

June 2004

Dear Friends,

At last...summer is here.

Those of you who live closer to the equator might not appreciate the utter relief and almost child-like happiness the rest of us are experiencing. To feel the warmth of the sun again. To know that it is not going to snow today. Or tomorrow. The crickets are back. They chirp all day long here in Colorado, through the heat of the day, as if to make up for lost time. The kids are out of school (no more lunches to pack, homework to nag them about, constant driving). The flowers are in full bloom. Stasi's garden is going nuts, overflowing baskets and pots and taking over the walkway with pinks and purples and reds and yellows and I absolutely love all of it.

Nature is rejoicing.

Yes, yes, I know – there are those of you who prefer fall or even winter and I can enjoy those seasons too. But I absolutely adore summer. No, that's not quite right. Something in me craves it, hungers for it, *yearns* for the return of summer. God is saying something to us through summer. We know he "speaks" to mankind through creation (Psalm 19, Isaiah 6: 3, Romans 1:20, etc.). So...what is he saying? This will do your heart a wondrous good. Go outside, walk around, take in summer in all its glory and ask yourself, "What is God saying to me through summer?"

Beauty is essential

We had a wet spring and the wildflowers are going bonkers – lupine and mustard and Shasta daisy and a dozen others. The aspens have their heart-shaped leaves again, trembling in the slightest breeze. Massive thunderclouds are rolling in, bringing with them the glorious sunsets they magnify. The earth in summer is beauty of magnificence and variety and unembarrassed lavishness, ripe beauty, lush beauty, beauty given to us with such generosity and abundance that would be scandalous if it were a man with his money.

Nature is not primarily functional. It is primarily beautiful. Stop for a moment and let that sink in. We're so used to evaluating anything (and everyone) by their usefulness, this thought will take a pause or two to begin to dawn on us. Nature is not primarily functional. It is primarily *beautiful*. Which is to say, beauty is in and of itself a great and glorious good, something we need in large and daily doses (for our Father has seen fit to arrange for this).

Nature at the height of its summer glory is shouting *Beauty is Essential!!* Beauty is the essence of God. The whole world is full of his glory (Is 6:3), in the form of beauty. This means that beauty is essential to life. It is essential to the Christian life. Our souls feed on

beauty like bees feed on the nectar of a flower. Your life must have beauty in it, lots of it. Drink it in this summer – soak in it, let it heal you, comfort you, draw you to God.

Enjoy

The hummingbirds are back in Colorado as well (they winter in Costa Rica, the little buggers), back in droves, zipping around and performing acrobatics in the air – first going up, up, straight up for thirty feet or so, like a helicopter or like those whirligigs we played with as kids, then plunging down as fast as they can, pulling out of their nose-dive at the last possible moment to race back up and do it again. And again.

Nature is enjoying itself.

Come summer there's a natural urge in all of us (if you'll listen) to take vacations, throw outdoor parties, break out the BBQ, head off to the beach or the lake or the city pool. My three boys are racing around themselves, right now, out in the street, determined to find the maximum speed of the new go-cart we got. Okay...dad was, too, a few moments ago.

Summer is God's invitation to play. The long days and the glorious weather are God's summons – come and *enjoy*. Don't let the thief rob you of this. Enjoy.

All will be well

Oxford Bishop Richard Harries wrote, "It is the beauty of the created order which gives an answer to our questionings about God." And we do have questions, don't we. Questions born out of our disappointments, our sufferings, our fears. Augustine found answers to his questions in the beauty of the world.

I said to all these things, "Tell me of my God who you are not, tell me something about him." And with a great voice they cried out: "He made us" (Psalm 99:3). My question was the attention I gave to them, and their response was their beauty.

And what does beauty say to us? What does summer say? *All will be well*. I sit outside in the evening and just listen and behold and take it all in, and my heart begins to quiet and peace begins to come into my soul. Somehow I sense, as Lewis did, that the corner has been turned. We have rounded the bend and are headed now towards eternal summer. It will come. The restoration will come. "All will be well," as Julian of Norwich concluded. "And all manner of things will be well."

May summer nourish you, free your heart a bit, bring you hope. That is our prayer for you.

From your allies at Ransomed Heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JH' or similar, written in a cursive style.