A memo arrived earlier today, bearing news I needed to hear.

The memo says, simply: Your beloved McKenzie River is doing just fine. … As are all the fir trees and pine, hemlock, and spruce, the dogwood, the wild rhodies, oxalis, and ferns.


Well, this news rejoices my heart.

By now I would be hiking weekly alongside my beloved McKenzie River, touching the bark of one tree, and another, as the sun climbs up beyond the treetops to splash the forest floor with dappled golden light.

I think back to the end of the last hiking season, when my walking stick broke, for the third time, and skittered down the river bank, irretrievable. A lovely, handcrafted hiking stick, that guided me on paths along this river, along the Pacific Crest Trail, up Skinner Butte at the south end of town. I would walk anywhere, just to feel its companionship on uncertain terrain.

My new hiking stick stands in the corner beside my front door. Ready to go. Eager for the trail.

And so am I. But in this season of constraint and self-isolation, I must wait.

So this news that my river is doing just fine seems … painful. Because remembering what I cannot now see and touch and smell is … painful. And so I have shied away from the memory of feeling alive along the river, in Creation’s beauty.

But the imagination will not be constrained by the pain of memory. Imagination, eventually, returns to its essential work—holding open a space for beauty, and appreciation, a space for life, and wonder, and holy possibility.

Right now I sit, on a bench, in the park-like setting of the north side of campus, a few blocks from home. Against a deep blue sky I watch clouds appear in thin air, grow, shape-shift, float east, then diminish, and finally disappear.

Birds chatter. The song of a single robin breaks my heart with every liquid warble it sends through clusters of fir and cedar. Creation seems oblivious to the ravages of a virus that reshapres how we live our days.

Yes, the memo arrived today, bearing beautiful news which I needed to hear. The distant parts of Creation that I have touched, that have given me life, are doing just fine. On their own. Without constraint.

What memo, do you imagine, is waiting for you?

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