



Looking Out My Window, August 21, 2024 Poetry, part 2

Last month I shared how poetry became a life-changing influence. This month, I want to say a word or two about the role of poetry in my preaching.

Preparing to preach always begins with a close reading of the biblical text, especially listening for what takes on energy and life in a passage. Once that happens, a theme begins to emerge. A first step with that theme involves searching for an image, a phrase, a symbol that opens it up and connects with it. Often that image or phrase or symbol lies in a poem. So, that portion of the poem, or the poem entire, finds its way into the sermon. Often, the key line(s) will be repeated during the sermon, like a mantra in meditation.

Poets, like musicians, write for the ear, not for the eye. Poems are best appreciated when heard. That helps explain why poets do readings of their poems for audiences. Since preaching is for the ear, a lucid poem or portion of it adds melody and rhythm to a sermon, adds richness for the ear.

Admittedly, some poems, though rich with meaning, are not easily understood. Those I avoid in sermons except for brief, easily understood lines. But poets like T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Mary Karr, Denise Levertov, Czeslaw Milosz, and others, combine profound depth of meaning with lucid poetic lines.

One example. Robert Frost, in his poem, "Birches," recalls his childhood, climbing young, snow-laden birches and riding them down to the ground. In that reflection these lines evoke a "yes."

"I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And, then go back to it and begin over. . . .
Earth's the right place for love;
I don't know where it's likely to go better."

Easy to see how those lines evoke our yearning for a new beginning and add melody and rhythm to a sermon.

When you hear a poetic line or an entire poem in a sermon, I am sharing it in the hope you will feel the same inspiration I have felt in those lines and that the poetry will help open up the biblical text and connect it with your life and experience.

Peace,

Handwritten signature of David W. Perkins in blue ink.

David W. Perkins+
Priest in Charge