

GOIN' GREEN: RECLAIM Genesis

Trained biologist Barbara Kingsolver, in her book “Small Wonder” (London: Faber & Faber 2002) states: “I can appreciate the challenge and the technical mastery involved in isolating, understanding, and manipulating genes. I can think of fascinating things I’d like to do as a genetic engineer. But I only have to stand still for a minute and watch the outcome of thirty million years’ worth of hummingbird evolution transubstantiated before my eyes into nest and egg to get knocked down to size. I have held in my hand the germ of a plant engineered to grow, yield its crop, and then murder its own embryos, and there I glimpsed the malevolence that can lie in the heart of a profiteering enterprise. There once was a time when Thoreau wrote, ‘I have great faith in seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.’”

She continues: By the power vested in everything living, let us keep to that faith. I’m a scientist who thinks it wise to enter the doors of creation not with a lion-tamer’s whip and chair, but with the reverence humankind has traditionally summoned for entering places of worship: a temple, a mosque, or a cathedral. A sacred grove, as ancient time.”

The day before my daughter, Kaitlyn, and I were preparing to depart for her journey to college, I needed to deliver something to my mother’s house. As I walked up to the front door, there on a bench sat a small bird. The wood on the bench was horizontal and had spaces between it. It appeared as though the bird was resting between the spaces. As I came closer, the bird looked startled, and attempted to move but couldn’t. I

thought it might be stuck between the boards. As I moved closer to the bird to investigate, it flapped its wings and popped out of the space it is was resting in and landed on its side on the bench. I noticed it had only 1 leg which appeared broken or unable to be used. As I came even closer it wiggled its body and fell off the bench onto the ground.

I was in somewhat of a hurry and was ready to resume entering my mother's home, but couldn't help think of the possible fate of this bird that obviously couldn't fly or walk. In years past, I would have probably left the bird and not given too much thought to its life, but now all I could think of was a neighborhood cat that patrolled the area. As I once again came in for a closer look, the bird kept wiggling or almost waddling away from me. Not knowing what to do I called our family animal expert, Kaitlyn to ask her advice. She advised me to place the bird in a box with grass and take it immediately to Hawk Creek, a wildlife sanctuary. I attempted this approx. 3 times to no avail. The bird kept getting away from me. At one point it was nestled in the branches on some leaves of a lilac bush and I thought, why not leave it there where it wasn't exposed to the elements and the cat. After all, I was in a hurry and needed to keep our schedule of leaving for college. But something told me that I couldn't leave this helpless bird all alone and that I needed to do something to take care of it. I once again called Kate who said she would come right over to help me take care of the situation. When she arrived she immediately scooped up the little creature and we drove a few miles to deliver it to the wildlife sanctuary where they would care for it for the duration of its life. We found out that this bird was born deformed and was under a year old, but appeared as though it would survive. I found out that apparently there is an increase in sickness and

deformity among birds and other creatures due to our neglect and/or care of our environment.

Kate, my animal lover, couldn't thank me enough for taking the time to ensure the safety and care of this bird. I told her that it was because of her passion and what she shared about her volunteer work that made me stop and notice this bird in the first place. As I shared earlier, at one point in my life I would have walked right by it, not giving it much thought. Although I didn't always respond in that manner.

When I was much younger than my daughter, I too, had a love for animals. But something happened to change my opinion about birds. When I was in my middle school years we used to take the trash out into our backyard and burn it in the burn barrel. How many of you remember having a burn barrel that you used? Well, every time I would take the trash out, barn swallows, that lived next door in a garage, would dive bomb me which really frightened me as a youngster. I actually developed a fear of birds and wouldn't want to get near them. Although it has been many years, I have RECLAIMED my sensitivity and caring towards these feathered creatures, because of a change of heart initiated by my daughter's example.

When I think about it now, I am amazed how I allowed this particular incident or experience in my life control how I lived my life. The outdoors didn't have as much appeal for me because of my fear. Yet in today's scripture reading we are told that we are not only stewards of this earth, but we are GOOD stewards. In order to be a good steward we need to manage carefully all the resources in our care. So how do we get started?

Rebekah Simon-Peter in her book “Green Church” gives us some food for thought. Rebekah shares that “we will not be able to reclaim our role as stewards of the environment if we never spend any time out in it. Young people will not grow up caring about the creation if they do not have direct experiences in it, and that type of experience is becoming increasingly rare. Richard Louv, author of ‘Last Child in the Woods’, writes, that children in the US are spending less time playing outdoors, a condition that Louv calls nature Deficit Disorder.

Louv’s unofficial diagnosis describes the costs of alienation from nature which includes diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illness. Louv affirms that the disorder can be detected in individuals, families, and communities and yes, even churches.

Christian education used to be grounded in camp experiences where the holy met the wild, but not anymore. Our time spent indoors has resulted in a drastic reduction of campers and camps being sold. Fewer people, especially children, have an opportunity to “sing in the rain”, sit around a campfire and tell their stories, or let Christ speak to them through the whistling wind in the pines.

We still love nature; but for many of us, our relationship to it has become iconic. We send photos in e-mails and view it safely on television. We have become de-natured and the result is we are more depressed, more

anxious and we have weight issues. At the same time creation is going through crises from a lack of care that we don't even see.

A few years ago I was told by my doctor that I had a vitamin D deficiency which comes from a lack of exposure to the sun. Another way Rebekah Simon-Peter states it is, "we trade green time for screen time." It was then that I realized I needed to get outside and do something. That is when I started to be intentional about going outside. I made a commitment that gardening would always be a part of my ministry regardless of what church I served.

It is time we all reclaimed our role as stewards of this God given creation. We need to be intentional about spending time outside. One idea would be to go and plant a garden. I know Cal Babcock would welcome you to join him as he tends to the gardens of Niagara Falls. The Dirt Devils would be more than happy to have you join them each Tuesday morning for some outdoor activity. Other options would be to take a walk outdoors daily, go swimming at a community or outside pool, take a child to an outdoor playground and experience creation. Whatever you choose, pay attention to your environment. Listen. Watch. Breathe deeply. Read your Bible outdoors. Pray for creation. In addition to improving your own health, let the Spirit speak to you about how you might use your God-given talents to make this world a better place! Amen.

This morning we have an opportunity to care for creation as we call forward Parker Wilson Miller and his family to celebrate the sacrament of

Holy Baptism, whereby we covenant to care for Parker as a brother in Christ.