

Winfield United Church Reflection – July 19, 2020

## **Invention of summer: Mosquitoes**

Psalm 139:1-18

Over the past few weeks, we have been considering some of the Inventions of Summer... sunflowers... the three sister seeds of corn, bean and squash. Today we are looking at something that reminds of the season of summer but is far less appealing and that is the pesky mosquito.

When we think of this tiny wing-creature with the distinctive high-pitched hum and ability to draw human blood and leave an itchy welt behind, the majority of us likely see mosquitoes as a seasonal annoyance and do our best to repel and avoid them. But I learned some of this insect's role in world history and the formidable force it has been.

In his book, *The Mosquito: A Human History of Our Deadliest Predator*, historian Timothy Winegard documents this bug as not merely an itchy pest but a force of nature that has dictated the outcome of significant events throughout world history. Mosquitoes are seemingly as old as time itself and have been shown to be present some 100 million years ago. When the extinction event of an asteroid hitting the earth, dinosaurs were apparently found to be already in decline from mosquito-born diseases. Malaria devastated prehistoric Africa to such a degree that people evolved sickle-shaped red blood cells to survive it. The disease killed ancient Greek and Roman populations, as well as their enemies, playing major roles in the outcomes of their wars. Hippocrates associated the late-summer surge of Malaria with the Dog Star, calling the sickly time the “dog days of summer”. In the third century AD, malaria epidemics saw massive number of people joining the much persecuted faith of Christianity that emphasized healing and care of the sick, helping to establish it as a world religion. Winegard also discusses in his book that for much of the world's military history, deaths by mosquitoes far out-numbered and were more decisive than deaths in battle. Mosquitoes were introduced to communities through colonization, the slave trade, and various military invasions over the

course of human history and has seen fatalities caused by mosquito-born diseases number 52 billion people.

At any one time, there are some three trillion mosquitoes on the planet... that's a lot of swatting and bother. But perhaps there are things from mosquitoes that we humans can learn.

They are persistent! They will spend a whole entire night with you in your tent and buzz in your ear to make their presence known and wait for their opportunity to bite you... they never give up.

Don't Underestimate! The size in the case of mosquito is irrelevant as I shared with you earlier the impact this insect which is smaller than your pinky finger has had. Just because something is viewed as small, doesn't mean it isn't impactful or significant.

Acceptance: this is a tough one. Sometimes we cannot avoid the swarm of mosquitoes that want to alter our idea of a good time outside. We do our best to prepare and defend but this is part of the natural order of life. Mosquitoes remind us that we share this planet with all life forms and that we humans are not as powerful as we make ourselves out to be but are part of something so amazingly interconnected and even a pesky mosquito is part of this system.

Is God in the mosquito? That question I am sure has been asked as long as there have been humans to ask it. Our Psalm today sings the praises of a God Presence that never leaves the writer alone. It doesn't matter where he goes in life, God is already there. From the beginning, when the cells started to divide and create his being, God was there... wherever he travels, what circumstances confound him, he feels a sense of the God Spirit with him. Life is not always easy. We so often tend to only see the God Presence in those things we identify as beautiful and experiences that are pleasurable. But what about when life throws us a curveball... when plans made become plans put on hold because of illness, ended relationships, economic uncertainty due to unemployment or insufficient work... these are mosquito moments. But we persevere, we find our strength in the support and care of one another.... our life experiences carry us forward changing us, adapting us to those things that are bothersome and problematic. And as we hear

and experience in our Psalm this morning, God is always with us... in the heat of the day, the mosquito buzzing in our ear....

May the Spirit of God be with us in all our experiences of change and uncertainty. If we can find God in the not-so-great moments of everyday life, perhaps mosquitoes really are an invention of Summer.

Amen and Amen.