

Sunday

Week 13. Restoring Peace with Nature

Nature is the place of wonder. Wonder is the basis of worship. It isn't enough to be stopped in our tracks by looking at the continuous fabric of light emitted by stars on a dark night. When meteors flash like fireflies we can see an angel hurrying to minister. When we see the Milky Way flowing like a luminous river, we can envision the occupants of heaven on holiday.

As children of God we have a tremendous treasure in nature. Thus, nature is holy and sacred. Through it we can see God reaching out to us in every wind that blows, every sunrise and sunset, every cloud in the sky, every flower that blooms, and every leaf that fades.

If each of us is unfolding life frame by frame, as if in the movies, nature provides a theater for some of our most effective healing and for our most dramatic experiences of being with God.

The settings may vary but the feelings are universal. Nature exerts her healing while you're walking through the woods, when you're watching a sunrise, as you canoe a mountain river, as you touch down your toes in the lapping of ocean waves, as you toss a smooth rock into a small pond and follow the ripples moving away from and toward you in ever-widening circles, or simply by sitting under a tree.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Gerald Manley Hopkins

As you sit or walk or canoe, bring your thoughts and ideas that are worthy of credit to God and learn to compare and associate them with what is happening in nature.

When this happens, we have started to read the book of nature.

There's another book that can serve as a vehicle to re-enchance you with the wonders of nature – the Bible.

Do this. Take your Bible outdoors to read. It's a natural. Passages that seemed fuzzy or incredible when read indoors seem totally natural outdoors. Outdoors, when you think about it, we are face to face with the wonder of it all. We see that the miraculous is not so extraordinary after all. It's the common mode of reality actualized.

It's our daily bread.

Now, how about an "Emmaus Walk."

To begin, read Luke 24:13-32.

As you start out, hiking along a country trail or a wooded path, you may be tired, sluggish, inattentive. Then, birdsongs begin to penetrate your senses and the play of light on oak leaves and maples catches your eye.

Notice the rocks. Their creation is so complex, so intricate, so profuse with life and form and color and scent, so representative of millions of years of prehistory and of the permanence of creation.

Now, to get the adrenalin rushing through your arteries and tingle your feet into life, read a few paragraphs of Revelation. The words of Revelation are guaranteed to arouse your imagination.

You'll experience a world of sky battles between angels and beasts, horrifying punishments, magnificent salvation, kaleidoscopic vision, and cosmic song. Hey, ya gotta get ready.

So, there in the great outdoors, you can be re-enchanted with the soaring adoration and primal affirmation for which God made us. There you can hear the Voice of God.

Monday

Week 13 – Day 1

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of our families

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Wisdom

An instinct to move is inborn. If you've ever had a baby this reality becomes junior or sister kicking and jabbing – about month five. By month nine he or she is moving and shaking, ready to debut into the world of nature.

If you're tired of technomedicine and turned off by medicines and surgery and can't make sense of herbs, tonics, secrets of ancient discoveries, including Chinese medicine and the Ayurvedic tradition, and, the dazzling array of bridges between your body and your mind can't seem to gel, remember what Dorothy said in The Wizard of Oz – the answer you're looking for is right here, in your own backyard.

It's motion – in the outdoors. If you could bottle it, you'd be hailed as the great deliverer and filthy rich.

We've seen it over and over, the transformation that occurs when a man or woman wakes up to the wisdom of re-enchanting the magnificent design of their body with the role nature has played in the good life. Stories of the good life from every culture that has taken the time to consider that old theory of the four elements - earth, water, air, fire – are stories of motion, how things move – the way and feel of things.

So, your first job is to think. Then, imagine. Then, move.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Tuesday

Week 13 – Day 2

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of our work communities

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Creativity

Journal Work.

Do a journal exercise on the following parallel thoughts.

First, Jesus saying – “Man does not live by bread alone.”

Second, D.H. Lawrence, the English writer, “The human soul needs actual beauty even more than bread.”

What say?

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Wednesday

Week 13 – Day 3

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of our living communities

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As A Source of Wisdom

It's easy to get the mistaken notion that spirituality is a separate department of life, because, when the Overweight State controls your life, it is difficult to discover the therapeutic value of your spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Rightly understood, spirituality is a vital awareness that pervades all realms of your being.

Someone will say, "I come alive when I'm at the beach with my dog, picking up litter."

"I come alive every morning as I jog in the park – rain or shine. You should see me glide, it's magic."

"I come alive when I play golf."

"I come alive when I'm in the garden."

As you can see, the power of the spirit is potent medicine. Whenever we come alive, that is evidence that the medicine is kicking in. There are many dose forms, but underlying all is the desire to deepen our relationship to God.

So, seeing nature as a friend can be like seeing the world for the first time as it really is. Look! Get out there!

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Thursday

Week 13 – Day 4

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of our nation

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit
The Holy Spirit As A Source of Divine Friendship

The Devotion of Hearing

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

If the word of God is divine and the Divine Word is primary, then, human hearing is essential.

So, what about your ears? Are they so heavily trafficked that when another person brings word from God, you don't hear it? Or, are your ears like good soil which readily welcomes God's Word and rejects the lies of the world?

Here's an idea. Practice the gift of hearing in reverence and silence and in wonder, so that you will truly hear and understand and believe.

Listen to the words of God.

*And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; **12** and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

1 Kings 19:11-12 RSV

Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your ears to hear the "still small voice" of God.

Wrapping Up

It's time.

Friday

Week 13 – Day 5

Morning Prayer

Theme: Ask God for healing of the world

Evening Prayer

Theme: Changing what is, through the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit As The Way

When Jesus said to Thomas, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” what did He mean?

Suppose you were in a strange town and asked for directions and were told, “Take the first road to the right and at the stoplight go across the square. On the right you’ll see a church, take the third road to the left past the church and the house you want is the fourth on the right.”

