

FAITHFUL WORDS MEDITATION: ON SIN

Just Right

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“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice. . . . “now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!”

Such was the adventure of Lewis Carroll’s character Alice, who found herself in Wonderland growing so tall that she could hardly see her own feet.

Lately, I have been remembering this favorite childhood book while considering a definition of sin from the ecological theologian Sallie McFague. McFague says for middle class North Americans, perhaps our greatest sin can be described as “living a lie,” or “living falsely,” out of proportion to our place in the natural world.¹ It is a concept reinforced almost every hour in the news these days, with the plentiful reminders that we have all, to some degree, been living just such a lie. We have, as a nation and most of us as individuals, been living well beyond our means – whether financially or ecologically or both.

So we are trying to do better. We are trying to cut our consumption; our cost of living; our dependence on nonrenewables. Like Alice, we may have grown so tall as to not see our own feet any longer, but we are learning how to measure and reduce our carbon footprint. It is clear that our future, and the future of this planet, depends on it – this right-sizing of our lives.

And yet, as in Alice’s adventures, we know there is more than one way to deny our proper size. If you recall the story, when Alice was not growing too large, she was often shrinking to almost invisibly small sizes, at one point fearing she “might just go out altogether, like a candle.”

¹ In *Life Abundant*, McFague describes sin as taking more than our fair share and “turning away from reality, from the radical, intimate relationships that constitute life and its goodness, . . . the false belief that we can live from and for ourselves.”

I don't know about you, but I know what that feels like. How many times have I made myself small by saying it doesn't matter what I do as just one person? How many times have I snuffed out my own power like a candle by not adding my voice to those speaking up and speaking out for the earth, for the poor, for those who are suffering? There are so many ways, some of our own choosing, in which a person can become smaller than one's proper size.

The problem is, as Alice put it, "being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing." It can be hard to remember what my "right size" is. How do I know?

Sallie McFague says she learned this in the natural world. She writes, "I did not find God in nature, but I found a sense of belonging, of being the 'proper size' in the forest. Whenever I got on a (hiking) trail, I immediately had a sense of proportion, of fitting in, of being neither too big nor too small, but 'just right' in relation to the trees above me, the bushes and flowers beside me, and the earth under my feet. . . . It felt like coming home."²

Perhaps you know this feeling; perhaps you are seeking it now. Whether in nature or in the embrace of community or both, may we all discover where we belong. And in our search to find it, may we learn to walk lightly but surely, neither making ourselves so big that we fail to see the size of our own footprints nor so small as to snuff out our own power to change. May we find, each of us, our proper size – not too big, not too small, but just right. And so may we find our way home.

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² Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 6.