

SUMMER WISDOM

(Reflection by Rev Peggy McDonagh, June 28, 2020)

Introduction

Born in 1880, Fay Inchfawn published 39 books, beginning when she was 39 years old. She died at the age of 97 in 1978. She treated a variety of commonplace subjects with an endearing light and careful touch of a poet. This morning I read for you her poem entitled 'Summer Met Me'.

Summer met me in the glade,
With a host of fair princesses,
Golden iris, foxgloves staid,
Sunbeams flecked their gorgeous dresses.
Roses followed in her train,
Creamy elder-flowers beset me,
Singing, down the scented lane,
Summer met me!

Summer met me! Harebells rang,
Honeysuckle clustered near,
As the royal pageant sang
Songs enchanting to the ear.
Rainy days may come apace,
Nevermore to grieve or fret me,
Since, in all her radiant grace,
Summer met me!

When I read this poem, I could not help but think about how summer meets us this year. We must approach it with a different mindset and understanding yet still allowing ourselves to be aware and stay attuned to the summer's incredible moments: moments of storm power and bright sun beauty, gentle waves of wonder, and soul growing wisdom. If we give ourselves time to honor intentionally this season with quiet moments of reflection, we might be delightfully surprised by what we learn.

I've spent some time on the rainbow benches at the church thinking about the past several months: the closing of the church, and the learning of new ways to stay connected as a faith community, how the pandemic changed the makeup of our lives, the lives lost, the Black Lives Matter

movement, and the protests for justice. It has all felt overwhelming at times yet remarkably enlightening.

I am looking forward to taking some time away, sitting on the swing in my mother's beautiful yard and learning from summer's wisdom and allowing myself to just be, to settle, to heal, and to rejuvenate.

Indigenous spirituality teaches of the value and wisdom of summer and of its powerful energy to transform our lives. People are encouraged to listen to summer. In Fay's poem we heard her experience of listening to summer and how it blessed her. If we just listen, Creation has so much to teach us about silence, calmness, gentleness, relaxation, living in the moment, beauty, and the power of healing. Summer invites us to let our spirits expand with insight and blossom with aliveness. It beckons us to settle our hearts and to remember that life is precious and that we should never take it for granted.

Cherokee "Moonmaiden" Jenny Wallace says that your spirit connects to the universe when you walk barefoot upon the Earth. When you stand quietly barefoot on the Earth, you feel the energy seep into your soul. I invite you to stand barefoot on the Earth this summer and let its power seep into your soul.

HYMN Give Praise for Summer Days

vs. 1 & 2

Reflection Part 1 - The Wisdom of Wonder

I always look forward to spending time at Mom's because I know I will encounter many moments of wonder when all one can do is exclaim, "Wow."

Last fall in our travels to and from Camrose, Mom and I sat in wonder as we watched miles of farmer's fields covered with snow geese, swans, and Canada geese. Another time we came across a field of hundreds of yellow-headed blackbirds. For curious and eager bird watchers, these were the most remarkable experiences. One never knows what will be seen on summer travels on country roads, on hikes, in the mountains, and while camping. I suspect that if a person is aware and focused, there will be many 'wow' moments.

Apparently, 'wow' is the most common expression when one experiences an awe-inspiring moment or sees Creation in all its splendor. I am sure many of you have been "wowed" by Creation.

Mom and I are always surprised at the number of people who simply drive by us, oblivious to the amazing wonders of nature right before them.'

In his book of daily reflections for awakened living, Edward Hays writes, "We suffer today from the banishment of mystery and wonder. Everything must be logically verified by testing. The need to appear sophisticated is replacing childlike astonishment. Few people stop long enough to stand and "gape open-mouthed at some modern marvel that the rest of us hurry past without a second glance."

Life has become increasingly mechanized and distorted. In such a world we are losing the capacity to be astonished. Hays observes that "as amazement diminishes, we become deprived of wonder and life sadly becomes a gigantic labyrinth of torturous, twisting, interlocking, unconnected pathways that create confusion and alienation."

Alberta Einstein believed that the most beautiful emotions one can experience are awe and wonder at the mysterious. He saw these emotions as the cradle of all art, science, and religion. Rabbi Abraham Heschel sees awe and wonder as the root of faith and Rev. Hays writes, "Without wonder and amazement God becomes something we imagine we can manipulate by tricks of piety, fasting, and lighting candles. To approach the Divine Mystery without a sense of wonder easily turns God into a philosophical concept or definable theological principle. Yet it is impossible to define the Wondrous One other than as a baffling mystery."

When the prophet Isaiah experienced the presence of God gloriously filling the temple, his ecstatic cry was 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' In the modern world, he might have exclaimed, 'Wow, Wow, Wow.' Rev. Hays sees the exclamation of 'wow' as a one-word prayer of adoration, a prayerful proclamation of the Divine Presence. "Whenever you are caught up in something so wonderful, sometimes you cannot help but spontaneously respond in prayer, saying, "Wow, wow, wow, I am aware of your presence. What an experience! What a stunning sight and the marvelous gift I have been given."

