

WILD ORDINATION  
Emerge – Gather - Belong  
by  
Rev. Roger L. Brown  
Preached April 3, 2022  
Centre Congregational Church

Romans 8:16-23  
John 21:17

### Introductory Remarks

When Scott asked me if I'd like to do a sermon on the last chapter of the Church of the Wild book, I readily accepted. And at that point I hadn't reach the chapter. Earlier this week, when I began to write this sermon I was happy to discover that this chapter gives me the opportunity to talk about two subjects I rarely get to talk about – my Masters Thesis research and the idea of Emergence. Don't feel bad if when I'm done you still don't understand completely what I was trying to do in the research. There isn't time to fully explain things, and besides this is a sermon, not a science lecture.

### THE SERMON

Together as a congregation, we have been on a Lenten journey using Victoria Looz book, Church of the Wild as a kind of spiritual guidebook. The goal of our guides this Lent has been to help us gain a deeper and more intimate relationship with nature. Several of us are participating in the BTS Center book study which involves 4 online Zoom meetings. As

examples of that Wild spirituality connection, you have heard about Margo Neale's encounter with a stag and a herd of wild deer. Scott has shared with us a vision of swimming with sharks. Aram Mitchell, of The BTS Center has been serving up daily spiritual practices to deepen and challenge our connection to Mother Earth. (P)

My task this morning is to share with you two mind bending ideas from Chapter 9, and a unique personal experience of doing research on the amazing Nitella plant. Thus, together we will explore the meaning of Wild Ordination and the concept of Emergence.

## NITELLA

Now, let's go back in time to the year 1965. During that year I could be found in my lab in the Physiology and Biophysics Department of the College of Medicine at the University of Vermont. My Master's Degree studies were supported by a research fellowship from a grant to study the effects of localized, that is small points of ultrasound on biological cells. In those days when no one had yet imagined the ultrasonic diagnostic devices which visualize the condition of my heart valves, or track the progress of a pregnancy. The pioneers in the biological effects of ultrasound who were my colleagues needed to insure that the ultrasound did not damage the cells they were radiating. (P).

In my lab, I could be found pering through a dissecting microscope so I could position the ultrasound probe next to the Nitella cell in the special chamber which held the two inch long Nitella cell. (The remaining lab equipment was simple - a frequency generator to drive the sound probe, the specially designed Nitella chamber, and an Oscilloscope to monitor the electrical impulse traveling down the length of the cell) (P)

Interestingly my research adventure didn't begin with the amazing Nitella plant. Originally, I was charged to investigate the effect of ultrasound on nerve impulse transmission. So I spent over a month experimenting with frog sciatic nerves. However, my ability to dissect out a single nerve fiber was questionable. So when I discovered that it was possible to send an impulse down the lengthe of a Nitella cell, and that it used the same electro-chemical process as nerves, I was done with pithing frogs and much happier driving out to Heinsburg Pond to fetch Nitella plants in the shallow water there. (P)

## SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NITELLA

One of the fascinating aspects of the Nitella plant is that some of its unique characteristics are not obvious by casual observation. Without a dissecting microscope, it's not possible to view the protoplasmic streaming in the big Nitella cells. Secondly, it takes sophisticated instrumentation and special probes to detect the voltage between the outside and the inside of the cell. And it is this voltage which makes it possible to send an impulse down the length of the cell.(p)

So you can see by this rather long story of my research days, that I had developed a relationship with the Nitella cell, testing it, and observing how it responded. I was not just passively observing it. I was interacting with it

I was on an intimate journey of discovery. A journey driven by curiosity, and informed by the work of earlier scientist, as well as the work and ideas of my research colleagues. While I was doing unique work, I stood on the shoulders of others.

I point out these special observations not only because they became useful to me in my research, but because Victoria Looz in her book and Aram Mitchell with the daily spiritual practices, are encouraging us to pay attention when we encounter the natural world - whether it be the oak tree

across the street or a wild animal on the trail. The more we pay attention, the deeper our relationship becomes. (p)

Now let us see if my year and a half relationship with the amazing Nitella plant qualifies me for wild ordination? (It did, however, guarantee my membership in the Society of Ordained Scientists, years later.)

## WILD ORDINATION

Most of chapter 9, deals with the sermon and chapter title: Wild Ordination. The term alone seems counterintuitive. Looorz begins by describing the Christian ordination process and showing that it doesn't fit wild ordination.

Ordination to the Christian ministry in the Protestant tradition you all know well. There are requirements - education, seminary training, and pastoral experience. In addition, certain members of the church community - the Church and Ministry Committee and a church Search Committee confirm that they as well as the candidate hear God's call to a specific church. Having a call to a specific church is a requirement for ordination, though there have been exceptions.

