

Make way for diversity

Beloved person,

It is full-on summer, and for me, this means enjoying nature even more in 'my backyard': the Kennemer Dunes. As I walk along, I pass clear lakes and hilly sand plains, see and hear birds, Scottish Highlanders, and recently even a fox. Everything has its place, its contribution, in these dunes. Variety is allowed. It is precisely the diversity of this landscape that makes it possible for so many different species to live here.

A passage from the song *Colours of the Wind* from the Disney movie Pocahontas expresses this beautifully:

*The rainstorm and the river are my brothers
The heron and the otter are my friends
And we are all connected to each other
In a circle, in a hoop that never ends*

Another verse reads:

*You think the only people who are people
Are the people who look and think like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a stranger
You'll learn things you never knew you never knew¹*

In this text, I sense that diversity - of species, cultures and people is not just an aside, but an inseparable part of life. So many connections, which I do not always see or feel, yet am still part of, that really amaze me. And that also brings me to my sense of responsibility. This touches on my humanity. Because diversity and being part of a bigger picture is not just about the connections in nature. It also shapes how I relate to human diversity.

Earlier this year, I went to the show *Aletta the musical*. It is a musical about the life of Aletta Jacobs, a girl who grew up in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, it was not possible for girls and women to study. Aletta did not agree with that. She wrote about it in a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. He replied that he had no objections, if her father agreed as well. Her father agreed. Aletta went on to study and became the first female doctor in the Netherlands in April 1878.²

Although I knew Aletta Jacobs' life story, I was struck by Thorbecke's actions. What if he had said 'no'? How much longer would it have taken before the first woman would sit in the lecture halls? What would *my* chances, and those of many girls and women then and now, have looked like?

It was not evident that Thorbecke would give permission. But he acted based on his belief in the equality of people. From that mindset, he concluded that studying should be possible for both men *and* women. By making space for someone who was different from the prevailing norm, by daring to allow variation, new possibilities emerged. Initially for Aletta Jacobs herself, but also for generations of women after her.

What nature, the song *Colours of the Wind*, and the story of Aletta Jacobs show me is that diversity is everywhere. A source of incredible possibilities. But diversity only becomes a strength when all life is truly part of the whole; not just tolerated, but a full participant.

And then the questions arise: Where am I trying to limit variety? Who brings a perspective I could never have thought of myself? What do I pass judgement on without knowledge? And where do I have the chance, like Thorbecke, to make space for someone or something else, allowing something new to bloom?

To me, the answers to these questions do not lie in grand gestures, but in the realisation that we are all part of the same bigger picture and that differences in it are not a threat, but actually a source of growth and renewal. From that understanding, I want to make room for the diversity of life. Maybe then we can learn to paint with the colours of the wind.

With a warm-hearted greeting, gladly your sister,
Jill Eekhart, with thanks to sister Annemarieke Meelker for her contribution to this weekly letter.



Attention for the Baptism promise

¹ Source: Colours of the Wind – Pocahontas – Disney song text database

² Source: National Archive: 90th anniversary of Aletta Jacob's death