

## The Rev. Emily Dunevant

June 8, 2019

Community Prayer Service

Romans 8:14-17

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*“The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still folded against his sides as though he were singing from a limb and not falling, accelerating thirty-two feet per second per second, through empty air. Just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact, deliberate care, revealing the broad bars of white, spread his elegant, white-banded tail, and so floated onto the grass.”*

— **Annie Dillard**

The free fall. The moment of letting go. The fear. The exhilaration. The sense of being so fully present to the moment that nothing else stands out but your breath. Everything comes into focus and as you move and begin to spread your wings you finally feel the support that will carry you safely home. You float onto the grass.

The lesson of the mockingbird hit home for me this past week. I was taking a riding lesson...on a horse named Newt. At 46, I am very cognizant of my breakability. I tend to prefer NOT to fall and over the years, I have found that my fear of falling has made me tense and anxious. And when riding a horse, my shoulders stiffen, my back rounds, my heels come up, the stirrups begin to flop. And...if you know anything about horseback riding, you know this isn't a good combination. You know it. The horse knows it...and the horse doesn't like it. They stiffen under your stress, feeding off of your anxiety. They look for the things that can hurt them, too. So, if you seem afraid, they will respond accordingly.

My instructor noticed my tension. She said...Emily when you canter in a circle you are completely relaxed but when you canter down the long side of the ring, you tense up. She observed...as long as you think the horse is contained in that circle, you are fine. But as soon as you are the slightest bit free, you become afraid. Indeed...I preferred to be contained, assured of what came next.

Freedom was terrifying.

And then, my instructor told me this tiny bit of wisdom...she said, Emily, it only takes 30 seconds of bravery to get you through this. 30 seconds to ride through your fear. 30 seconds to breathe. 30 seconds to trust that the moment of freedom will not defeat you. She said, in 30 seconds, if you can relax and trust yourself, the horse will relax as well and you will soon be back in control and confident. Or as the mockingbird – you will float easily home.

It was a profound lesson in allowing life to just be – without resistance, without fear. 30 seconds. It changed everything. The lesson was about balance – feeling the movement, the

freedom, yet staying secure in the unknown. Allowing yourself to fall a bit (metaphorically) and allowing the fall to be the wind that allows your wings to spread.

And guess what? Once I let go of fear, I was perfectly balanced on that horse. When I stopped resisting, I found peace and we glided around the ring with an ease I had not experienced in years. How much time I had wasted with worry, with fear, with resistance. How much joy I had sacrificed.

I have thought a lot about that lesson. I then I began to think about what else in my life needs those 30 seconds. When and where do I need to give myself over to God, to a greater trust that my life will be just fine if I let go of worry. If I let go of the need to control every aspect of what is happening. Could I move with greater ease? Could I overcome my fear? Could I feel true freedom?

God says yes. Because as children of God, we were never meant to live in fear. Romans 8 reminds us that we did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but we have received a spirit of adoption. An adoption into God's family to be loved and cared for and comforted and strengthened. It's an adoption that allows us to spread our wings and live.

As our opening poem stated...just be willing to take that first step, the one you don't want to take. Take the small step you can call your own and let God's love carry you home. Amen.