

The Palos Hills by Reverend Paul Sanders

Chicago land is the center of a rich treasury of nature's wonders.
Surrounding our great city is a belt of over 30,000 acres of beautiful woodland
in the Cook County Forest Preserves
which is set aside for the public enjoyment.

In the Palos Hills in early summer, there is a continuous
unfoldment of interest from the time of the first wild flowers come in the spring
to the last beautiful array of color in the fall.
If one will take time to leisurely walk through the woodland trails,
they will find countless varieties of wild flowers, birds, and
many of the little wild animals of the forest.

Nature is at its best just after sunrise.
It is then that the birds sing their sweetest songs and the wild flowers seem freshest.
The little animals of the forest are just going to their beds
after their night of foraging for food.

God's out-of doors has a message for His children who feel the pressure of a great city.
If one could but take time to walk and quietly look and listen,
a new world would unfold and the pressures of modern life be forgotten for a time.
Many say they worship God in the out of doors,
but only a few choice souls seem to understand how to make this a reality.

Meditation

Strike bowl: As we begin our reflection today may I invite you first to look...

Strike bowl Listen....

Strike bowl Feel....

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

Who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is,

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed,

how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

~The Summer Day by Mary Oliver

and so we are here...
on this small hillside
under the green pines and blue sky...
and the sweet smell of pine sap wafting all around...
and we hear birds...
and cars...
and we feel sticky
and we smell sweet, freshly cut hay
and we sit next to one another,
sometimes as friend or family,
sometimes as neighbor,
sometimes as stranger gathered together for a few moments in this time and this space...

And we sit in God's chapel...
that mysterious source and sustainer of all that is...
and we gather,
some say to worship Jesus, some say to honor God...
some say to give thanks or to say please or to wonder why??

but I say we gather to simply be with one another
so that we might get to know one another...you and me and the Holy One
as companions on this brief journey of life on this little blue/green ball of a planet...

And as we breathe deeply...
and our muscles relax,
our tensions loosen,
our hurts find a brief respite

and our hearts grow soft and a little bit larger...

May it always be so...

But we know that it won't...

we know even as we are here, now,

there are others who are threatening the very life of our planet...

we know there are some who know not what they do...

we know there are some, including, even, sometimes...

ourselves, for reasons we not fully understand

that we take the easy way,

the near sighted cheap way,

the ego centered selfish way out...

Ahh....

What is this precious love and laughter

Budding in our hearts?

It is the glorious sound of

a soul waking up!

-Rumi.

Is our soul waking up?

Or have we been caught up in the dour complaining of the world?

Have we bought into the fear and the scarcity that permeates our senses

from those who would have us buy, buy, buy...

I will admit: I have at times succumbed to this feeling of not enoughness ...

I am not here to lecture you or advise you to do x, y or z...

I know too well my own faults and weaknesses...

**But I do know that I have seen something beautiful,
I have felt mercy and kindness and softness and beauty
much more than I ever deserve....**

**I know that through the graciousness of other people
and the divine mystery that blows will it will
I know that I have been gifted beyond measure
and sometimes it brings me to tears...**

**So, my only recommendation this day
is to breathe...
to stop and pause and breathe...
to pay attention,
to stroll through the fields or your own back yard,
to give witnesses to grasshoppers or whatever miracle you might find...
to allow your heart to chuckle
to be willing for your soul to awaken...**

**For it is in this paying attention,
the pausing and the breathing
that we hear hints of the sacred,
we see glimmers of the Divine,
we feel the strength and the gentleness of the Holy...**

**It is then that we will protect and preserve this first revelation of God's presence,
the beautiful, mysterious, paradoxical, home planet we call Earth...**

**Thomas Berry, priest and cultural historian warned us in 2002:
“Today, in the opening years of the twenty first century,**

we find ourselves in a critical moment when the religious traditions need to awaken again to the natural world as the primary manifestation of the divine to human intelligence.”

We are in a critical moment in human history.

At no other time has our decisions been able to make such a global impact on so many different species...

According to the United Nations: it is estimated that between 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird and mammal go extinct every 24 hours.

Every 24 hours...

That is almost unimaginable...almost.

But it is happening.

The report goes on to say:

This is nearly 1,000 times the “natural” or “background” rate and, say many biologists, is greater than anything the world has experienced since the vanishing of the dinosaurs nearly 65m years ago

Ok...we can be aghast!

We can protest...

but what else shall we do?

Berry goes on to say:

Eventually only our sense of the sacred will save us.

We must allow ourselves to be swept away with wonder.

We must take the time,

take out the ear plugs,

turn off the TV

put down the book,

**allow the dishes to air dry,
and the basketball game to unwatched...**

**and we must open our ears and nose and eyes, and hearts, and minds,
to the glistening presence of Mystery that we are literally swimming in.**

We must first start with “Yes”

**Yes, I am willing to put aside my rational,
logical, productive brain for a few moments every day ...**

**Yes, I am willing to let Spirit fill me with wonder and awe,
to see the magnificence of life,**

to experience the thrill and the gift of the sacred all around me.

Yes, I am willing to see myself as a part of this Sacred moment...

Yes, I am willing to see my friend and my foe in it with me as well...

**Yes, I am willing to be surprised by the laughter that is budding in
my awakening heart.**

Yes, I admit: it is all a gift, and I humbly offer my gratitude....Amen.