



## Traces

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (2/13/26)

My wife and I made an expedition on the ice covering Egypt Bay on Monday. She in her snow shoes and me gliding on my Nordic skis. Together we traversed around two islands and deep into the neighboring bay and the tributary that leads into it. The ice was thick, the snow slick, the sky cerulean, and the wind crisp and frigid.

Pausing on our trek to soak in the view of snow-capped Schoodic Mountain and the vast expanse of Taunton Bay, my wife remarked that when she is immersed in such natural beauty her heart fills with thanksgiving to God. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught us, “Prayer begins with a sense of wonder and arrives at radical amazement. The first response is reverence and awe, openness to the mystery that surrounds us. We are led to be overwhelmed by the awareness of eternity in daily living.”

Our path on the ice intersected with the footprints of many other fellow creatures. We saw traces of otters, deer, coyotes, fisher cats, and young children. While the other creatures left footprints, the children left footprints and snow angels which caused us much joy. We were careful not to tread on the angels.

The traces of our fellow creatures reminded us that we were not alone and that God’s world is much bigger than us. The traces of our snow shoes and skis were one set of traces among many. Life is teeming, independent, possessed of its own direction, ends, and excellences. Doesn’t it feel like a gift of grace when you spot a fox in the field or when a barred owl perches on your porch? Wonder and awe once again give birth to reverence and prayer.

How we human creatures choose to walk on the earth, the traces we leave behind during our temporary sojourn, say a lot about our spiritual and moral orientation to God and God’s creation. As a Boy Scout I was taught to walk with reverence on the earth, leaving only footprints, taking only memories, and leaving it better than I found it. As a lifelong conservationist, I carry these stewardship values as a form of active prayer when I work or hike or play in the forest.

One thing I do know is that one virtue we practice in worship is reverence. The habitual practice of reverence in worship builds up our capacity to encounter fellow creatures with reverence and to honor them and God's earth.