NEPA Synod Green Team

e-newsletter #4, Winter 2023

ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.
Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to our newsletter!

We present to you this collection of prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, news about and from notable places within the synod, advocacy opportunities, and inspirational stories of good work being done on our territory.

Any questions or comments on this newsletter would be appreciated – please send them to pwmetzloff@gmail.com.

Please feel free to share this with anyone who would be interested!

A Prayer for Winter in Pennsylvania

by Pastor Carl D. Shankweiler

Dear God, it is cold! Winter is no joke; it can truly be dangerous because of low temperatures, ice and snow, darkness, and foul moods. No wonder many people head south to await spring. Even polls show winter to be the least favorite time of year.

So please help us remain positive about this helpful season, a season that plays its own important role in the natural world here in the Northeast. Apart from the beauty of snow and the enjoyment winter provides to those of us who do like to ski and skate, these cold days can help control plant disease and weeds, provide a period of dormancy that assists plants in their burst of springtime growth, and enable trees to shed old leaves that, when decomposed, provide nutrients for new and renewed life.

Winter: it is part of a cycle that counts on their *being* a winter.

Yet we do recognize the additional struggle that winter can create for people who are at risk of falling, who are unable to meet the increased costs of utilities, who become depressed by the greater darkness and their own limited mobility, and who mourn the temporary loss of friends and relatives who travel to warmer places. Help all people who are negatively affected by winter to have the stamina and resources to flourish; and help those of us with time, ability, and resources to assist those who are in a more difficult fight for happiness and even survival.

May we be able to sing with joy "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow," knowing that snow melts, birds return, the world will turn green again, and the outdoors will be appreciated anew because we did experience this challenging but important season. In the name of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate in winter.

Amen!

Green Tips

Ever thought of going to the grocery store as a way of combatting the climate crisis? Well, it can be. And it remains a wonderful way, with a little thought and planning, of caring for our planet. Here are some ideas to try for your next trip to the market.

Before you go

* Make a shopping list and stick to it. Buy only what you need. Bonnie Schneider in her book, "Taking the Heat" (p.158), reports 30% of all food in the United States is thrown away and that "food waste is responsible for 11% of global greenhouse gas emissions."

* Shop locally if you can. Purchasing community grown food items cuts down on carbon emissions from truck, planes, and trains transporting goods across the country.

* Minimize the number of trips you make to the market, diminishing your car's carbon dioxide emissions. Consolidate your outings as well. If you plan on shopping at a couple of stores, do it all in one trip. Perhaps you can even offer to pick up any items needed by your neighbor while you're out, saving them from taking out their vehicle.

* Check the tire pressure on your car, especially in cold weather. Properly inflated tires yield better gas mileage which, consequently lowers carbon emissions.

At the grocery store

* Look for plant-based food options (having no animal sourced ingredients) like vegetables, beans, coarse grains, and fruits. Consider going beef-less whenever possible as cows emit high levels of methane, a high contributor of greenhouse gases, in digesting their food.

* Focus on fair-trade certified items that emphasize minimal environmental harm in growing food products and stress ethical treatment and compensation for farmers. For instance, global warming has forced coffee growers to seek the cooler temperatures of higher mountainous grounds leading, in turn, to increasing deforestation and less carbon dioxide absorption by trees. A similar story holds true for those tasty avocados we enjoy. It takes approximately 84 gallons of water to produce one avocado, once again pushing farmers to expand croplands through deforestation.

* Avoid purchasing plastic-encased items such as water bottles or using store provided plastic bags at the checkout counter. Plastic, whether being made or disposed of, releases significant amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Instead bring your own reusable shopping bags to carry out your purchases.

Back home again

* Check your refrigerator temperature setting as you're putting food away. Maintain the temperature at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below to keep foods fresh.

* Compost whatever you end up not using. Composting reduces the amount of greenhouse gases being emitted into the environment.

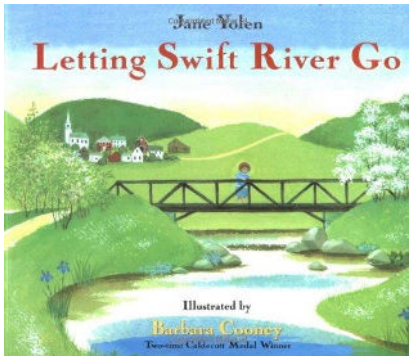
* And one more thing, perhaps the most important of all. Don't lose hope that you can and are making a difference in fighting the climate crisis. It begins with each of us doing what we can, even in the simple things that occupy our time like going to the grocery store.

