

Every Body a Vital Part of the Landscape: Interdependence with Nature and One Another

*A Reflection on Psalm 98 alongside the Color Green and Theme of Nature from Gilbert Baker's Original Pride Flag*

Quotations from "Bodies of Nature," *Feminist Queer Crip* by Alison Kafer, 2013.

I wanted to sit outside, by the stream, among the trees. IN "nature." The pollen is thick though. And every, every single neighbor seems to be mowing or blowing leaves. Sounds of construction—and destruction?—trucks digging and carving, a chainsaw!—these noises fill my outdoors. Wanting to distance myself from all that, wishing I were on a sandy beach listening to the sea roar, I realize that the "natural environment" blurs with the "built environment."

My name is Melissa Guthrie Loy; my pronouns are she and her. I was invited to reflect on Psalm 98 alongside Gilbert Baker's green stripe from the original pride flag, to which he assigned the theme of nature. We tend to think of nature as "out there." We go out into nature. Nature is the wilderness, the environment... "Nature," "wilderness," and "environment": those terms don't hold universal meaning. Our ideas about what constitutes "nature" or the "natural" and "unnatural" are completely bound up in in our own specific histories and cultural assumptions. The natural environment is also a built environment, one shaped by and experienced through assumptions and expectations about gender, sexuality, class, race, and nation. "One way of understanding the culturally dominant conception of what constitutes 'nature' in the United States is to ask ourselves who gets to go there..."

And, what if, what if nature is (not only) "out there"?

I spent time rereading "Bodies of Nature." It's a single chapter in Alison Kafer's book *Feminist Queer Crip*. Kafer suggests "person" and "plant" are not so easily distinguished. I think of "the world and its inhabitants" in Psalm 98.

Let us hear the words of Psalm 98, a kingship Psalm focusing on God as creator. With the sea thundering, rivers clapping, and mountains singing, the world and its inhabitants make quite a noise:

From the Tanakh...

Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has worked wonders; his right hand, his holy arm, has won him victory.

The Lord has manifested his victory, has displayed his triumph in the sight of the nations...

...

Rivers clapping? Mountains singing? Commentary in the Tanakh translation says these verses may not merely be a personification of the sea... The sea and rivers are paying homage to God. But rivers clapping? That's not natural... Queer siblings and allies, how often do we hear "that's not natural?!" Alison Kafer unpacks the binaries of nature and self, nature and human. The queer community—we—are too familiar with binaries. God—and all of God's creation—is much too expansive.

I treasure the diversity of our bodies—I do this work with, maybe you’ve heard of the Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance, AllianceQ – I’m GLAD to work with this ministry that affirms our divine differences. I find in Alison Kafer’s writing not only an affirmation of our differences but an invitation to reimagine how we understand ourselves, our bodies, in relationship to nature.

Kafer draws upon the work Petra Kuppers, a disability culture activist and community performance artist. Here begins a quotation: “Kuppers depicts human-nonhuman nature interactions not in terms of solo ascents or individual feats of achievement [I scaled the mountain!], but in terms of community action and ritual. [Church folk know something about community action and ritual.] Describing a gathering of disabled writers, artists, and community members, [Kuppers] writes, ‘We create our own rhythms and rock ourselves into the world of nature, lose ourselves in a moment of sharing: hummed songs in the round, shared breaths, leanings, rocks against wood, leaves falling gentle against skin, bodies braced against others gently lowering toes into waves, touch of bark against finger, cheek, from warm hand to cold snow and back again.’ In this resolutely embodied description, the human and nonhuman are brought into direct contact, connecting the fallen leaf to the tree, or the breath to the wind...’ Such forms of interaction are made more possible by recognizing nature as (and in) everything around us... Moreover, Kupper’s ‘we’ is an acknowledgement of the ways in which our encounters with nature include and encompass relations with other people.”

Our encounters with nature include and encompass relations with other people.

Here I turn to Gilbert Baker’s green stripe. It is said that nature sat at the core of Baker’s movement.

“The beauty of pride - celebrating love, humanity, and acceptance of and for everybody - is intrinsically tied with nature. To openly express and share one’s sexuality is natural. To be gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgender is natural. To love and be loved by others is natural. Our earth, its resources, its healing and feeding capabilities, are all apart of the pride movement’s overarching goals for peace, love, and equality. For humans and the planet earth alike.” I wish I had written that. The connection between nature and pride comes from the San Francisco Green Film Fest’s explanation of the colors of the pride flag.

With expansive definitions for nature, know that you – your body, your love – is affirmed and connected with the whole of God’s creation.

Queer siblings, you are a vital part of the landscape. Every body is a vital part of the landscape. We are interdependent.

Perhaps you’ll read Kafer’s book. Perhaps you’ll sing. You should sing. I should sing. We should sing. With all the earth, may we make beautiful noise, praising a Creator who, Psalm 98, verse 9, a Creator who will rule the world justly, and its people with equity.

I invite you to pray.

I invite you to pray with your body. Touch your bare feet to the street, the sand or the grass; roll your wheelchair to a space near the trees; with the palm of your hand touch the bark of a tree. However your body experiences the world, take in all the earth, connect your breath to the wind. You are a vital part of the landscape.