

Early in January we have been distributing a book of daily devotions exploring creation. And I hope that you have had time to dip into its pages. The book is entitled **FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH** and it comes to you as a gift from the Grant Committee-- the Committee dealing with both the Wild and Scenic Film and The Stewardship of Creation grants. The book provides us with one page devotions, day by day which slowly and leisurely respond to the creation account in Genesis chapter one.

Yesterday I read a portion of the devotions to the Finance Committee for January 13th. It was written in response to the following scripture:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

The writer of the devotional -- Nancy Hopkins Greene-- it turns out, is an avid gardener. She loves the color green. She speaks of seeds sprouting green and those first ripe raspberries and flower beds in full bloom later in the season. She speaks also of the soil writing *It might look like dirt but there is a lot going on below the surface.*

A lot going on beneath the surface.... Greene explains:

*The wind of God sweeps over the face of the waters in these moments before creation. God hasn't created the soil yet [in Genesis 1] but this wind invites us to pause and reflect on all that goes on out of our sight, below the surface of things. Somewhere in God's plan are all of those growing things above and below the surface. But for now, creation is fallow and waiting. Perhaps we could ask this of our own lives, too. What rich and abundant things could be stirring below the surface. What seeds might sprout in the year ahead?*

Seeds. Just before I went away to my first year in college, I got a summer job with the U.S. Forest Service in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Gifford Pinchot

worked with President Teddy Roosevelt and the two laid aside lands throughout the West as national forests.

The Pinchot National Forest is in the State of Washington, about 2.5 hours away from my home in Portland. I worked on a trail crew with two local guys. We brushed trail and cut out windfall blocking the trail all within sight of Mt St Helens and Mt Adams. It was pristine country. We would hike in and out each day. Finally the distance was great and it took too long to hike in and out. So the Randle District turned to their local wrangler, a Forest Service packer with a string of horses and mules, to pack the three of us into a vast expansive wilderness area where we would live on a ridge for three weeks. And so on a Monday, at the trail head, when the packer arrived, a seed of memory was planted when I first heard his name: Keenes Meade

A few days ago, in response to a request, I wrote the following poem:

### Keenes

For Keenes Meade, Forest Service Packer, Randle District

was the name given  
by the wrangler as he unloaded the pack string  
into the soft morning air at the trail head. His one mule  
nuzzled my empty shirt pocket for smokes to eat  
filtered or unfiltered.

Keenes threw the diamond  
hitch over the saddle forks bulked with gear  
shrouded with canvas, his hard compact body  
wired for action.

Then he eased up into the saddle  
on his pinto mare and, lead rope in hand,  
showed us the way up the ridge to our home for three weeks,  
Mount St Helens and Adams and the Goat Rocks in the distance.

He did not stay long after leaving our gear in piles.  
Fifty-five years the name has been like a clover seed in my mind,  
waiting to sprout with this memory and set it before me  
burnished with joy.

A clover seed in my mind. That's the power of memory. Memory quickens things long dormant and asks them to live. To green up in a dormant time of one's life and to feed

one's spirit. Nancy Greene asks us to feed that spirit and to recognize that under the surface of things there are seeds, seeds of hope, seeds of intentions, seeds of memory that are waiting for the right time to be born and to sprout and to bring life.

And when that moment comes, when in the language of scripture there is a *kairos* moment, a moment of the fullness of time, amazing things can happen. For me, just this past week one small seed of memory brought me back to a time when I was all of 18 years and worked hard with two other guys all summer to clear trail. It was such a ripe and abundant time that even to touch it from this place in my life, to remember it with affection and clarity, creates within me energy and a sense of joy.

On the surface, our Gospel lesson is not speaking of memories. It is, however, speaking of life emerging from dormant or ordinary times. It is speaking of awakenings when Jesus walks by the sea shore and disturbs and awakens the ordinary lives of a few fisherman. And it particularly creates a moment of awakening and insight and connectedness for a man named Nathaniel.

We know Nathaniel for his statement *Can anything good come out of Nazareth.* But by the time that our Gospel reading is over, the skeptical Nathaniel winds up praising Jesus. The encounter happens over three brief verses:

**47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.**

Rabbi. Son of God. King of Israel. The NT scholar Jan Rippentrop writes: *All three of these terms have the potential to bring transformative change: Rabbis through teaching and leading, The Son of God by bridging the gap between heaven and earth, the King of Israel by bringing just rule.* And these proclamations come from Nathaniel. For him, this encounter with Jesus is an epiphany. A moment of astounding and sudden insight. An illuminating discovery.

But we began talking this morning of seeds, of things operating and stirring beneath the surface. Stirring beneath the surface of this encounter with Jesus are seeds of expectation. It began with Philip seeking Nathaniel out. He finds him and says: "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Seeds are beginning to sprout, seeds of memory and expectation. This is a glorious moment for Nathaniel when the old seeds of expectation and memory about a Messiah began once more to sprout. But sometimes epiphanies are born in the depths of deep struggle and discouragement.

Tomorrow is federal holiday marking the birthday of Martin Luther King. And here is his moment of discouragement in which seeds of hope begin to sprout.

**I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.**

**The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.**

**At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.**

Epiphanies. I close once more with this statement from the devotional writing of Nancy Greene: *Perhaps we could ask this of our own lives, too. What rich and abundant things could be stirring below the surface. What seeds might sprout in the year ahead?* For me this past week it was a seed of memory sprouting from fifty-five years ago. In our Gospel this morning we have seeds of expectation and of hope sprouting as Jesus calls his first disciples. And now in our own lives we must also take a look: What seeds planted by the Spirit of God are coming alive within your spirit and within your soul?

In the name of God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.