Wayne Moritz
Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit
Emmaus, PA

Book Reviews

As an active early childhood educator, it was a blessing to gather a bountiful collection of some of the very best children's books around! These writers and illustrators find ways to speak not only to the children of their target audience, but sometimes most especially to the adult reading the book. Now in retirement with time to read more adult literature, I still find myself very moved by the gifts offered by the children's authors and illustrators!

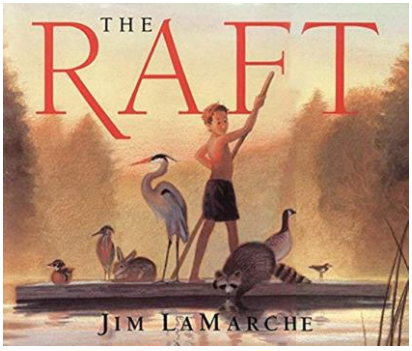
Letting Swift River Go
Jane Yolen (Illustrator) and Barbara Cooney, 1992



A young girl's account of watching the machinations necessary to flood their beloved communities in order to create a reservoir for the city of Boston.

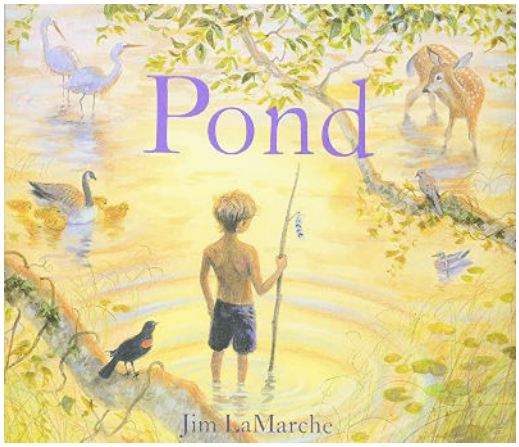
The Raft

Jim Lamarche, 2000



An urban boy spends the summer with his grandmother (with resistance) at her cabin by a river. Without television, nature draws him closer and closer as he discovers his artistic skills and ability to care for God's creatures.

Pond
Jim Lamarche, 2016



Three children discover that the local dumping ground, called the Pit, is really the depression for a pond. They unblock it, remove the trash, and are welcomed into a world previously unknown to them as nature is restored bit by bit. They spend most of their days, and some of their evenings there, bringing along their individual hobbies, creating a home away from home.

All three of the above works are full of wisdom, wistfully provoking thoughtful reflection and appreciation for the gifts of water. The illustrations speak as powerfully as the words of the joy of spending whole days out-of-doors, and the absolute need to protect and restore our water systems. While I am sure these books would be available in any library, my copies are at Saint Pauls' Orwigsburg, and if you visit, please come and see!

En Cristo,.
Sue Reier

Notable Places:

The mission of Red Creek Wildlife Center, in Schuylkill Haven, is to "offer a second chance to distressed Pennsylvania wildlife through rescue and rehabilitation, public education, and by providing training for wildlife rehabilitators."

That's a big mission, given the amount of wildlife in our state, especially as the center is is recovering from a fire in December of 2022 which destroyed one of their buildings (the main clinic). However, due to an outpouring of support, they have begun rebuilding and are reopening this month. There will be ways to support the center in the coming months, including fundraisers, which you can find more information on at their website,

https://redcreekwildlifecenter.com/

In operation since 1991, the center has taken in over 4,000 animals per year, from small to large; offers summer internships; has published books and pamphlets on how (and whether) to care for found animals, in addition to having detailed instructions on their website; and offers programs for education on Pennsylvania wildlife, particularly birds.

Although they do not allow visits to the center – with the appropriate goal of keeping wild animals wild – it's good to know that this important agency is a part of our local community in NEPA. Please consider supporting their work!

Advocacy/Action:

Plant a tree!

Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light (PA-IPL) and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) are offering FREE native trees and shrubs for Spring 2023.

