

context

The book of Job is found in the Hebrew scriptures; those ancient books that are shared by people of both Jewish and Christian faith. It is a folktale and it is quite a story! The purpose of which is to find out if Job is only faithful to God because it is in his best interests.

First, all of Job's great wealth was destroyed, then his children were all killed. Next, his entire body became covered with painful boils and his wife's best attempt at supporting him was to suggest he "curse God and die."

Finally, some friends came by to comfort and console him in his anguish. However, after a while even they began to add salt to the wounds with their attempts at explaining to Job why God had allowed all this to happen to him. In fact they said that Job must have done something terrible for such woes to be brought down upon him.

In utter frustration Job responded to their pious platitudes by reminding them that he knew God every bit as well as they did. He had seen the wicked prosper and mock God while the righteous suffered in pain. However, Job had seen something else that enabled him to keep trusting in God despite his present circumstances.

listen Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you;
or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In God's hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of all humankind.

gift of music

reflect

In this worship series, like Job, we are looking for something beyond the fear and willful ignorance which is as prevalent in our world today as it was in ancient times. We are looking for "vital signs" that change can happen and that the immanent destruction of our earth home can be averted.

So as Job suggests, let's start by listening to the animals, the birds, the fish, the trees & plants -- and we must not forget the insects! Let's not just listen but learn from what they have to tell us; not in words and learned discourse but through their very living and dying.

An "indicator species" is an animal or plant which reflects the health of a particular habitat. What does the monarch butterfly have to teach us?

As adult butterflies, Monarchs live for only three to four weeks. Because of their short lifespan, environmental changes impact the Monarchs quickly. Monarchs are found in many parts of north American continent: summer habitats range from New England, to the Great Lakes region, west to the Rocky Mountains and California. In late fall, they migrate 2,000 – 3,000 miles to the Sierra Madre mountain range in Central Mexico to spend their winter months. Tens of thousands gather on single trees, making the forest glow and flutter orange.

Troubling records indicate that monarch populations have plummeted over 90% during the past few decades, mainly due to the decline of milkweed, herbicide and pesticide use, and loss of natural habitat.. This decline in monarch populations is an indication of trouble facing pollinators in general, which play a key role in pollinating 35 % of world crops that we depend on for food.

Perhaps some of you have heard the scientific facts about the decline of the monarch. You might even have participated in the planting of milkweed in your gardens and city parks and conservation areas. It seems that facts can only take us part of the way to making the changes needed to ensure not only the well-being of monarch butterflies but the health of the whole planet.

It is the human population of this earth that needs to change. And we are a species who are influenced much more strongly by our emotions than our rational thought processes. So throughout this worship series I will be using both science and the arts to look for those vital signs which might bring about change.

Today I would like to introduce you to Barbara Kingsolver . She is a renowned American novelist, who often addresses important topics such as social justice & biodiversity . Barbara is fascinated by the interaction between humans, their communities and the environment in which we live. She was raised in rural Kentucky, earned degrees in biology and began writing for science journals whilst at graduate school.

It is Barbara's recent novel 'Flight Behavior' that I would like to tell you about. The book begins with the main character, Dellarobia Turnbow, hiking in high-heeled, pointed-toe calfskin boots, up a steep, muddy trail to a deserted cabin for an illicit rendezvous. It's the wettest fall on record in southern Appalachia; the rainstorms are of biblical proportion and remind the locals of the stories of Noah. Rivers overflow their banks, trees are uprooted, slabs of mud slide down mountains.

Then comes the miraculous arrival of a colony of migrating monarch butterflies, its flight plan, evolved over centuries, thrown off by the chaotic weather patterns of a warming Earth. Now nothing is on firm ground.

Dellarobia has learned to be wary of the subject of climate change; she doesn't "believe" in it. As she sits in church on Sunday morning, she thinks she could believe, as the minister intones, that the butterflies are *a gift of the Lord's grace*. Now Dellarobia does not always agree with the words that flow from the pulpit, but she does believe in grammar, and resents the minister's use of the word "covenant" as a verb. Before too long, she's forced to sort out for herself matters of faith and science.

The arrival of the butterflies is of enormous consequence to Dellarobia's town. Some want to exploit them as a sightseeing, money-spinning spectacle. The media are also in on the exploitation. Dellarobia notices that "nobody was asking why the butterflies were here; the big news was just that they were."

Enter Ovid – another main character in the story. He is measuring the butterflies' response to an unreliable climate. Their habitat in Mexico is threatened, but in Appalachia they're also threatened, by unrelenting rains and freezing temperatures. The monarchs open Dellarobia's heart to a crazy longing to protect something larger than herself: nothing less than this gorgeous endangered world of ours. When Dellarobia presents Ovid with a scheme to save the butterflies by shipping them to a warmer place, Ovid recoils. "That is a concern of conscience, not of biology. Science doesn't tell us what we should do. It only tells us what is."

But the same Dr. Ovid Byron, when responding to television journalist, who suggests that scientists are in disagreement about whether global warming is happening, replies:

"The Arctic is genuinely collapsing Tina. Scientists used to call these things the canary in the mine. What they say now is, the canary is dead. We are at the top of Niagara Falls, in a canoe. There is an image for your viewers. We got here by drifting, but we cannot turn around for a lazy paddle back when you finally stop pissing around. We have arrived at the point of an audible roar. Does it strike you as a good time to debate the existence of the falls?"

Dellarobia and Job have one thing in common - neither one finds God in the unbending dogma parroted by their faith communities. They both stumble upon God when they are at the end of their tether. They are brought to an awestruck standstill by the expression of the divine in nature, by a God who is profoundly involved in life. That the divine spark is within butterflies, human-kind [both friend and foe] and the evolving swirl of stars, planets and whirlwinds. There is a mystery beyond our minds knowing but not beyond the sensing of our hearts and spirits.

Kingsolver asks, us all to consider the big picture question of how we are going to live, as we hurtle toward the abyss in these times of epic planetary transformation - - -whilst also dealing with the pinching boots of everyday life!

People not governments will make a difference

We are going to address the climate crisis when people get on board, and start speaking out at the ballot box or marching on the streets. That's happening now. Partly because there is an administration to the south of us that is so anti-environment and so anti-science; it has really galvanized a lot of people to act. Similar things are happening in Ontario – people have made it very clear to the provincial government that they do not support clause 10 of Bill 66, which put prime farmland and 1.8 million acres of Greenbelt in jeopardy – so it has been cancelled.

“If governments want to win, they have to do what the people want. If people insist that they want governments to address climate change, then they have to if they want to win an election.” write Ian Hanington and David Suzuki. ‘Just Cool It’: Seeking Hope in an Age of Climate Crisis, a new solutions-focused book.

How do shifts happen? How many of us grew up in a time when you could smoke in taxis, buses, restaurants and movie theatres? I bet you can't even imagine that now. A shift in consciousness comes about once you reach a critical mass. With climate change, we're not yet at a critical mass of people understanding what it means and demanding that we do something about it.

We need to remember that during times of shift - - there are always those who fear and reject change. Those who argued ending slavery would destroy the economy; who claimed putting people on the moon was impossible; who rejected ending South Africa's apartheid system; and who said the Berlin Wall wouldn't come down.

As Hanington and Suzuki write - “Things are only impossible, until they're not.”