

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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An Alternative to Golf or Gardening

The Very Rev. William F. Maxwell

When I retired 18 years ago, I had 43 years of sermons and classes and grant proposals and letters behind me, and most of those do not demand much from me now. So I serve as a hospice volunteer, as chair of the city library board, and as chaplain to the retired clergy on the Olympic Peninsula. I help out at two parishes as needed, and I have lots of time to think. Poetry has been the vehicle for many of those thoughts.

Rain

Splats on the roof
wake me up.
The rain insists
that life goes on
without me,
without even my consent.
So I go back
to sleep.

Cooper's Hawk

I saw death this morning
in my garden,
quiet, immobile, beautiful,
looking,
waiting.

And then
a sudden strike
across the yard
into a skittering
of juncos.

Death missed –
no burst of small feathers.
Death moved on
to look
and wait
again.

Ash Wednesday

Remember
that you are made of dust
and you will return to dust.
Remember too
that we are made in the image of God –
male and female,
old and young,
white and all persons of color
and geniuses
and people with attention deficit disorder.

It's a strange and confusing combination,
this dustiness, and this freedom to love
and to be selfish
and to be afraid
and to know hope
and joy
and wonder.

It's a strange business,
this combining of
dust
and
glory.

Sing to the Lord a new song!

Psalm 98

Singing is harder for me than it used to be.
I am the victim of incipient longevity, and as a result my
pitch is uncertain,
my voice is not strong, and “new song” reminds me
that I don’t understand
any of the new songs I hear when my children come to
visit.
I can’t even whistle loudly any more.

On the other hand,
I hear a new soft song when I smell the earth after a rain.
I hear a new insistent song when the wind shakes the trees
by our house.
I hear a new tender song when I see a woman nursing a
babe or when I see a young couple walking and
whispering and smiling.
I hear an old song that is always new when I’m told, “I love
you!”
I hear songs that call to me
when I am afraid,
or when I hear of God’s love
or when I hear of suffering
or when I hear of hope that refuses to die.

So I don’t have to sing a solo.
I am surrounded by singing,
and I am invited to join the chorus.
All the whole earth sings.



Bill Maxwell’s ministry has included small missions in Texas, the chaplaincy at Northwestern University, and family-sized churches in Chicago and Montana. He was a born-again cathedral dean in Chicago and Salt Lake City. He served as a deputy to five General Conventions, and he and his wife Sue retired happily to Port Townsend, Washington, in 1990.