

The Weekly Message from Darren Brandon

April 22, 2026

"Nature"

On an early morning walk, I heard a Downy Woodpecker hammering away at a rotten branch in the Black Walnut tree. It darted to the fence, I snapped a quick photo and it flew away.

Curious about the other bird songs I was hearing, I pulled out my phone and opened the Merlin Bird ID app. Within seconds, it named the birds: Mockingbird, Robin, Bluebird, Cardinal, Mourning Dove, Song Sparrow - twelve birds singing in that moment. Then I looked up to see Geese flying in formation overhead.



I don't always pause to listen and look for birds, but I'm glad I did. It brought me a sense of joy and wonder. It reminded me of Jesus and how he often turns to nature to speak of God.

When his disciples are anxious, he says, "Look at the birds. Consider the flowers. God takes care of them, and God will take care of you."

He also speaks of the slow work of grace. In the parable of the fig tree, the gardener asks for more time: "Let it alone for one more year." (Luke 13:8) In the story, the gardener is patient, tending the soil. Even when fruit is not yet visible, grace is still at work to nurture growth.

And then, Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches." (John 15:5) Life flows through connection. Separated from the vine, the branch withers. Connected, it bears fruit.

We remember this at the Communion Table each time we gather, *"Make us one with Christ, One with each other, and One in ministry to all the world"* - including the natural world. Stop, Look, and Listen today. God is all around.

Blessings,

Darren