

**Earth Care and Spirituality**  
**Reflection for December 2020**

*The Gift of Watchfulness*

**Pastor Heather Sylvester**

Each year, as fall arrives, I enter the Maine woods with a new hunting season before me. This season brings me lessons in much patience and waiting, quite similar for me to when the world was awaiting the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Each day I drive to my chosen territory for that day, step from my truck, and hike into the woods to a spot where I will wait and watch. I am dressed head-to-toe in camouflage, my gun slung over my shoulder. My aspiration, my determination, is to harvest big game (bear in August/September, Deer in late October into November) to fill a portion of our freezer with healthy, God-grown, meat to feed my family.

*Genesis 27:3* : "Now then, get your equipment--your quiver and bow--and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me." It is with these words that I find comfort in knowing that God has allowed me ,and called me to, this opportunity to provide for my family. Each afternoon as I enter the woods for bear hunting, and each morning as I park at my hunting spot for deer hunting, I pause to look around me, to take in the beauty that is placed before me.

I pay attention to direction of the wind, the temperature, and the sounds of the woods – manifestations of God’s hand. It is then that I kneel, bow my head, and say a prayer of thanksgiving for whatever the day may bring.

The prayer I offer up often goes as follows: *Lord, thank you for allowing me the ability to hunt your woods. Thank you for the opportunity to experience you all around me and take in everything you have created in these woods. As I enter your woods, may you grant me the chance to take in everything you have made and may I not take for granted the beauty that is all around me. If you allow me the chance to harvest an animal today, may my aim be straight and true. I thank you Lord Jesus for everything you place in front of me today.*

Most days as I sit patiently in my tree stand, the game that I am hunting does not appear. I let the sun shine down on me, smell the air around me, sometimes feel cool rain fall all around me. I practice patience in waiting. Often, in the course of sitting and waiting, I read a book, or close my eyes for a time to take in the sounds of the woods, and watch for animals – not necessarily game for my hunt - that appear nearby, joining me.

Over the years I have seen numerous squirrels and chipmunks - some of which are quite curious about me. I have even had chipmunks climb right into my lap! (Perhaps drawn by the bag of trail mix by my side.). This past bear season, for

four days straight, a great bull moose wandered through my site calling for cows. The bull would slowly walk around my stand, giving no indication of noticing that I was there. I sat in awe of his remarkable size. He wasn't the biggest bull moose I've ever seen, but this sighting was by far the closest I have ever known one to come to me and yet seem oblivious to my presence.

All I could think of in those moments was how truly amazing God was to allow me this opportunity to witness this gigantic animal, in all of its majesty, wandering the woods calling for a mate.

I have also had the privilege to see hawks swoop down from trees and leave with a squirrel that was sitting on my bait barrel. I have witnessed owls hooting from treetops. My sightings include ravens and crows, ermine and fisher cats. These creatures perch or wander near my site, or by the nearby tree line; or play with each other in my bait barrel as I sit watching for bear.

How incredibly blessed I am to witness such beauty! Not only do I have the opportunity to harvest an animal to feed my family in the winter months ahead; I also have the joy to sit deep in the woods and observe nature in its God-given glory.

Most of all, I simply sit, watchful. Some days I question: Why do I put myself through this long wait? Why sit in the heat or cold or rain, knowing that on many days I will return home empty handed? But when I finally do get the chance to harvest an animal, I think of how blessed I am to have God give me this opportunity to hold watch in the midst of the Maine woods, to provide in due time sustenance for my family. The wait, then, becomes worth it.

In Advent, as we wait and watch for the coming of our Savior, Lord Jesus, take hope in your waiting, and your watchfulness. May the celebration of the birth of Christ this year be all that you have waited for. This year has been so very difficult for everyone. We await the close of this chapter and are in hopes that 2021 will bring us happier and more hopeful times.

Christmas season, the coming of Jesus, the hope for the world, is just what we need right now. And as we wait for Jesus' birth, let us prepare to rejoice that His coming is our grace and saving. A special gift this year: May His light shine down on the Earth on December 21st when the Star of Bethlehem shines over us again for the first time in over 800 years.

May this Christmas lead to the hope and promise of better times as we celebrate Christ's birth and Christ's love for all humankind. May our wait be blessed in the New Year with homes shared with loved ones, dinners with friends once again, and the opportunity to travel to be with those we haven't been able to see in person for many months.

As a gift to yourself, or to those dear to you, give patience, waiting, watchfulness, as precious gifts. Gather what you need to be warm, go into the woods, find a place to sit in silence. Watch, listen. If you have access to a tree stand, perch yourself there. If not, carry a folding chair, or perhaps a pad for sitting on a stump, a log, or a rock, insulated from the snow. Shoot pictures with a camera if you wish.

Behold our Creator's hand in the Woods. May you know an ever-closer connection to God's Presence as you sit, and as you watch.

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Photo by Heather Sylvester

