



"GOINGS AND COMINGS"

SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 13: 11-13; MATTHEW 28: 16-20

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, June 4, 2023

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

13:11 Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

13:12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

13:13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28:16-20

28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

28:20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Word of the LORD

Thanks be to God.

There's a song of summer – if you're an early riser, like me, you get to hear the night sounds of cricket and cicadas fold into the morning chorus of all the birds who are passing through on their migration. What voices are in the morning chorus these days in WNC? (finches,

nuthatches, warblers, thrashers, robins, mourning doves, tanagers, thrush) (people can name them)

Birds enter the song where they are to establish territory, to give themselves the best possible chance to find food, find a mate, find a safe place to spend a few days or a few weeks or a few months.

Birds are models of life-giving collective goings and comings.

If you're looking for some comic relief from the news these days, the Point Of View reels about what birds are really doing at 5am with all the chatter are the best! "Bird arguments at 5am" are winning the internet right now. Here are just a few of my recent favorites.

[Play Birds 5am Argument Video #1](#)

And now what could be better? A duet!

[Play Birds 5am Argument Video #2](#)

And my all-time favorite so far.

[Play Birds 5am Argument Video #3](#)

All the goings and comings in the bird world produce the music of our lives on earth.

Take your headphones off and put down your phone for a while and just listen the next time you are outside. Let your body really download the songs of the turning of the season.

Our bodies know these songs. And just like birds use constellations and the sun as a compass in their migration patterns, our nervous systems use the sounds of the natural world to tell us lots of things about where we are and what our bodies want and need to do.

The birds can teach us a lot about goings and comings – they can teach us things that could help us embrace and metabolize the goings and comings that stitch together the tapestry of life.

Goings and comings are not a sign that something is wrong, even though we humans can be given to catastrophizing change – change is the single most important sign of life and health that God weaves throughout creation.

I was delighted a few days ago to look outside my kitchen window and see a scarlet tanager.

Show Scarlet Tanager #1 image

They are breathtaking birds – they look like they come from the rainforests of South America—because they do! And they migrate through North Carolina in the spring and early summer to move to their breeding ground in the north east and southern Canada.

Show Scarlet Tanager Migration Route Image

In fact, the scarlet tanager is a long-distance migratory bird. They can travel up to 4000 miles in their seasonal migration. And they often travel alone or rarely in loosely affiliated groups of other neotropical migratory birds like thrushes, vireos, and warblers.

It is actually pretty rare to see a scarlet tanager, so I have savored the fact that I have now seen him twice out my kitchen window on the serviceberry tree behind my house.

Scarlet tanagers are more frequently heard than seen. You may recognize their song. Some say the scarlet tanager’s song sounds like a robin with a sore throat.

Play Scarlet Tanager Video

After video is through, put back up Scarlet Tanager Image #1

Their brilliant red feathers with the deep black feathers on their wings are striking to see. Not only does the scarlet tanager travel 4000 miles a season to make life work, but he completely changes his appearance for mating season.

This brilliant red plumage tells you this is a male mating adult during mating season. The non-mating male looks like this:

Put up Scarlet Tanager Image #2

Truly amazing to see the transformation that occurs for these birds. The non-mating male looks more like the female scarlet tanager – who isn’t scarlet at all.

Put up Scarlet Tanager Image #3

The female is a gold/sometimes light greenish bird. Juvenile males and fall males (non-mating) have similar plumage to the female.

And the males go through a metamorphosis to take on their mating plumage.

Put up image of Scarlet Tanager #4

Here is the male in the process of changing – becoming the brilliant red. The male molts his feathers twice a year. When he goes south, he becomes a more muted yellow like the female.

Put up image of Scarlet Tanager #5

Before heading to the breeding grounds, he molts and becomes the brilliant red. He arrives first and establishes territory. In fact, the female will not go looking for the male until he has established his territory and started singing from the tree tops to tell females it is safe to come and nest here and breed.

Put up image of Scarlet Tanager #1

And he doesn't do any of that – migrate, establish territory, and sing from the tree tops, until he has his red plumage.

We are made to be impacted by seasons, the way we are located in space, the colors we see, the sounds we hear.

Take down Scarlet Tanager image

It's just that we humans have done so much to distract ourselves from our created nature – we are so deeply estranged from the life that comes from change, from sensory cues – from the sights and sounds and feel of life on earth. And because our bodies don't get to savor and soak in and move and breathe with these cues, we have become the species on earth that struggles with change the most.

We humans kid ourselves into thinking things are permanent. We like to try and make them permanent – with structures and policies and expectations of conformity and

sameness and stasis. There is nothing about how the world works that supports that kind of approach to life, to relationship, to health, to community.

We are built for change – and we are the most healthy and well and free when we move with the rhythms of change, instead of using our energy to try to keep things the same or assimilate everyone to one way of doing things. Sameness has tended to be a carrier of oppression and death.

Think of it like the scarlet tanager does – I embrace my changes, because my changes are my life. I don't stay in the same place. Staying in the same place is death.

Today at Grace Covenant we are living into our created nature, we are following the lead of our migratory cousins – we are resituating ourselves in space and trusting that there is life in this kind of movement — we are practicing the embrace of change and transformation. And we have created the conditions to keep practicing change, movement, and transformation on a regular basis in our sanctuary space.

The scripture passages today may not ring with much inspiration at first hearing – but if you listen closely, they are calling us to enter the song of how the life of faith is a constant series of goings and comings. And we are called to embrace those rhythm changes, those shifts and movements, those changes in position of our bodies in space and time – we're called to embrace all of these things as healing opportunities, as gifts of the Spirit.

Both Paul and Jesus say goodbye and hello with invitations to a purposeful way of living into change.

Greet each other in a way that honors how sacred each person is and the sacred purpose for which you are meeting each other (the holy kiss in Paul's time – a platonic kiss when gathering for worship).

Live peacefully with each other, find agreement – that doesn't mean always seeing things the same way, but it is agreement as in harmony – finding ways to fit into each other's lives, finding ways to understand the blessing that we are to each other.

And then Jesus instructs those disciples (the ones who saw him including the ones who doubted, he instructs them to not stay in one place – but to go out into the world and show people what it looks like for Jesus to be present with them – to show them what it looks like to know that God is present in every exchange, in every encounter.

What if the great commission is about our capacity to be present in all kinds of different situations, with all kinds of different people? What if the great commission isn't about conformity or assimilation at all! What if it is about right relationship – what if it is about practicing right relationship in all kinds of different conditions and situations, cultures and perspectives.

Baptism is really about saying to the community that each of us is a child of God – that's an identity that is unearned and defines us as we grow and change over time.

God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer–Parent, Christ, and Spirit – the God who made us and who bids us to consecrate our hellos and our goodbyes by trusting God with all of it – that God invites us to practice, practice, practice the sacred art of change.

And so, our song is really about trust – trusting the song itself, trusting that our voices will enrich the song, trusting that our songs are more beautiful when there are different voices singing each from our own uniqueness.

Most of all it is a song of trust about who God is and how God moves and breathes in the turning of things – turning around, even sometimes turning upside down or inside out.

(go to the table, AKKP meet MMS at the table)

Our comings and goings are fed and fueled by the Divine Love that meets us here at this Table again and again to remind us who we are and how we are made and what we can become together.

(Invitation to the Table)

This is a table of...

Thanks be to God.