



One Page Sermon

By Rev. Robb McCoy

July 7, 2024

The Gospel According to the Prairie

Recap of sermon from July 7, 2024

Scripture: Romans 8:22-24

“Hold out your hands and let me lay upon them a sheaf of freshly picked sweetgrass, loose and flowing, like newly washed hair. Golden green and glossy above, the stems are banded with purple and white where they meet the ground. Hold the bundle up to your nose. Find the fragrance of honeyed vanilla over the scent of river water and black earth and you understand its scientific name, [which means] the fragrant, holy grass... In our language it is called *wiingaashk*, the sweet-smelling hair of Mother Earth. Breathe it in and you start to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten.”

This is the first paragraph of the Preface to *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer. This is one of the best-loved books that our Two Rivers Readers have recently read together. It weaves together stories of indigenous wisdom, scientific advancement, and presents a hope for the healing of our world. I am terrifically intrigued by this preface, and hope to read the full book soon.

Last weekend my family and I went back to the town where I grew up—Schaumburg, Illinois. We took an impromptu trip to a place I hadn’t been since being a fifth grader on a field trip. The Spring Valley Nature Center is 135 acres of fields, forests, marshes, and streams set in the heart of the otherwise sprawling Chicago suburb of Schaumburg. As we walked the three mile trail, we marveled at the spectacular colors of the wild flowers, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, and small animals that crossed our path.

At one point I looked out over the incredible prairie and marveled “there was a time when there was nothing but this.” It was as if I remembered something that I didn’t know I’d forgotten.

During the height of the isolation of the pandemic, while I was mostly depressed, lethargic, and unmotivated, my incredible wife Sarah planted a perennial flower garden in our backyard. It is a little wild and unkempt. We don’t weed it as much as we should. Some of the flowers should probably be split or trimmed back. But to me, it is a brilliant explosion of life and color. Yesterday I went out and tried to count all the bees on

the flower patch, but there were too many and they were too active to count.

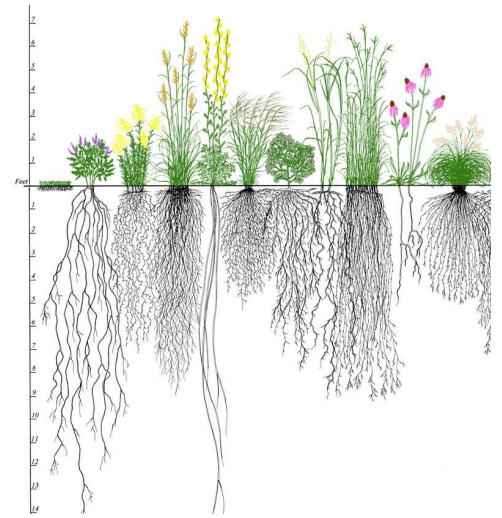
Every morning when we open the back door and sip our coffee, the sound of the birds is overwhelmingly loud.

In our front yard, we have planted more indigenous wild flowers. We have cut out more of our grass, and when you look at the chart above, I hope you can see why. The cone flowers, bee balm, milkweed, and other flowers we have planted have roots that plunge deep into the ground. All of those roots are a big sponge that holds the water and nutrients in place. They preserve water and prevent flooding. The flowers provide pollen for insects, which is food for birds. The grass (depicted on the far left) has provide little benefit.

Was planting these flowers and tearing up our green grass a spiritual discipline? I think so. The roots of the prairie keep us grounded in the connected nature of all Creation. The prairie helps us remember something we didn’t know we forgot.

When fire sweeps over prairie, to the untrained eye, it looks devastating. After a prairie fire, it looks as if everything is dead. Yet prairies teach us what resurrection can mean. The real life of the prairie is under the ground. There is a spiritual realm that we cannot see, but keeps hope alive. The good news of the prairie is that fire may produce damage in the short term, but enables new life to come back with even more robust vigor.

All creation waits for redemption, and there are labor pains of co-creation, there is hope for healing that we cannot see. While we braid the sweet grass, re-plant the prairie, and sink our feet deep into the goodness of God’s creation, we can also eat the grain and drink the fruit of the vine. Maybe then we can re-member something we did not know we forgot and hope for a renewal that we cannot yet see.



Next Week: Beloved Community, Part 3 of 4
The Economic Community