

Loving Prayer
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
September 7, 2025
The Rev. Dr. Nina R. Pooley

This first week of Creation Season our theme is "Pray." On the surface it sounds like a church-y theme, one that's so basic to being people of church, that we wouldn't need to even talk about it ... and yet. I've found that prayer is incredibly challenging for most people - easy to say - "prayers ascending," "I'm praying for you ... " or the dreaded, "thoughts and prayers," but when it really comes down to it, we sometimes struggle with what to do - **how** to pray. Thankfully, Creation has a lot to teach us when it comes to prayer.

Brother Luke Ditewig, from the Society of St. John the Evangelist shares this suggestion with us in his post, titled, "Linger."

Spend time outside. Lie on the ground. Notice what is parched, satiated, or swamped. Watch clouds drift by. Touch a plant. Put your hands in the soil. Get into water. Pay attention. What do we hear God say through these with whom we share kinship? Linger with an open heart.¹

Friends, when I linger and pay attention to Creation, here's what I notice. The ground hog doing that "wave" run as he scampers to hide under the shed. Where we have a litter of rabbits, the other litter is up on the hill. Where we saw the deer grazing. Then there's the fox who crossed the yard all winter, leaving his footprints and scent, teasing our dog. The nest of robin's eggs which hatched in August, down low in a bush, where we could catch glimpses of the three little ones, yelling for food, and slowly growing in their feathers, until one morning the nest was empty. The woodpecker who decided to drink from the hummingbird feeder, and the enormous hawk swooping down to grab a snack under the ancient apple tree. Then there's the bear who menaces our neighbors' trash, and the coyote who stands defiant at the end of our driveway.

On the way to church - we saw a statuesque blue heron, scanning the waters of the Housatonic upstream of Pittsfield. And watched a large black bear crossing the street in the midst of traffic between Dalton and Pittsfield, "Can this really be happening?"

Maybe it's all a prayer. Maybe paying attention with an open heart is prayer embodied. A form of falling in love with God's creation - over and over again. Maybe prayer is essentially a declaration of what we love.

A (long) Poem by Andrea Gibson, it's called, ["A List of Things I Love"](#)²
(Click link for poem - which is too long to be included within copyright laws).

Beloved, our homework this week is to pay attention. To notice with wide open hearts all that we love, all that makes us smile, that causes us to catch our breath, that breaks us open. To ask ourselves, "What am I loving today?" And embody prayer. Amen.

¹ Br. Luke Ditewig, SSJE, "Linger," Brother Give Us a Word, posted on September 6, 2025

² Andrea Gibson, "A List of Things I Love," The poetry of everyday
<https://andreagibson.substack.com/p/a-list-of-things-i-love>, posted on March 13, 2025.