



Moments of Grace

from Bishop Geoff Peddle

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“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”

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“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26)

I keep a bird feeder in my backyard during the winter months. It gives me great joy to watch the birds that come during the long cold winter. My main customers this year have all been dark-eyed juncos, those little gray-black birds with white underbellies. We counted 29 of them at once last week! On really cold days I am convinced they must fluff themselves up because they become almost perfectly round balls as they hop around. I feel much peace watching them, especially in the early mornings, as they arrive for breakfast. I am glad that in some small way I can make their journey through winter easier.

Watching the natural world has always been something of a meditation for me; a form of mindfulness practice because it anchors me in the present. Those moments I spend watching the little birds in my backyard I find myself intensely focused with little thought for the past or the future as I attend to the present. Paying attention to nature in this way can be quite good for the soul.

Jesus used a lot of illustrations from nature in his teaching. In our Gospels he invites us to consider seeds, trees and shrubs, “lilies of the field,” “birds of the air.” And he always did so that we might learn something more of God and of God’s ways in our world. It was as if by paying attention to the natural processes around us we might gain a priceless insight into our relationship with God and with ourselves. In the short passage from Matthew above Jesus tells us that there is something to be learned from the birds of the air that live for the moment. The more complete passage reads like this:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about

clothing? 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.”

Wow! Jesus is sure at odds with the world of today and all of its anxieties. Most of the counselling I did over my years as a parish priest involved some form of anxiety, generally about the past or the future, not nearly so often about the present. This is an age that nurtures worry in so many ways, from advertisers who tell us we are lacking unless we buy a certain product, to financial planners who tell us that we should be nervous about having enough for retirement. Then we hear Jesus say to us: *“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”*

When you really think about it, most of what distresses us in life are memories and wounds from the past or fears and concerns about the future. That is not to say that such thoughts are not valid in their own way, but it is to say that we too often allow the past and the future to distort the present for us. That is so sad because today is all that we really have.

Jesus’ words remind me of the importance of living in the present moment.

And the winter juncos of my backyard tell me not to worry. The same God who cares for them cares for me.

Blessings,
+Geoff

