May nature provide you with rich signs of Christ’s irrepressible grace

I was three when my family moved from Edmonton to Fort Nelson, a town in Treaty 8 territory in the northeast corner of British Columbia, at Mile 300 of the historic Alaska Highway, surrounded by boreal forest near the confluence of the Muskwa, Prophet and Fort Nelson rivers.

Our home was a standard-issue military house, in an area carved out of the bush to accommodate personnel who were stationed there as part of the defense of the North during the Cold War. You did not have to go far to be in the bush: across the street and over the fire break lay the vast expanse of the forest and its inhabitants.

Early one morning, my brother went out on his bike and encountered a nature lynx paddling along the gravel road. The hunters in the community simply walked out their back doors to pursue game in season. Big birds like the great horned owl, bald eagles and golden eagles graced the skies, and the rivers and creeks had plenty of fish. Black bears were commonplace.

My very earliest memories formed in that rich environment. To this day, certain scents in the forest, the look of the sky, or the way light falls on leaves or snow will bring me back there.

I have been lucky enough to spend time in many natural places in Canada and abroad over the years, in forests, mountains, prairies, deserts, rivers, lakes, and oceans. When my soul needs to be restored, I head into nature.

As good as it is to be in wild places, nature breaks through everywhere. When you look to the sky from any location, or alongside a river, or at creatures in the trees on a city street, you will always see signs of unfettered creation. Sometimes the weather will take an interesting turn to remind us that nature follows its own course. Jesus encouraged his followers to consider nature—the birds of the air and the flowers of the field—to understand that, just as God is at work in the intricacies and interdependencies of creation, sustaining species of plants and animals, God is also at work in human lives. And so he asks us, “Why would you think that you, alone, control your destinies? That you must look to yourselves alone to find hope and security?”

Jesus teaches his followers that God will provide what we need to find peace of mind in this life, and that our first and foremost job is to live in the love of God and to use the gifts God has given us to share that love with others—through words, actions, technologies, strategies, medicines, and all forms of justice.

As I write this, a late-summer storm has made its way across much of our diocese, replete with severe wind and rainfall warnings. A cleansing, quenching rain has fallen on everything, renewing colours, refreshing the air, and filling waterways. It was a sign of unfettered creation, breaking through to remind us that, like the flow of nature, the flow of God’s creative love continues around us, even as we are anxious and preoccupied with a coronavirus pandemic that feels all-encompassing. The summer storm was like Jesus saying, “Remember that God is at work in creation and in human lives! Do not be anxious about today or tomorrow! Don’t forget that your first duty is to love God, not to fret! Know that if God’s gifts to human beings—gifts of memory, reason and skill—are used wisely and compassionately, effective treatment and a vaccine for COVID-19 will soon emerge!”

As this autumn season unfolds, I pray that nature will provide each of you with rich signs of Christ’s irrepressible grace, God’s abundant love, and the steady fellowship of the Holy Spirit, giving you solace and insight as we journey toward the day when we receive news that the pandemic has ended—as it surely will.

The Rt. Rev. Shane Parker, Bishop of Ottawa

The Synod circular, which includes all reports, the draft Synod agenda, practical information on how Synod functions, notices of motion and material on issues to be addressed at the meeting, will be published in October as usual. The Synod circular and financial statements will be made available online only.

In a welcome letter to Synod members, the Rev. Canon Doug Richards and Kim Chahey, clerical and lay secretaries of Synod respectively, wrote, “We remain hopeful that we can gather again in-person as a Synod on January 22-23, 2021. That meeting of Synod will focus on our four strategic priorities, providing us with an opportunity to be informed and engaged in developing them as a diocesan church. There will also be time for fellowship, learning, and constructive conversation.”

Reopening plans

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• Weddings, funerals and baptisms can resume in church buildings under all the same restrictions as worship services.
• Everyone entering must provide their names and contact information (phone number and email or mailing address).
• Mark or block off seats to ensure physical distancing between individuals who are not members of the same household.

For more information:
In this together: The Diocese of Ottawa’s COVID-19 plan and video of the COVID briefing for clergy and wardens is online at ottawa.anglican.ca.

Synod 2020 split to October and January dates

Due to the COVID-19 limits on public gatherings, the 2020 annual diocesan Synod, which had been scheduled for October, will be divided into two events.

On Oct. 24, members of Synod will gather online for a “necessary business only” Synod. All of the face-to-face Great Chapter meetings, which are normally held in the lead-up to the Synod are cancelled.

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