

Wild Church January 19... March 16

Gather - hot bev, fire, settle

Introductions - name, pronouns,

prompt: Tell a story of your favourite earthly gift - not received from another human

PART 1: Gratitude

Reading: *The Serviceberry* pages 1-2

“The cool Breath of evening slips off the wooded hills, displacing the heat of the day, and with it come the birds, as eager for the cool as I am. They arrive in a flock of calls that sound like laughter, and I have to laugh back with the same delight. They are all around me, Cedar Waxwings and Catbirds and a flash of Bluebird iridescence. I have never felt such a kinship to my namesake, Robin, as in this moment when we are both stuffing our mouths with berries and chortling with happiness. The bushes are laden with fat clusters of red, blue, and wine purple in every stage of ripeness - so many, you can pick them by the handful. I’m glad I have a pail, and it’s getting pretty heavy. The birds carry their berries in the buckets of their bellies and wonder if they will be able to fly with so much cargo.

This abundance of berries feels like a pure gift from the land. I have not earned, paid for, nor labored for them. There is no mathematics of worthiness that reckons I deserve them in any way. And yet here they are - along with the sun and the air and the birds and the rain, gathering in towers of cumulonimbi, a distant storm building. You could call them natural resources or ecosystem services, but the Robins and I know them as gifts. We both sing gratitude with our mouths full.”

Invitation:

“I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.’ ‘What it do when it pissed off?’ I ast. ‘Oh, it make something else. People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back.’ ‘Yeah?’ I say. ‘Yeah,’ she say. ‘It always making little surprises and springing them on us when us least expect.’ ‘You mean it want to be loved, just like the bible say?’ ‘Yes, Celie,’ she say. ‘Everything want to be loved. Us sing and dance, make faces and give flower bouquets, trying to be loved. You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk?’ — **Alice Walker, *The Color Purple***

READ: *The Serviceberry*, pages 7-8

“I can’t help but gaze at them, these shiny gems, cupped in my hand - and breathe out my thanks. In the presence of such gifts, gratitude is the intuitive first response. This

gratitude flows toward our plant elders and radiates to the rain, to the sunshine, to the improbability of these bushes spangled with morsels of sweetness in a world that can be bitter.

In the Anishinaabe worldview, it's not just fruits that are understood as gifts, rather all of the sustenance that the land provides, from fish to firewood. Everything that makes our lives possible - the splints for the baskets, roots for medicines, the trees whose bodies make our homes, and the pages of our books - is provided by the lives of the more-than-human beings. This is always true whether it's harvested directly from the forest or whether it's mediated by commerce and harvested from the shelves of a store - it all comes from the Earth. When we speak of these not as things or natural resources or commodities, but as gifts, our whole relationship to the natural world changes."

Exploration:

Go out and pay attention to the trees, the birds, the river, the sky. All around is creation waiting to be witnessed, to be loved. Where do you see abundance, what does it look like? What gifts are there expressing themselves - whether you see it or not?

Practice gratitude by going on a walk - long or short distance makes no difference. On this Gratitude Walk move silently around the space, pausing as you feel called. Notice everything and as you do give silent thanks. Express gratitude like this for at least 10 minutes before returning.

While waiting for others to return, consider more deeply what "things, commodities, or natural resources" could be seen as gifts? What in your life can you give your gratitude for that is not immediately recognizable as a gift?

Sharing:

1. Find one other person to share about your gratitude walk. Take turns listening to each other in full.
2. Once everyone has shared in pairs, the whole group together can share insights, snippets of story and gratitude.

Prayer/Acknowledgement:

Circle prayer - each person contributes their gratitude into the space.

Reading:

The Serviceberry Pages 11-12

"I have no claim to these berries, and yet here they are in my bucket, a gift.

This pail of Juneberries represents hundreds of gift exchanges that led up to my blue stained fingers: the Maples who gave their leaves to the soil, the countless invertebrates and microbes who exchanged nutrients and energy to build the humus in which the Serviceberry seed could take root, the Cedar Waxwing who dropped the seed, the sun, the rain, the early spring flies who pollinated the flowers, the farmer who wielded the

shovel to tenderly settle the seedlings. They are all parts of the gift exchange by which everyone gets what they need.

Many Indigenous Peoples, including my Anishinaabe relatives and my Haudenosaunee neighbors, inherit what is known as “a culture of gratitude,” where lifeways are organized around recognition and responsibility for earthly gifts, both ceremonial and pragmatic. Our oldest teachings stories remind us that failure to show gratitude dishonors the gift and brings serious consequences. If you dishonor the Beavers by taking too many they will leave. If you waste the Corn, you’ll go hungry.”

Part 2: Reciprocity (we didn’t get to it)

Action:

Retrace your steps from the previous gratitude walk. For whom and where you stopped to give gratitude, you are invited to now spend a moment making a commitment to that being, that space and spirit in reciprocity.

What gifts do you have that you can return? Think broadly, your personal skills/talents, your finances, your time and energy. Can you water? Can you weed? Can you use your voice to speak for the trees?

What can you offer that is achievable and meaningful to the whole, to this individual?

How will your return gifts contribute to Mutual Flourishing?

You are making a commitment threefold - to yourself, to the more-than-human beings, and to the spirit of all.

Sharing:

What will you do for Earth? For your community that is not exclusively human? We have acknowledged all that we receive and give our deep thanks, but how will we *show* in addition to *speaking*?

Share with the group anything that arose from your moments among these Kin.

Sharing out loud brings a sense of obligation and responsibility. Accountability to more than your own ideas. **Speak into the space before us now and truly commit to an attitude of grateful reciprocity.**

Closing:

Pg 90-91 - what world do you want to live in?

“ ‘The way I see it,’ she says, ‘always value people over things. There’s that old line that farmers like to spout, ‘Without farmers, you’d be naked, hungry, and sober.’ But it goes both ways: without good neighbors, you’d also be alone, and that’s worse.’

And that customer who comes to value the smell of ripe berries and the view of lambs on pasture and the memory of their kids climbing on hay bales - they just might vote for the

farmland preservation bond in the next election. That's a fine return on investment from a free bucket of berries.

I cherish the notion of the gift economy, that we might back away from the grinding system, which reduces everything to a commodity and leaves most of us bereft of what we really want: a sense of belonging and relationship and purpose and beauty, which can never be commoditized. I want to be part of a system in which wealth means having enough to share, and where gratification of meeting your family needs is not poisoned by destroying that possibility for someone else. I want to live in a society where the currency of exchange is gratitude and the infinitely renewable resource of kindness, which multiplies every time it is shared rather than depreciating with use.

Anthropologists who study gift economies note that they function well in small, tightly knit communities. You might rightly observe that we no longer live in small, close-knit societies, where generosity and mutual esteem structure our relations. But we could. It is within our power to create such webs of interdependence, quite outside the market economy. Maybe that is how we extract ourselves from a cannibal economy. Intentional communities of mutual self-reliance and reciprocity are the wave of the future, and their currency is sharing.”