

# Green Ducks

September 17, 2023

## Green Ducks

One of the things that I appreciated in moving from Milwaukee to Green Bay is the lack of traffic. Sure, there is the occasional backup because of a train on the tracks going parallel to Broadway or in the summer a boat going under the bridge. But aside from those things and a home Packers game, you can pretty much get anywhere in the metro area in 15 to 20 minutes.

That is, unless you live where I do.

Because I have to drive past the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary to go just about anywhere, my travels are delayed regularly, often for up to 10 minutes, by geese. I swear, it's a game for them. Not only are they experts at taking their own sweet time, they'll make sure that they are 90% clear from your car before encouraging one of their comrades to join them.

They're not motivated by car horns. I've seen people get out of their cars to shoo them. It's a phenomenon unlike anything I've ever encountered. In the nine years I've lived where I do, this has resulted in hours and hours of observing the geese. We get to watch their life cycle as the little yellow goslings mature. We are able to orient ourselves to the seasons as they migrate.

But one of my favorite things is when they turn green. You see, the reason they cross the road is there's a tiny little pond on the north side of the road which, invariably as the weather turns warm and there are a few days without wind and rain, develops an algae bloom. It's day-glo green, like the relish on a Chicago style hot dog. And, just as invariably, the geese swim in the green colored pond and come out stained day-glo green themselves. I'll admit, I was scared for them the first time I encountered this, but after some inquiries, I was assured they had nothing to worry about, just a little evidence of where they'd been swimming.

As we reflect on our Gospel today and celebrate ReUnion Sunday, the day that our congregation gathers back together from the four winds after our summer adventures and we resume our choir and faith formation programming, I'd like to suggest that, kind of like the day-glo green geese at the wildlife sanctuary, living lives steeped in forgiveness and grace is evidence of the waters we've been swimming in.

## The Gospel

The Gospel passage we read today came right after the passage we focused on last week, in which Jesus talks with the disciples about forgiveness, and then tells them that if they go through a series of healthy attempts to reconcile with someone and they still don't see eye to eye, they are to treat that person like a Gentile or a tax collector. Of course, the punchline is that the way that Jesus treated sinners and tax collectors is that he ate with them. He sat down at table with them, broke bread, and tried to get to know them better.

Then, Jesus goes on with today's passage, in which he tells a parable about how often and how much God expects us to forgive. Of course 70 x 7 isn't meant to be literal. We're not meant to be keeping tally and the 491st offense is the one we finally don't have to forgive. Rather, seven is symbolic of the days of creation, so 70 x 7 means every day times every day times ten. Seventy x 7 means All. The. Time.

I think of what it must be like for Scott to live with me and all of the ins and outs of a marriage. A successful marriage cannot be based on an accounting of one's faults. It has to be about constantly and consistently loving one another through the faults. This is an important time to point out that God's expectation of extravagant forgiveness does not mean that we must put up with abuse or other behaviors that diminish us. Forgiveness doesn't mean staying in a bad situation, nor does it equal a lack of accountability. What it does mean is treating others with the graciousness that we've been treated.

In our parable today, Jesus tells of someone who had a debt of 10,000 talents forgiven but who then refused to forgive 100 denari. A talent was equal to 20 years wages and a denarius was equal to one day's wage. The first person was forgiven 200,000 YEARS worth of wages, but then turned around and wouldn't forgive 100 DAYS worth.

One of my professors used to say that the scariest word in the Lord's Prayer is the word "as." Do you get where she was going with that? "Forgive us our debts AS we forgive our debtors." Forgive us AS we forgive. Hinge our own healing and reconciliation and redemption on the way that we practice those things toward others.

Scott Hoezee from the Calvin Institute puts it this way:

"The reason God expects us to forgive as a result of our being forgiven is the same reason you can expect to be wet after diving into a lake: water is wet and when you immerse yourself in it, YOU get wet. So also with forgiving grace: grace is magnetic and beautiful. When God immerses you in grace, you will be dripping with grace yourself. You will be full of grace and truth and so spread it to others."

## **Belonging**

Now you get where I was going with the green ducks at the wildlife sanctuary. Living lives of forgiveness and grace, living lives that look at EVERYTHING from the lens of reconciling and seeking the health and wellbeing of all, is the mark of the waters we swim in. We're immersed in God's forgiveness and healing and grace, and it leaves a mark, just like the ooey-goey green slime of the north pond.

At our all-church retreat last weekend, we spent the morning reflecting on our church member Dr. Benny Rieth's work around the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and what that might mean for our church. One of the key insights people have had every time I've gone through Benny's work is the difference between inclusion and belonging. Inclusion seems to be systemic. Our church has policies and statements and a culture of inclusion. But belonging is relational. It's a sense of connectedness, and it's a two-way street. There's a

reciprocity in belonging. Much like the AS in the Lord's Prayer, you get what you give. Again, this isn't to say that God gives to the measure that we do, but rather that our experience of community hinges on our willingness to be in community.

### **Conclusion**

As we begin our program year this ReUnion Sunday, I hope these two concepts will be the threads that run through everything we do this year: that we are marked by the waters of grace that we swim in. That our mutual life here at church and our individual lives will be inseparable from our experience of God's grace. I hope this plays itself out in our lives at home, in how we vote around areas of immigration and economic policy, in how we show up for the marginalized and oppressed. And, that having been so immersed in God's healing and reconciling and love, we make every effort to help others feel like they belong in this community of grace as well.

Friends, we're green geese. We're different because of swimming in these waters of divine love. Let's wear it proudly. Alleluia and Amen.

Rev. Bridget Flad Daniels  
Union Congregational United Church of Christ  
Green Bay, Wisconsin  
**Exodus 3:1-15, Matthew 18:21-35**  
September 17, 2023