

Devotion, Week of Pentecost, 2021

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

Thank you for all the red you wore Sunday to celebrate Pentecost, and to Mary and Connie for coordinating our first outdoor reception. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in so many ways, and it was wonderful to have fellowship with refreshments with each of you. I'm looking forward to many more weeks of a time together in the shade after service.

This past week Jim and I went up to Lake Nottely near Blairsville for a couple of days. After being bombarded by the sound of those 17-year cicadas when we got out of the car (they sound like a low pitched, non-stop car alarm), we settled in for some quiet (well, almost quiet) time. One afternoon as we sat on the dock, we watched a Canadian geese family work its way across the water. Dad led, followed by 4 precious goslings, and Mom brought up the rear. All were in an exact, straight row. They paddled over to our bank, waddled out, and the parents set up sentry duty as they let these babies wander around. Jim and I were afraid to speak or move.

For about an hour, the parents stood and watched the surroundings for danger and the goslings to make sure they didn't wander too far. If one did, Mom would utter a short cluck and back it would come. After a while, they all got tired and sat, except for Mom, who never left her stance and continued to keep watch. Then Dad got up, wandered to a new area for a few minutes, and then quietly got in the water. The babies soon followed, with Mom in the rear, and off they went, in a perfectly straight row, to a new locale.

Jim and I talked later about this miraculous behavior. Perfect straight rows with babies between the parents for protection. Parents who let them explore, but not too far. An example of parenting that we should perhaps all mimic. Boundaries, but freedom of will, as long as it's not life endangering.

I'm struck by the theology of that. That's what God has done with not just geese, but with us. We have commandments from God – to love one another as we love Him, and to live rightly – but we also have freedom to go our own way. And if we go astray, God utters a cluck to let us know. How does he do that? He speaks to us through guilty consciences, moments of presence when we know we've done wrong, and in response to prayer. When we don't confess or repent, God generally sends some kind of reminder – some gentle, and some like being hit in the head by a two by four. Think about it – think about those times when you literally stopped in your tracks and said to yourself, "What in the heck do I think I'm doing? This isn't right." That was God clucking at you.

What is so reassuring to me is that God is such a good parent to us, his somewhat scatterbrained, disobedient children. All through the Bible, God sends both love letters (read Isaiah 40) and fire and brimstone (read Revelation 21). But God yearns for his communication with us to always be love letters, because that means we have followed his commandments. So as I think of these faithful Canadian geese parents, I think of these words from Isaiah 40:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

May you soar this week, knowing that God loves you and cares for you, even when you stray too far away from those protective wings.
Jeanne