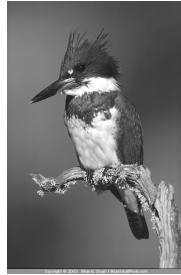


HALCYON DAYS



THE DAYS OF LIBERATION, PROSPERITY AND JOY

Scripture:

Deuteronomy 22:6

If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.

MATTHEW 6:26

Consider the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?

LUKE 12:6

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.



THE COVERBIRD

If you can identify the bird on the front cover of the bulletin, don't tell anyone.

Even if you do know the name of this bird, there may still be something about this bird that will surprise you.

WHAT CAN WE SEE?

- It has a long pointed bill.
- Top knot on his head.
- Colors are blue, grey and white.
- Some varieties are the size of robins; other varieties can be as large as adult crows.

HABITAT

They are found throughout marsh or wooded habitats. Their range is from dry deserts to dense rainforests, from seacoasts to the mountains. They feed on lizards, salamanders, snakes and small mammals near sandy seashores and small streams. They can eat grasshoppers, earthworms, or they can eat shrimp, crayfish and crabs. They spend much time perched in a stationary position on the lookout for prey, swooping down to grab prey from the ground, water, air, or leaves.

A variation of these species is the symbol of Australia (the Laughing Kookaburra). The call of these birds is seen as an omen in some parts of the world. It's the "omen" part of this bird's mythology that is so interesting. We'll come back to this little bird in a moment.

<http://animals.jrank.org/pages/887/Kingfishers-Alcedinidae.html>

CHILDRENS PEACE MONUMENTS



Do you know the name Sadako Sasaki? She lived in Hiroshima. She was 2 years old when the first atomic bomb was detonated there; she was exposed to radiation. By the time she was 11 she had developed Leukemia from the radiation. She fought a very hard and public battle to survive, but she did not. Sadako's best friend told her of an old Japanese legend which said that anyone who folds a thousand paper cranes would be granted a wish. She started to work folding the paper cranes and completed over 1000 before dying on October 25, 1955 at the age of twelve.

The Children's Peace Monument at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park commemorates Sadako Sasaki and the thousands of child victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The monument was built using money from a fund-raising campaign by Japanese school children including Sadako's classmates. A statue of Sadako holding a folded crane is on the top of a sculpture. Thousands of origami cranes from all over the world are offered around the monument on a daily basis, with ancient Japanese tradition holding that one who folds a thousand cranes can have one wish granted. They serve as a sign that the children who make them and those who visit the statue desire a world without nuclear war.

There is a similar statue in Seattle. There is another one that my friends helped to create and fund in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Have you seen any of the peace statues?

I want to think about the spiritual and mystical power of birds with you today. What is the power that we wish the birds could bring us?

SYMBOLS OF PEACE

Birds have been used as symbols of peace and as the teachers of the spiritual lessons found in nature for thousands of years. You will see birds in nativity scenes, present at the baptism of Jesus and John. Look closely at your Christmas cards, and you will see birds everywhere - perhaps circling above

the manger scene -- and usually they symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit at the birth of Christ.

**BIRDS CIRCLING ABOVE CAUSE US TO
LOOK UP
AND THINK UP
AND PRAY UP.**

THE BIBLE IS A FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS:

The pages of Holy Scripture lead us to cormorants, ostriches, owls, peacocks, pelicans, quails, ravens, sparrows, storks, swallows, eagles, pigeons, doves, and vultures.

- The *eagle* was a symbol of swiftness and power in the writings of Isaiah.
- *Pigeons* were offered in sacrifice
- The *dove*, sometimes depicted with an olive branch in its beak, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit itself.
- The *angels* seem to be some kind of mixture of human and divine symbolized by the wings of birds that carry them aloft.

THE HALCYON

In Greek and Roman mythology there is a story of a bird that lives along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. She gives birth to her young in the winter.

The song of this bird is loved by the sea nymphs, and this bird is favored by the gods. According to legend, the females were said to carry the aged males on their backs. (Audubon, however, does not report this behavior in his studies.)

The mythical name of this bird is the halcyon.

She breeds in the winter when she is four months old, and she constructs her nest on the sea. She lays five eggs in the nest. The Greek historian, Pliny, reported that the sea is calm for seven days before, and seven days after the winter solstice in order that the halcyon may incubate the eggs, and hatch its young. Aeolus, guardian of the winds,

forbids the winds to churn up the waters while the halcyon rears her young.

References to the halcyon still appear because writers have found it a symbol of tranquility and harmony. Shakespeare, who gave new life to classical bird symbolism, has Joan of Arc in *Henry IV, Part I*, encourage the Dauphin by urging him to “expect St. Martin’s summer, halcyon days.”

DAYS OF PEACE AND TRANQUILITY

So the “halcyon days” are the carefree and happy days of peace and tranquility upon the waters of life, based upon the bird for whom the gods calmed the seas in order that she might give birth to her young.

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Myths are powerful stuff. Myths are born from human needs. They reflect human hopes. Joseph Campbell says that we need our myths just to live and to understand our world. I want you to be on the lookout for halcyon days this weekend which marks a midpoint of summer. Halcyon days are days of discovery, and peace of mind, and peace of spirit. It is a freedom to think, and discover, and to let our thoughts soar. That’s why we fought the wars for freedom that we celebrate... in order that we might enjoy the halcyon days.

INNER PEACE

So what should you be on the look out for, exactly? What if an epidemic of inner peace suddenly threatened our frenzied society? What if the Holy Spirit burst through the fogs of despair and conflict that the religious and political warriors drum up to make us nervous? The world thrives on conflict. Is there still room for a week of halcyon days?

Here are some warning signs of inner peace to be watching for:

- **A tendency to think and act spontaneously, rather than on fears based on past experiences.**
- **An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.**
- **A loss of interest in judging other people**
- **A loss of interest in conflict.**
- **A loss of the ability to worry. (This is serious!)**
- **Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.**
- **Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.**
- **Frequent attacks of smiling.**
- **An increased tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.**
- **An increased susceptibility to love extended by others, as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it yourself.**

HALCYON DAYS

- When the waters are calm enough for nests to be built or refeathered.
- When traditions and hopes are renewed.
- When families remember the hopes that their parents had for them.
- When the business of conflict is halted for a moment, and when new life emerges once again upon calmer waters.
- When there is time for folding origami birds to remember the victims of war.
- When there is reason to find other people interesting rather than threatening.

THE KINGFISHER

We know this small bird by the name Kingfisher. The Greeks called it the halcyon. Chances are you can spot one on the coastal flyways.

If you see the halcyon, remember the bird that flew and flew until she found waters calm enough to build a nest for the next generation of children. The only worthy business of any adult is to make the world safe for their children and for the children of others, and for the children where there is not enough food, and for children where there is too much war.

Our world is not as child friendly as it once was.

Our games are more violent, and the technology is much more lethal.

We focus too much on winning, because that builds up our weak ego.

But let us calm the waters enough to build nests for children, to create safe places for them to play, to study, to interact, to grow in wisdom and in the spirit.

And to discover once again, the magical, mystical, spiritual halcyon days from which life is born.



Dr. John H. Cushman
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
July 6, 2008