

November 25, 2009
Thanksgiving Eve Sermon
Rev. Canon Marianne Borg

Consider the lilies of the field...how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you - even Solomon, in all his glory - was not clothed like one of these. Consider the lilies of the field. Author Madeleine L'Engle (1918-2007) suggested that, "Consider the lilies of the field" should be our eleventh commandment. Thou shalt consider the lilies of the field...how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. It is not because of how they work, or how much effort they put into being what they are. They simply are. There is a givenness in their identity. And they are glorious in our sight. In fact, the text even suggests even Solomon, in all his glory, was not adorned and clothed like one of these. Solomon was a very magnificent and indulgent king, that had a magnificent temple--overbuilt, overdone--and even in his arraignment, it could not be compared to lilies of the field.

Recently, someone who knows the terrain of the Middle East, suggested that what we call lilies of the field...and I sort of have this picture of a calla lily, white and somewhat delicate, in the an open field...what we might think of as a lily in the field...he suggested that the flower that is actually referred to here...are poppies. Red vibrant poppies, like in Flanders Field. These red shimmering flowers that open themselves up like a cup to the sky, and they can transform a landscape, and they catch your eye from a great distance. Renoir was impressed by lilies in the field, and that inspired him to paint...that the lilies of the field were perhaps red poppies that just grew everywhere. And I've even seen some of those red poppies growing out of rock walls, in the Middle East.

We are invited tonight to consider the lilies of the field...the world is God's own field. And we're invited tonight to think about the magnificence of the lily. And for me, one of the things that that brings to my mind...is that most important things, cannot be taken for granted. The most important things cannot be taken for granted. And yet they are given. They are given. On this, the eve of Thanksgiving, I suggest that our texts tonight, are helping us to get ready in mind, and heart, and spirit, for our day tomorrow. But tonight we hold ourselves in readiness, which is a phrase of Martin Buber's (1878-1965). "Hold yourself in readiness." Another way to put that is maybe...begin before we are really ready. We may not be quite ready for tomorrow, but tonight we have an opportunity to begin to ready ourselves. And I suggest that part of what we are called to rest in, tonight and tomorrow, is the givenness of God...in creation...God as Creator...that we can see and experience God in the givenness of Creation. Consider the lily of the field. And that tomorrow...maybe just for one day...we are not to worry about our life...how we toil and spin. But to let tomorrow be a kind of Sabbath-day rest, where we will let God be God, and just invite ourselves to rest in that. In that givenness that is God...and in the power and truth that the God who calls us, will sustain us.

Listen to what the psalmist said this evening: "You visit the earth, and water it." Maybe that's all we really need to know tonight. God visits the earth. God is here in Creation. God visits the earth and waters it...sustains it. "The river of God is full of wa-

ter,” said the psalmist. The river of God is full of water. If the Dalai Lama had said that, we would say “the river of God is full of water?” It would sound like wisdom and truly good news, and we would get the sense that the river that is God, is full, and giving, and moving, and sufficient...more than sufficient.

You visit the earth. The river of God is full. Maybe tonight, and tomorrow, we are called to really attend to the beauty of the earth...and to seek God’s presence in Creation. To see that God visits us, in Creation...in the givenness of Creation. And maybe even in these two days, it’s even a way to help us prepare for the next season in the church year that is coming. Advent...and then Christmas, where we come to see that God visits us--not only in Creation--but in the Flesh. God visits us in the flesh...and not because of how we toil, or spin...but unto us it is given. Listen to the prophet Joel tonight: “Do not fear, oh soil...do not fear, oh soil, do not fear, you animals. Oh children, be glad.” Do not worry about your life...not tonight...not tomorrow. “I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten. I will repay you, for the years that the swarming locust has eaten. You shall know that I am in your midst.” You shall know I am in your midst. And when we have that experience of the presence of God with us, in our midst...in that moment, time can be redeemed. Those years that the swarming locusts have eaten away at your life, in the moment when you realize...oh, God has been here all along. In that moment of recognition, time is redeemed. And where else but in the moment, can we experience the redemption of time?

So I suggest that on this Thanksgiving Eve, that we are invited to rest...in the presence of God in our world...in our midst...and to take time to consider the lilies of the field, and how they grow. And I suggest that we are reminded that the most important things cannot be taken for granted. The most important things cannot be taken for granted, and they are given freely. Consider the lilies of the field...and maybe that habit of being...of being attentive to the lilies of the field...maybe taking on that as an eleventh commandment, will help us to see more fully, ourselves and one another, with the same attentiveness and mindfulness, with which we consider the lilies of the field. And we will see life as grand...and given...moving us to awe and astonishment...and gratitude.