

Small Talk – July 7 2021
By Michael Small

I am thinking back to yesterday morning. Tuesday mornings on Northern Community Radio (KAXE) is a time when one hears “Phenology”. *“Phenology is the rhythmic biological nature of events as they relate to climate.”* I am always fascinated by John Latimer’s weekly observations. I always hear about something new that is happening in Northern Minnesota from John and other listeners who have posted observations. Also, the hearer is introduced to the big picture, trends, and changes in climate over the past 30+ years.

Phenology brings to mind all of the rhythm’s, flows, movement, and the surprises of biological life – but even more than that, also the changes, and evolution of all living things. Recently I had a conversation about the mighty Columbia River with another. (The Sahaptin word for the Columbia was "Nch'i-Wana," the "Great River.") Even though it is bound up the Columbia continues to powerfully flow through the Pacific Northwest emptying massive amounts of fresh water into the Pacific Ocean. And of course, years ago Woody Guthrie wrote and sang of the power of this river in his song to the tune of Irene, “Roll On Columbia, Roll On”. *“Roll on, Columbia, roll on. Your power is turning our darkness to dawn, So roll on, Columbia, roll on!”* I wondered aloud, with my friend, can one even imagine what that massive river looked like to Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as they were warmly greeted by the many indigenous folk living along the shores of this life-giving river. The powerful flows and currents cutting through the Columbia Gorge must have caused one to pause at the power and beauty of Mother Nature – taking one’s breath away.

There has always been a tension between the power of nature and the desire of humans to harness, suppress, and control nature. The dam’s scattered throughout the Columbia basin have tamed a mighty river while providing cheap energy and reducing the frequent flooding that occurred in the spring. But there are always unintended consequences. With the fourteen dams on the mainstream Columbia, it becomes more difficult for the salmon to swim up-river to spawn and then naturally die.

As we speak about phenology, rhythms, and flows –are we aware of the phenology of human life – the natural, biological rhythms as humans relate to climate, to seasons, to challenges, to daily events, to the flow of daily living and to the historical flow over the times spanning one’s life and beyond.

Each of us stands in the natural rhythms of the day, from sunrise to sunset, from dusk to dawn. From season to season, one year to another, from decade to decade. Question, do we try to control and harness those rhythms making days predictable and sometimes rigid? Or are we free to take moments to “go with the flow,” to appreciate the moment, to unfold with unpredictable surprise? Do we take time to dance?

I would invite you to carefully be mindful of the phenology of your whole body. Listen to what the trillion cells that compose your body saying. Are they stretched and worn? Are

they tired? Are they hungry for contact with another, water to refresh, food to fuel this miraculous creation, tired and in need of rest, or are they in need of a long walk or run? Within these trillion cells listen to the voice(s), a whisper calling you to be present with and for others in need of healing and justice. Listen to the voices who are trying to loosen and break free from the shackles that are self-imposed upon ourselves so that we may be free to fully engage with the world around us.

Be aware. Look. See. Smell. Breathe deeply in . . . and out! Be silent, sit still, be present in place opening all the senses . . . respond!

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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