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## What We Need is Here

Philippians 4:4-9; Matthew 6:25-34

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This is going to be a participatory sermon. First, a song.

Listen first, then sing.

### CAPO 2

### What we need is here

Amy McCreath

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That song was written by an Episcopal priest, Amy McCreath, using those 5 powerful words which come at the end a poem by Wendell Berry, called *Wild Geese*:

Horseback on Sunday morning,  
harvest over, we taste persimmon  
and wild grape, sharp sweet  
of summer's end. In time's maze  
over fall fields, we name names

that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves. We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow.  
Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear,  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.

Let's do a quick mental exercise—a question for you that I'd actually like to get your response to:

If you could choose to live in only one of these three places—the past, the present, or the future—which would you choose?

Don't overthink it. Just go with your first instinct. Past? Present? Future? And why?

I had suspected that only a handful of us would say the present.

We sometimes struggle to be present, don't we?

Right now, without saying anything, I want you to notice: where is your mind?

Is it behind you? —thinking about something that already happened.

Is it ahead of you? —thinking about something that hasn't happened yet.

Or is it right here? —actually inhabiting this moment.

Be honest with yourself.

Now, raise your hand if you discovered that your body is here, but your mind is somewhere else.

That may be one of the strangest things about being human: we are remarkably good at being somewhere other than where we actually are.

It's a multitasking skill that may serve us in some ways but otherwise leave us malnourished in this inability to be present.

Experts tell us that this is hard for a number of reasons.

Part of it is that we are always editing the past. Our brains are taking in all the data of what has passed and constructing narratives, often remembering the past selectively. It is making nostalgia out of an enhanced version of what actually happened. So, our minds are working, at least in the background, on the past.

Another reason that it's hard to be present is because the present is filled uncertainty. The here-and-now is the place where we encounter things we cannot control—rejection, loss, uncertainty, discomfort, even the possibility of things going wrong. And so we check out, and go some place else.

And it doesn't take much to pull us out of the present moment instantaneously: a small thought, an image, a memory, worry, a funny meme you recently saw on social media (See! It worked, didn't it?!).

Wendell Berry's poem speaks of the harvest at Summer's end: "tastes of persimmon and wild grape". It speaks of Fall fields—a page is turning as the season is changing.

We have our own things we are looking forward to, with some degree of anticipation.

What is something you are anticipating this Fall?

It can be something that brings you excitement or something you are dreading.

Berry also writes of the passing of time like a maze.

we name names  
that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves.

We are thinking about those that have passed away, perhaps even a long time ago. We remember what once was but is no longer. And that invites a fondness, a nostalgia, or sometimes deep grief in that loss.

What is something that has been lost for you, that has your mind in the past these days?

Berry writes:

"We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow."

I think this means, that in spite of all we are caught up anticipating or what we might be looking back on, we can learn to trust what is already present.

We can learn to trust that what we NEED is here, even if there are other voices telling us otherwise.

What I love about that statement is that it imbues us with a sense of control.

The circumstances of our lives, and the poly-vocality of all that is calling to us these days from any and all directions may betray that thought. That, no, actually what we need is over here or over there, or comes at a high price. That your life is out of your control.

But at any minute, we can break open that persimmon seed to see "the tree that stands in promise."

Berry reminds us that we don't have to wait for some future heaven or earth before we can discover that what we need is already here.

Sometimes what is required of us is simply "to be quiet in heart, and in eye, clear."

—to recognize what has been here all along: the gifts within us, the gifts among us, and the abundance that there is between us, which is enough to sustain us.

There are seeds here, even in this church, that contain a tree that stands in promise. I'd like to spend a moment calling these out, in a spirit of gratitude.

What are the seeds already here?

What gifts are already in this congregation?  
What relationships are here?  
What imagination has been evident?  
What courage and wisdom do we see?  
What new possibilities?  
What traditions worth carrying forward?  
What changes do you see already beginning?

The tree isn't here yet. But we can notice that the seed is.

This is not all just a mindfulness exercise, it's a deeply spiritual one, a Christian one.

In the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount, he said:  
"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own."  
(v.34)

Jesus was trying to root followers in this ancient wisdom, a wisdom found throughout the New Testament Scriptures.

This doesn't mean we don't make plans for what is coming; nor does it mean we forget the past. But there is a lifeline to tap into when we can be present where we are, to whatever degree that may be possible.

I want to close by singing together again.

As we do, let the truth of this wash over you and in the "quiet" of this moment, see clearly what is already here.

And, if you're brave enough, please add all the harmonies you can.