These trees can be planted

- in your own yard
- in nearby park or Rails to Trails
- at your congregation, your school, your local library

This act of hope, faith, and healing will contribute to sequestration of the excess carbon dioxide in our atmosphere that is changing our global weather. It can help clean the befouled air that we humans have created that is making the most vulnerable amongst us sick. Planting native trees can clean up our waterways, beautify our world, and return native plants, that are becoming more scarce, to the food chain that supports native insects, birds and all creatures.

A few notes about the ordering process:

- **You should order your trees as soon as possible** to allow for efficient ordering. Trees (along with tubes and stakes if you request them) will be available at your selected pick-up location towards the end of March. You will be notified when they have arrived.
- Trees are distributed through a **priority county system**, which means you may or may not receive the specific plants you order. You will be notified if your order needs to be adjusted.
- You are welcome to **order as many or as few as you wish**, placing a separate order for each planting location. The order form lists each of the species. You are responsible to ensure you have permission to plant at your location of choice.
- If you need help in being sure the plants you order will fit your planting site, **please visit the native plant information website, Morton Arboretum,** which has great pictures of the plants. If you click all the links on the home page for each native tree or shrub, you'll find useful information on where the plant will best thrive, what light conditions it needs, how big it gets and whether you need more than one plant to create seeds.
- You will receive a copy of your order to your selected email address.

Order your native trees here!

Inspiration: Behold the Snowflake

Reflections from Pastor Inge Williams, Winter 2023

"From as far back as I can remember, I had this notion of plants as companions and teachers, neighbors and friends. [But] As an aspiring botany major, I was pressured to adopt the scientific worldview; to conceive of these living beings as mere objects; to ask not 'Who are you?' but, "How does this work?"

Later in my career, I was invited to sit among indigenous knowledge holders who understood plants as beings with their own songs and sensibilities. In their presence, and in the presence of the plants themselves, I woke from the sleep I'd fallen into. I was reminded of what I'd always known in my core: that my primary relationship with plants was one of apprenticeship. **I'm learning *from* plants, as opposed to only learning *about* them.**"

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Interview with Sun Magazine, April 2016

"Behold the birds of the air… Consider the lilies of the field!" - Jesus of Nazareth
(Matthew 6:26, 28)

A friend of the congregation recently gifted me the book "The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature" by David George Haskell. The premise of the book is the author's observation of a three foot circle in the woods of Tennessee over a year's time. He calls it his mandala, borrowing from the Buddhist practice of meditative, geometric, evanescent art. Haskell is both scientist and poet: gazing deeply into the lives of the creatures he finds there. In the church, we would call his efforts "contemplation." In fact, Jesus' admonition to "consider" the lilies comes from two Greek words: KATA (down, against, into) + MATHETE ('to learn' and the source of our word disciple). Haskel learns by entering into the landscape with regularity and precise attention.

His brief chapter on the snowflake has stuck with me. He draws on the musings of Johannes Kepler, the famed astronomer, who in 1611 took a break from charting the movements of the planets to write an essay entitled "The Six-Cornered Snowflake." "There must be some definite cause why, whenever snow begins to fall, its initial formations invariably display the shape of a six-sided starlet," Kepler pondered. His essay is a kind of scientific meditation- poetic and even theological. In addition to astronomy, Kepler studied theology at the University of Tübingen. The culture of science at the time did not separate religion and scientific inquiry into neatly divided categories. Instead, "science considered itself one more way of marveling at the universe."

Kepler never actually presents a scientific explanation for the six-cornered snowflake. He lands by pointing to the Creator, whose DNA produces patterns we can appreciate but not necessarily explain. "I believe that the cause behind the six-cornered snowflake is no other than the one responsible for the regular shapes and the constant numbers that appear in plants," he writes. "I cannot believe that this ordered shape is present by chance." His conclusion echoes the final chapters of the book of Job, when God heaps on the poor mortal a barrage of ecological mysteries only their Mother could take credit for: "From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?" (Job 38:29)

David George Haskell explains that Kepler's reflections prompted further scientific study, and the hexagonal shape was only elucidated once atoms found their place in scientific theory: the snowflake's geometry is a direct expression of the molecular structure of water. Atoms are only visible at a scale "one million billion times smaller" than normal human life, but through the use of X-ray technology, scientists have discovered "One oxygen atom tethered to two restless hydrogen atoms… Hexagonal rings of water molecules build on one another, repeating the six-sided rhythm over and over, magnifying the arrangement of oxygen atoms to a scale visible to human eyes." Haskell concludes his reflections on the snowflake with these words: "I examine again the glassy stars on my fingertips. Thanks to Kepler and those who followed him, I see not just snowflakes but sculptures of atoms… The form of the six-sided ice crystals gives a direct view of what should be invisible, the geometry of atoms."