In Wild Ordination, none of these details are required. Things are very open ended,

Victoria Loorz says this about Wild Ordination: “In wild ordination, it is the wild that calls you into service. It’s not the hierarchy. The calling comes when it comes, from whomever it comes, and at the right time. I can’t be more specific than that. Because I don’t know. Only you will know. What I do know is that we are deeply interconnected with a world yearning to be whole again.”

Let me suggest a very simple example of wild ordination. This past Thursday, as part of an all day online retreat called Discovering a New Story, I found myself in a breakout room with another retreatant. In discussing special places, he now viewed his yard as a part of the wider ecosystem, so he thought he should give it more attention. He hadn’t yet figured out what this meant. I might mean plant more flowers or a small garden. The point is we might say that he had a wild ordination to care for his yard. (P)

My sense from reading chapter 9 is that as we connect more deeply to some part of the natural environment, that we may hear it calling to us for more attention and care, then that special place grants us a wild ordination to be its caregiver, its eco pastor, if you will. (P)

EMERGENCE

Now I want to move on and discuss the concept of EMERGENCE. (p)  
Loorz gives only two pages to this topic, though the topic is spread throughout the book but not named. So fundamental and important is this idea that The Institute for Religion in the Age of Science devoted two week long summer conferences to this topic.

Let me start by putting the noun into a simple sentence as a verb: the Groundhog emerged from his hole, and suddenly there he was. Here, something unexpected has happened that we claim as an event. Especially on Groundhog Day.

Now in nature on many complex levels, makes connections that are unexpected, yet create something new. (P) I learned recently that the roots of trees talk to each other, so a strong tree can help a weak tree. That means in a forest you don't just have a group of trees, you have a forest, where all work together. Now let me bring the idea of emergence into the human world, where we all live.

I'd like to share an insight from a paper delivered at the IRAS conference on Emergence. The paper is titled: "How Deep and Broad are the Laws of Emergence." The Bennington College professors who wrote this paper - Bruce Weber an evolutionary biologist and Susan Sgobati a choreographer, spent several years studying how emergence and

improvisation were part of group dance routines. This brought to mind my many years of contradancing, right next door in the rec building and once on a boat in Boston Harbor.

In a contradance, couples form long lines where the couples in two lines face each other. Each dance has a routine of swings, dosy dos, pass throughs and other moves common to square dancing. As the dance progresses, half the couples move up the line and half move down. By the end of the dance, every couple has danced with every couple in the line.

(p) So, out of this random collection of dancers is formed a unique community. During the evolution of this dance, emergence has been at work to form a community who can perform the dance flawlessly. (P)

Quite typically, when the caller figures the dancers have learned their moves, he stops calling, and there is just the music and the dance. It is not unusual for the dance band to pick up the pace of the music and the dance becomes even more fun. At that point, another level emerges, and I find myself in a hypnotic state where I do not have to think about the dance moves, and I can just live into the music and the dance happens automatically. Now a community of dancers has emerged to become its own organic being. So well does everyone come to know the dance, that I know that when I reach out my hands to my partner or another dancer that



their hands will be in the right place. So what has emerged is a community guided by the musicians and the caller that is a new entity, a new being just for this dance. (P)

Now can you imagine what might emerge in this congregation if we knew the moves of our ministry guided by the music of our faith, so that together our congregational dance takes us to a new level. (P) Scott is our congregational dance caller, and when he stops calling, we carry on the ministry led by the Spirit for the emergent process has led us to a new level.

Expanding the dancing metaphor to include all of God's creation on Earth, then the trees and plants and animals are all part of the great dance of life. If we honor each dancer in this great creative dance of life, and we trust that each dancer will find their place and role as the laws of nature demand what a wonderful world of grand community will emerge. (p)

Then the wisdom of nature will be our dance caller. Hear now the words from John 21 in the terms of this metaphor as Victoria Looz describes it in her book:

“In a wild ordination, the questions you might be asked are more along the lines of the first ordination, issued by Jesus to Peter at the shore,

beside his boat where he was fishing. Using the language of deep relationality, Jesus asked him, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said something like, "oh, my God, yes, I love you." Three times Peter affirmed. His love. Three times Jesus said to him, "Okay, then, go feed my sheep."

"Do you love me?" Earth asks, the deer ask, the remaining oak tree in the park asks, and you say yes.

"Will you speak for those whose voices have not been heard?" And you say yes.

"Will you represent the wild ones whose authenticity worth has been disregarded for too many generations, to recover and rescue and restore them?" And you say yes in the way only you can. "Okay, well done. Go and feed my sheep.

And so you do. In the only way you can."