Summer can restore wonder's voice when we slow down, center ourselves, get outdoors, and sit quietly and let the natural world come alive. Summer offers the possibility of reawakening our awareness to the wonder of life and to the mystery of the Divine within and around. Suddenly we find ourselves proclaiming 'wow,' more readily and more often.

Hymn Teach me, God, to wonder vs. 1 & 3 VU #299

Reflection Part 11 - The Wisdom of Joy

Living in a pandemic world with all its new requirements, its loss of life and jobs, the devastation of the economy, the separations, and amplified fears, I imagine that for many people it feels as if this new reality has robbed us of joy. But recently I heard someone say that the struggles and bleakness of life does not make joy untrue.

We all know that experiencing pain and facing challenges are part of living. Disappointment and loss, illness, and aging all tear at the fabric of our lives, often leaving us fearful, exhausted, and sad. Like so many, I have felt depleted of joy over the past many months, not only because of the pandemic but also because of all my physical and painful challenges. But I also know that joy is still in me, that it has never gone away. For me spending time in the country, sometimes alone or with Mom silently swinging and experiencing the play of nature, joy begins to rise up again within me.

Rev. Henry Ward Beecher wrote, “The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world's joy.” Nature is replete with joy. At least that is how I experience it. Listening to the wind dance through swaying trees and watching the chickadees, waxwings, butterflies, and dragonflies flutter by and play, I cannot help but feel the carefree joy of summer. Novelist and environmental activist Wendell Berry has a profound love of nature and desire to preserve its integrity. With an eye to the quiet glory of the natural world, Berry writes:

“There is not only peacefulness, there is joy. And the joy, less deniable in its evidence than the peacefulness, is the confirmation of it. I sat one summer evening and watched a great blue heron make his descent from the top of the hill into the valley. He came down at a measured, deliberate pace, stately as always, like a dignitary going down a stair. And then, at a point I judged to be midway over the river, without at all varying his wingbeat he did a backward turn in the air, a loop-the-loop. It could only have been a gesture of pure exuberance, of joy — a speaking of his sense of the evening, the day's fulfillment, his descent homeward. He made just that one slow turn, and then flew on out of sight in the direction of the slew farther down in the bottom. The movement was incredibly beautiful, at once exultant and stately, a benediction on the evening and on the river and on me. It seemed so perfectly to confirm the presence of a free nonhuman joy in the world.”

In his book, *Joy, the happiness that comes from within*, Osho writes, “Joy is a spontaneous flow of your own spiritual energy...a state of

transcendence, one is neither happy nor unhappy but utterly peaceful, quiet, and in absolute equilibrium.”

Scripture repeatedly talks about experiencing a kind of joy that transcends our circumstances. On many occasions, Jesus told his disciples that he wanted them to experience the fullness of his joy in their lives. The apostle Paul called believers to "Rejoice always."

Paul wrote a letter to the Philippians that is saturated with joy. In four chapters he references joy sixteen times. He uses words like rejoice or joy to describe what a Christian's state of mind or general attitude should be. He wrote this Epistle of Joy to the Philippians during extremely difficult circumstances. He had spent three years in prison in Caesarea. He then was taken to Rome and placed under house arrest, living in a rented apartment and chained to a different Roman soldier every few hours. Paul wrote to the Philippians during the time that he was in Roman custody. This letter shows that he never allowed his circumstances to drive him to despair, he experienced deep joy. He wanted the Philippians to share in his joy.

In her book *Finding Joy*, Dr. Charlotte Kasl talks about the spiritual fruit of joy's "power to open our hearts, remove fear, instill hope, and foster healing." She writes, "Joy leads to wisdom because it connects us to all we are – our mind, heart, power, and spirit. It stimulates our immune system, increases our energy, and gives us mental clarity. When we open ourselves to joy, we experience the breadth of human emotions, realize our connection to all life, feel compassion, and dance lightly with the dramas of life."

Deepak Chopra said, "Joy is a return to the deep harmony of body, mind, and spirit that was yours at birth, and that can be yours again." No matter how miserable you may be or the state of our world, this does not make joy not true. We must reconnect with this non-expectant, relaxed, at-ease state of our being. It is always there, just like your breathing, your heartbeat, and the blood circulating in your body.

When joy arises within, you live in your own innermost nature, with absolute acceptance of yourself as you are. Where there is joy, the Divine Presence can enter. Where there is joy, there are no pits to fall into, and all obstacles seem less persuasive. Summer invites us to breathe the fresh, sweet air of joy; to let this spiritual sunshine awaken us over and over to the wonder of life, to the love of God, to the beauty within others, and to the goodness of your own being. May this be so for us all.