

There's always something greater out there



Highland Views

Chris Highland
Guest columnist

I spied a tiny spider weaving its web in a dark corner of a small room. Before “showing it the door” (putting it outside), I did something I often do: wove another lesson from nature into a web of wondering. While I pondered that, a short time later I was outside eating a sandwich and saw something I’ve never seen before. A red “daddy longlegs” (or a mommy) was spread out on the side of the house. A red one is new to me. I took a picture so I could see it larger and in more detail. Amazing creatures.

Viewing these two leggy neighbors up close got me thinking about how narrow and restricted our worlds can be. The spider in the dark corner has no idea there is a massive “room” we call a “planet” just beyond the

walls. I know many spiders like dark places, yet, like us, I wonder if they know the world of options for creating a home is so close. Their world, their universe, is confined to a very small space. Spy any lessons for humans in that?

When it comes to a “faith home,” how do people choose where to build? What may be just beyond the walls? There are countless choices, near and far, many they have never even heard about. Many have never ventured more than a stone’s throw from the faith in which they were raised. For any of us, people of faith or not, we may not know there are alternatives to physical space or mental space (our thinking can be fairly confined as well). It may feel threatening or dangerous to take a step beyond the comfortable fences of our familiar property.

A recurring and disturbing thought occasionally bubbles up. When I consider how short life really is, and learn about so many other lands, wildlife and peo-

See HIGHLAND, Page 2C

Highland

Continued from Page 1C

ples around the globe, I feel a level of sadness. I sense disappointment knowing I won't see the vast majority of the world. I've seen a lot in my life, and done some traveling, but it all adds up to a small piece of earth. There's such a big world out there, even in my own state, my own country, that I simply won't have the time, energy or resources to visit or explore. I'm not a great traveler anyway, especially since I dislike air travel, but I do wonder what it would be like to personally experience the incredible diversity of land and life on the planet. One human lifespan just can't cover the ground. No one, not even my high school classmate, Rick Steves, can see it all. The planet is immense, and even though it sometimes seems to be growing smaller, at least in terms of communication and "screen travel," there are always going to be places unseen.

This reflection ties in with religious exploration as well. If I hadn't been exposed to Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Pagans and many others, my knowledge of the world's faith traditions would be confined to books. This is actually one reason I appreciate a background in the Protestant church, as well as a few years in Evangelical, Pentecostal and Catholic churches. Getting to know people representing a wide diversity within Christianity as well as other faiths bursts my bubble of belief; these relationships help me emerge into the light of day, into a wide and wonderful world, no longer in the low and limited light of one house of belief.

I don't want to be the spider in the dark corner any more than I want to be a frog in a puddle or a gorilla in a zoo. There's always something greater out there, and "out there" doesn't have to be across a mountain range or ocean. It doesn't mean I have to seek out every landscape or search every address or viewpoint. When I have a choice, if I have a choice, I would hope to have the freedom to decide to move around a lit-

tle, see what's beyond my box of body, brain or belief. Maybe it's only walking down a different path or driving a new street in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Maybe talking to someone I don't know, hearing their story, that takes me on a journey out of myself. Maybe, as a human being, I could learn more from the natural world, paying closer attention to what I may be missing. How else does a person gain knowledge, discover more of the strange and unusual, inviting all who have eyes to see, ears to hear — and minds to receive?

Mind you, all this began with observing a tiny critter nearly hidden in a corner. How much more can I find, when I look around, here and there, near and far?

Chris Highland was a minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, the Rev. Carol Hovis, live in Asheville. His books and blogs are presented on "Friendly Freethinker" (www.chighland.com).