

Thoughts from the Garden – July 2017

On my hands and knees beside purpletop grass, I was working on widening our native plant nursery in preparation for planting our winterberries, common boneset, sweet everlasting, and New York asters, all plants native to Long Island that will benefit pollinators and soil and water health. Beside my right hand I noticed a dragonfly. He was crawling on a lone stem, his translucent wings resting along his needle shaped body. The sun glimmered on his exoskeleton which was the color of midnight, and his wings twinkled like snow crystals on a bright morning. I inhaled in appreciation as the beauty of this creature drew me away from my highway of thoughts. I had never seen a dragonfly so close and so still, and I was grateful for this companion to my morning task.

Ready to move to the next section of the native plant garden, I looked over to see if I was still accompanied, and the dragonfly began to move from his perch. His wings extended in his effort to balance, and I noticed that one wing was broken. This was, no doubt, the reason for his extended stay. My heart winced at the sight of his incompleteness. There was, however, no diminishment of his beauty in his brokenness. He was beautiful, *and* he was broken.

My initial, fleeting thought was whether I might adopt this new acquaintance. I couldn't heal his wing, but perhaps I could shelter and feed him. My immediate response to brokenness is to see how I might fix it. This, however, was not a time for fixing. It was not a time for me to interfere with nature, but a time, rather, to let nature take its course.

I don't know what happened to the dragonfly. I imagine he became nourishment for a bird or perhaps, unable to feed himself, he died where I left him, his small life returning to the soil and nourishing life smaller, even, than he – life that may eventually feed me or those who are fed at our sharing table. Life and death, not as opposites, but as one seamless cycle has its own kind of tragic beauty. I take comfort in the belief that God knows every sparrow and dragonfly and numbers every hair on our head.

I carry the dragonfly with me these days – my companion still – as I meet broken wings everywhere I turn. Just as the dragonfly's loss enabled me to glimpse his beauty in a way I could not have if his wings were complete, I realize that beauty is so often found in our wounds, our imperfections, our limitedness. It is in my own broken places that the ragged edges of my neighbor can enter in. It is in the universal experience of being grounded dragonflies that we companion one another in compassion and love. It was in touching the wounds on his hands and his side that Jesus' disciples recognized the risen Christ. Like dragonflies with missing wings, we, too, are broken, and we are beautiful, and we are beloved.

