

This Gift Keeps on Giving

by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

I have been blessed over the past year or two with a growing awareness of nature, especially trees but actually all other plants, animals, and elements, as well.

Part of this is due to the influence of several authors I am following, including Robin Wall Kimmerer, a scientist, professor, and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and Robert MacFarlane, a fellow of Cambridge University. Kimmerer's book is *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, and MacFarlane's is *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*.

I mention these works, because they are gifts to me, gifts that keep on giving. I do not remember how I learned of either of these books, and given how powerful each is and has been in my life, I believe books and authors are a gift from God to me, and of course to many others.

What they have helped me begin to realize is that there is so much more that is central to this world than humans. I understand more and more that we humans are latecomers to the earth, that other living things, actually living *beings*, and even beings we don't think of as living (mountains, rocks, bodies of water, e.g.) have been here far longer. And they have so much to teach us, if we can let go of our sense of human exceptionalism, as if we are the only ones with knowledge.



And I go further. I am beginning to experience all these beings as fellow citizens of the globe, each one by itself and all of them together. Now I see the world as populated by more than the

estimated 7.8 billion humans. Now the population count is so many times that I cannot even calculate. Just think, scientific studies say there are 3.041 trillion trees, 400 billion birds, at least 10 billion squirrels.

Talk about gifts!

This year, in Advent as we focus on the reality that each of us is a gift, that I am a gift, that you are a gift, I now see how many other trillions of gifts there are. They certainly will not fit under our Christmas tree! But they do fit in my life, my heart, and I hope yours, too.

The gift God has given us—all creation—and keeps giving us, is the gift that keeps on giving. How blessed we are!

Thank you, God!