

## Listen for the Spirit to Guide You

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024

Let us pray, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Creator, Redeemer, and Liberator. Amen.

Last month, Lois Wilson was interviewed on CBC ideas - did anyone listen?

The interview was about a book that came out on her 95th birthday, a collection of essays written by people who have worked with her - former parliamentarians, human rights activists, church ministers, university professors, environmentalists - All sharing how she inspired and helped in their work for justice, peace — and the common good.

The book is called *For the Sake of the Common Good: Essays in Honour of Lois Wilson*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press. She is magnificent.

*Can we have a photo of her posted please?*

If you don't know her, Lois Wilson is 96 years old, she's a United Church minister, a community organizer, the first female moderator of the United Church of Canada, a president of the World Council of Churches, a staunch human rights advocate, and a former independent member of the Senate of Canada. I had the honour of meeting her when I was a part of the Student Christian Movement in university.

A couple of things stood out to me about her interview published on the CBC website.

**First, she talked a lot about camping.** Rev. Lois recalled that as a child, her family of nine would get into a 20-foot canoe and take off onto Lake Superior - for a month. She said that being immersed in nature is a very important part of her own spirituality. She said *nature is the ground of our being*.

The ground of our being. *The stars and the animals and the fish are the ground of our being.*

The scriptures today remind us to ground ourselves, our being in creation. Our psalm today is about how the sun and the heavens and the night and the day sing the glory of God even though they don't use words.

*The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.*

*<sup>2</sup>Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.*

*their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

*In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.*

The movement of the sun was understood in a different way in the ancient world- as something that moved across the sky. Now we would say that we are the ones moving, but the sun and the moon that follows it are no less miraculous to us than they were to ancient people, especially here in the land of living skies. The sun and the moon and the dome of the sky still sing the glory of our creator, don't they? This weekend, we can say that the snow sings the glory of our creator.

Our reading from the book of Exodus today – the story of the law- is also deeply rooted in creation. After the Hebrews leave Egypt where they were enslaved. God does not set them up in a nice town right away. They are in the wilderness. In the wilderness they are at the mercy of the elements, *Under*

the beating sun, *In* the driving winds. They struggle to find enough food and water, there were snakes biting them out there- we'll read that next week. They got sick. They fought with one another.

When the children of Israel received the law from God through Moses, what we call the ten commandments, they are *immersed* in creation, *humbled* by God's infinite power displayed in the natural world.

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;  
you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

Look around you at this terrifying and miraculous place. I made all this. I'm God. That's the first commandment. And the other commandments make sense, don't murder, don't take other people's cows or wives. All good.

But listen to this one -

*Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.*

Here, the commandment to take a day off work in honor of God is incredibly important. Taking a day off is what is going to establish that these people are no longer slaves. Commanding that the children of Israel also give their laborers a day off - even their animals a day off ensures that they are not enslaved. but also that they will not enslave others. They cannot enslave other people- not even animals. The command to take a day off, a rest, sets us in our place – below God and equal with all other people, servants, children, alien residents from other lands and in respect for the animals the plants. The sabbath law gives plants and animals and human beings a rest.

The sabbath commandment is so important because it is our day to **be** a creation of God- **be** a part of God's infinite creation, not just to *use* God's creation for our own needs. Keeping the sabbath honors God – who created us as a part of something bigger than ourselves.

In her canoe with eight other people paddling the waves and battling the black flies on Lake Superior, our Lois Wilson was formed in the wilderness, under the sky, experiencing the transformational power of sabbath. The power of knowing herself to be a *part* of God's good creation. To be humbled, strengthened, And in awe of the one who made it all.

So, that's the first thing I noticed about Lois Wilson's interview- the camping. The second thing is her commitment to *justice*, justice for all the people of the earth. Lois Wilson once visited South Africa, South Korea, and Argentina — all in one year. She was a driven community organizer and believed that we, as followers of Christ, have an obligation to *work* for justice on this earth.

When the ten commandments came down off the mountain in the wilderness, it was over a thousand years before Jesus. By Jesus' time, the law has expanded dramatically. There are laws about clothing and money and food and worshipping and cleanliness. *There are laws about who is in and who is out.*

By Jesus' time, the faith of being under the big sky honoring God and caring for human and non-human neighbors has become an organized religion with a roof to maintain.

In the gospel reading today Jesus is in the holy city- in the holy temple for Passover – and people are selling animals for sacrifice and changing money at a profit which of course benefits the money changers and the temple more than the people who are coming to seek God.

*In the temple Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"*

Jesus makes a whip and chases animals and people out of the temple. Remember, Jesus is a Jew- he loves the scriptures and the festivals, he loves the people and the temple, he is there for Passover like everybody else. He does *not* like the exploitation of the poor- in order to enrich the temple community. Here, he is calling his people, all of us back to the basics of our faith- back into balance – back into a place where we honor God, honor all other people no matter who they are or where they are from, and where we honor creation - of which we are only a small part.

In this gospel reading, Jesus is full of the power of the Spirit of God. The same God who created all things - and like a plough wind, comes in to open up the space, and clear out all that is obscuring the goodness of God in that place. As followers of Jesus, that same Spirit is accessible to us - if we are in a place to listen, and to hear, to humble ourselves and to be led.

When talking about her own drive to address injustice, Lois Wilson gives credit to the Holy Spirit. She said - *I attribute a lot of it just to the spirit, the Holy Spirit. I hardly ever had an original idea myself, but I would always respond to what the community called me to do. Looking back, that's what I think it was, because it wasn't my idea. None of them were my ideas. But I was able to respond to them because I saw that they were in continuity with what I understood as the purposes of God in the world.*

Grounded in the wildness of nature, and captivated by the wild Spirit of God, Lois Wilson and other saints in our community show us how to be followers of Jesus in our own lives.

Today, on this sacred day of Sabbath, under this deep blanket of snow, in the wind of this powerful blizzard, and near the warmth of your own little cup of tea, I invite you to consider your small place in God's big creation, and to listen for where the Spirit is calling you - calling you to work for justice, balance, respect, renewal and peace in this world God loves.

Amen.

Rev. Emily Carr

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/lois-wilson-common-good-faith-community-1.7115539>

**Honouring Lois Wilson: A lifetime dedicated to the common good**