

Devotional – Look at the Birds – May 13, 2020

By Pastor Sharon Tidd

COVID-19 has many of us spending much more time at home, in isolation, in an effort to keep ourselves and our neighbours safe and healthy. I'm blessed to have a large bay window in my living room, and it looks out on my front yard which is graced with some beautiful flowering shrubs and a Japanese maple. The shrubs are in full bloom now, and I find myself spending long stretches just taking in the majesty they display.

On sunny days (and we've had plenty of those lately) these bushes serve as resting places for countless birds – swallows and finches mostly! My eyes are often captured by them. They flit here and there, float in the wind, then settle back on an outer branch to sing some melodious tune. Each has its own distinct sound. Some are sopranos, while others are basses. This is no coincidence; God planned it all for their pleasure and ours!

There's such a carefree and playful nature to these little birds. Many times I'll witness two playing their own unique game of "Catch Me If You Can" or "Bird Tag", as they fly with great speed and many swoops and dives, from branch to branch to branch ... one right on the tail of the other. I've yet to see them collide or fall head-first to the ground. They trust their wings and tails to keep them afloat, and appear very confident in their ability to land on the thinnest of branches! They read the breeze and make great use of it. And they sing as they play (or 'whistle as they work' at playing?). I can't help but smile in wonder at their joyous antics. They are the perfect picture of a "not a care in the world" life!

Too often my world seems filled with care, especially in these days. Do you feel that too? The challenge of keeping one's distance, remembering masks and gloves (especially when I know I'll be with or near elders), washing hands thoroughly (how many times have you sung "Happy Birthday to Me" in the past two months?!?!), and keeping abreast of all the latest developments in the fight against COVID-19 can be tiring. Hearing stories of lay-offs and market drops and

supply shortages can overwhelm my heart and soul. Hearing about lives lost and lives still in the balance, brings sadness and grief, even though I don't know these individuals personally. I feel deeply for those who are without work or unable to find work. I feel deeply for those who are struggling to feed and care for their families. I feel deeply for those with significant health challenges, waiting for surgeries and other treatments that have been 'on hold'. I feel deeply for those who are working extended hours, in stressful environments, as they battle exhaustion, simply to keep people healthy and alive and all of us supplied. There is much to pray for!

As I've watched the birds I've been envious of their lives. No social distancing mandated for them ... and food is readily available. They don't have to worry about hand-washing and sanitizing. And so they pursue their games of tag with joyful abandon in the glorious sunshine! I never can tell who wins; I suspect that doesn't matter to them!

This week, though, that glorious sunshine was often replaced with steady downpours as the rains returned to beautiful British Columbia. We needed them, so I'm not complaining! But I was in awe of the birds as the storms passed over us pounding my lawn and sidewalk. What did the birds do in response you ask? Well, I was amazed to find that their games continued, though on a smaller scale. Under the cover of the branches, blooms and leaves provided by my front yard bushes they kept up their antics. Beneath that umbrella of protection provided by the shrubs, they flitted and flew, moving from branch to branch, singing still. There was no trace of gloom. No sense of, "Well, we'll have to wait this storm out!" They were unfazed by the rain, or so it seemed, even when it was at its heaviest. Again, I was in envy. Oh to live all of life, whether in sunshine or in rain, with that kind of carefree abandon that plays without ceasing.

As I sat in wonder and awe, thanking God for the lesson those wee birdies offered me, I was reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 6:26-27: "Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

There's no question that these days are challenging for all of us. Fear and anxiety can so easily overcome us. But, for me, the lesson that rings in harmony with the birds' singing is this, "God will take care of you ... through every day, in every way!" I know its truth, because I've lived it through many crises. But in these past weeks, it has been the birds who have reminded me by playing with reckless abandon in both the calm and the storm. So, as 1 Thessalonians 5:16 encourages, "Always be joyful!" I'm taking that advice and like the birds I'm going to spend my time playing, singing, and dancing! Even in this period when normal has been re-defined on so many levels, there is one normal that will never change – we can choose, moment-by-moment, day-by-day, to enjoy this beautiful life that God has given us! In sunshine and shadow, we can fly!