Another guide into the contemplation of snowflakes is Wilson Bentley, the Vermont farmer who in the early twentieth century first documented the phenomenon that no two snowflakes are alike. As a young man, Bentley labored to attach his camera to a microscope and then spent long hours in his cold woodshed pressing snowflakes to microscope slides with a turkey feather. He photographed more than 5,000 of these "ice flowers" and never found a single duplicate. "Under the microscope, I found that snowflakes were miracles of beauty; and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others. Every crystal was a masterpiece of design, and no one design was ever repeated. When a snowflake melted, that design was forever lost. Just that much beauty was gone, without leaving any record behind." Many of his photographs are now part of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

We live in an era with unprecedented scientific tools. How do humans use them not just to explain, but to marvel? As people of faith, we 'behold' and 'consider' not only because God's world is so beautiful, but because God speaks to us in our contemplation.

Jesus invites his listeners to behold the birds and consider the lilies as a way to deepen our relationship with God the ultimate gift-giver. The birds and flowers become our guides in living less anxious, more trusting lives. The snowflake is even more ephemeral than the birds or the grasses, especially in our warming world; "and yet our heavenly Father made them artistic masterpieces," Jesus seems to be saying. "Are you not also beloved?"

Bibliography:

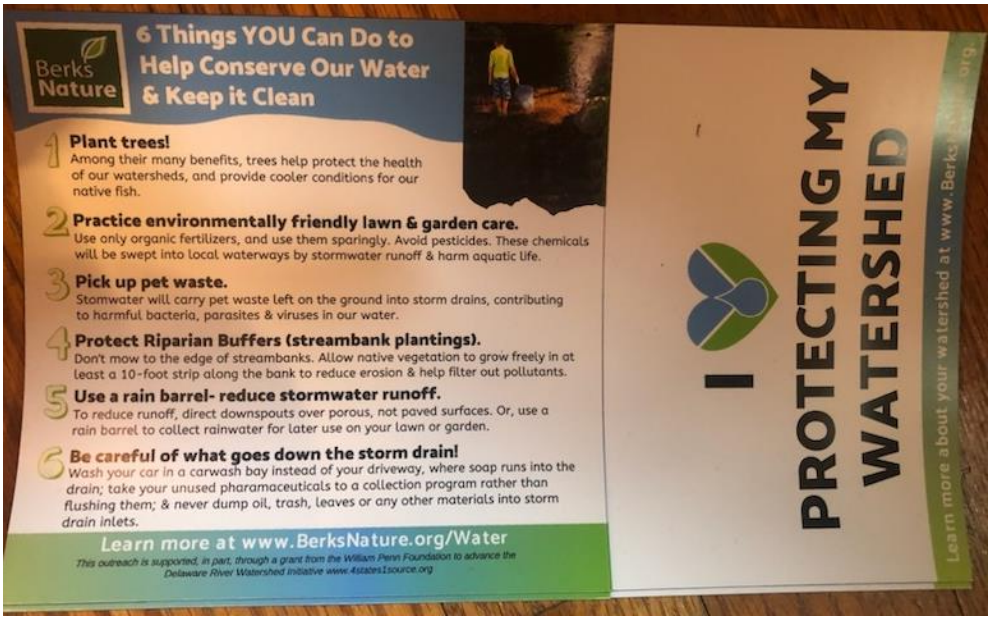
The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature. David George Haskell. 2012.

https://kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2011-summer/selections/kepler%E2%80%99s-snowflake/

https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2022/12/weather/wilson-snowflake-bentley-cnnphotos/

In Conclusion

details to follow on this project!
if you have questions or would like to donate seeds or plants,
please contact Kristen Weiner at kristenjweiner@gmail.com



Thanks for reading! If you're interested in being a part of the synod's Green Team, please see our page on the synod website at www.nepasynod.org/green-team.