Chances are you’d be lost before you got half way.

But, suppose the one you asked for directions said, “Come, I’ll take you there.”

Thus, the person is The Way. Thus, we can’t miss, can’t get lost. That is what Jesus does for us. He doesn’t simply give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us out of confusion into clarity. Along the way He strengthens us and personally guides us moment by moment and day by day. He doesn’t simply tell us about the way. He is the Way.

Thus, all the usual habit patterns that have sabotaged your weight loss efforts before will be turned around: excuses, setting off without a plan, rationalization, shaving the truth, moodiness, going for the quick fix, timidity, and so on.

He is the Truth – His character affirms it through His life.

He is the Life. Life with Jesus is the Abundant Life indeed.

Wrapping Up

It’s time.

Saturday Eating Realities

Week 13

Motion (Phase 2)

By this point you should feel better and lighter and be more able to start a routine exercise program. By aggressively exercising while maintaining the strict Diet or eating with the same general diet principles you should see an increase in weight loss.

Your goal should be 150 minutes per week. This is usually broken down into 30 minutes 5 days a week.

The type of exercise you do is not as important as just doing it. Find something you enjoy that is simple to do.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

At Home:

- 1) Walking (A good inexpensive form of exercise as long as you have a safe place to walk and have a backup plan if it is too hot or cold. Try walking while moving a ball from one hand to the other to build coordination)
- 2) Treadmill (start slow and gradually work up speed at your own pace)
- 3) Exercise Bike (bikes that work the arms and legs are especially good)
- 4) Recumbent Bike (good for people with knee problems these bikes take the stress off the legs and knees while providing a good cardiovascular workout)
- 5) Elliptical Trainer (one of the best low impact workouts, however, they tend to be more expensive)
- 6) Exercise bands (available at most sports stores they will provide on-the-go strengthening)
- 7) Health Bouncer – buy a small in-home trampoline and run on it in your living room for 20 minutes a day. You can do this while watching the kids or listening to the news.

At Work:

- 1) Use the stairs (never take the elevator)
- 2) Wear ankle weights (will help you burn more calories)
- 3) Walk with a purpose. Instead of walking sluggishly, always try to walk with a quick, light step. This will help to burn more calories.
- 4) Take a walk over lunch. Take 5 or 10 minutes before or after lunch and take a brisk walk.

Saturday's Message

Week 13

"One Picture of Jesus"

II Peter 1:1-4

Since my wife died suddenly on May 5, 2006, I have developed a new interest in pictures that we have taken across nearly forty-six (46) years of marriage. I have discovered that the pictures have helped to build important memories and to revisit those pictures again and again helps to refresh those precious memories.

All of this reminds me that the Bible is a valid written record of God's revelation of Himself to people that contains many "word pictures" of Jesus Christ. Reading and studying these word pictures of Jesus teach us important spiritual lessons concerning who Jesus is, the remarkable qualities of His perfect life, and what He would have us be and do. One such pictures of Jesus is found in II Peter 1:1-4. What does this word picture teach us about Jesus.

1. Jesus possesses divine power. II Peter 1:3 refers to "His divine power."

There is much emphasis today on power – nuclear power, military power, man-man power. But the greatest power on earth and in Heaven is the divine power of Jesus Christ – power that can literally take the life of a sinner – any sinner who is willing – and transform that person's life into a redeemed child of God. There is a powerful message in that hymn which declares:

Would you be free from your burden of sin?
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;
Would you over evil a victory win?
There's wonderful power in the blood.
There is power, power, wonder-working power,
In the precious blood of the Lamb.

2. Jesus is one who blesses the lives of His people. II Peter 1:3 says that Christ "gives us all things that pertain to life and godliness." One translation says that "By His divine power Christ has given us everything we need to live a godly life." This is a wonderful spiritual truth. In our own strength we cannot live that quality of life that God would have us live. But we do not have to rely on just our strength. Our text declares that Christ gives us all the blessings we need to live according to God's will. What a Christ we know and serve!

3. Jesus is one who makes great promises to His people. Peter writes that "Christ has given us precious and very great promises." I am not sure how many promises of God are contained in His Holy Word. There are many. And God is faithful and without exception keeps His promises. All the blessings of God promised in His Word can be ours through Christ if we are willing and ready to receive them and to be good stewards of them.

Years ago, I was blessed to hear Dr. Carl Bates, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., speak on the subject "A Call To Commitment." In that message – which I hope time will never erase from my memory – Dr. Bates spoke of the promises of God and then used a meaningful illustration. He said that Dwight L. Moody was talking to a friend one day and his friend said: "Dwight, do you know what I believe the first question will be when I stand before God in judgment?" "No, I am not sure," said Mr. Moody. And his friend replied: "I believe God's first question will be: 'My child, why did you not let me bless you more?'"

4. Jesus enables us to share the divine nature of Almighty God. Peter writes in II Peter 1:4: "Christ has given us precious and very great promises in order that by receiving what He has promised we may escape from the destructive passion that exists in the world, and come to share the divine nature." We are created in the image of God. We are able to have fellowship with God and to take on the divine nature. We can live on a higher level than the world expects. By the power of Christ our sinful human nature can be transformed. The Bible teaches that we cannot even begin to imagine what we can become if we are totally committed to God through faith in Jesus Christ. In John 10:10 Jesus said: "I am come that you might have life and that you might have life more abundantly." With God's help we can grow more and more spiritually speaking as we become greater sharers in the divine nature!

Look often at that word picture of Jesus found in II Peter 1:1-4 and you will be inspired and challenged to grow toward that divine quality of life which Jesus had in mind for all of us when He said in Matthew 5:48: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

Reverend Phillip R. Morrow Sr.