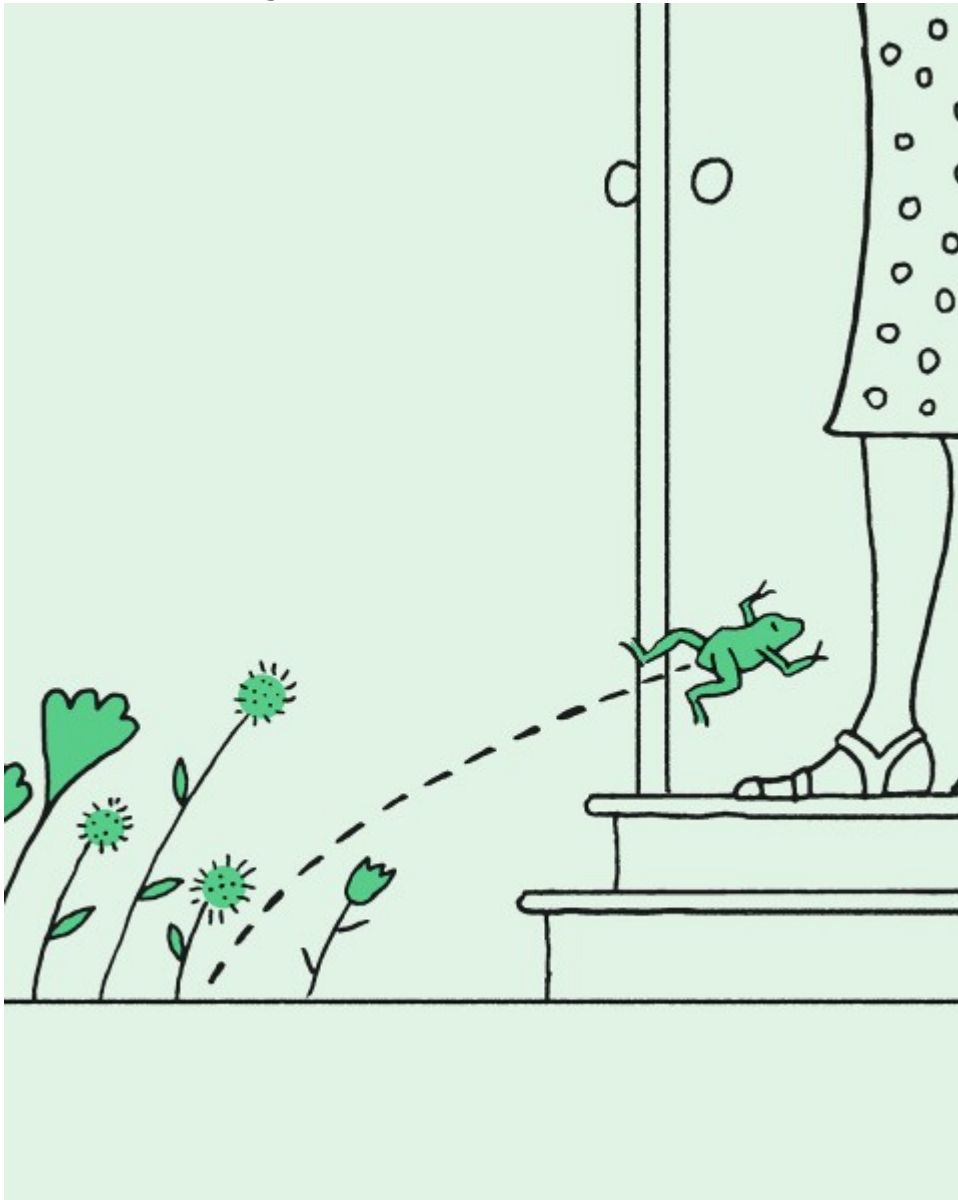


Small creatures

“There’s a frog in our house!” My daughter and I said the words together, but only one of us was excited.

by [Yolanda Pierce](#) in the [September 2024](#) issue

Published on August 23, 2024



(Illustration by Nicholas Blechman)

We had planted flowers in our tiny garden to attract hummingbirds. After a long summer rain, my young daughter and I stepped outside onto the porch to see if our well-watered plants had finally yielded any visitors. No sooner had we opened the door than a frog hopped into our house. A few hops to the right, and he settled on the area rug of my home office.

The unexpected appearance of a frog on my porch and then in my home left me speechless. I am a city girl. In my mind, frogs existed in places like rainforests or in fictional settings like the bedtime stories I read to my daughter at night. I had no real-life experience with actual frogs. I had no clue how quickly they moved. And I certainly could not have imagined one taking up residence in my house. As the parent, the adult in charge, I knew I needed a plan to rid our house of this uninvited visitor. I grabbed my daughter by the hand and we fled to our next-door neighbors, leaving the frog to whatever destruction I imagined he planned to wreak in our home.

We could not have asked for better neighbors. A Presbyterian pastor, her husband, and their young daughter had welcomed us into the neighborhood years earlier and remained the kind of dependable neighbors you knew you could turn to in a crisis. As they opened their front door to our unexpected visit, my daughter and I almost simultaneously cried out: "There's a frog in our house!" before we even said hello. I'm sure there is no course in divinity school that had prepared my theologically trained neighbor to offer a pastoral response to a wildlife crisis in a neighbor's home.

With hindsight, I clearly remember this moment because of the way my daughter and I made the very same proclamation at the same time. When I said, "There's a frog in our house," I was really saying that there was an unwanted and uninvited creature that needed to be dealt with immediately. My daughter said the same words—but with excitement, awe, and glee. Her little face was beaming with wonder as she shared the same news that had me worried and anxious. I saw a problem; my daughter saw an opportunity. I saw an intruder; she saw a guest. I felt nothing but exasperation; she was filled with delight. I pictured an invasion requiring pest control companies; she reveled in the serendipity of nature.

We make meaning with our words, their intent, and how we say them. My words rightfully conveyed the distress and bewilderment I felt at such an unexpected situation. My daughter's words conveyed a world of possibilities (particularly the

chance that we had somehow acquired a new pet). I wonder how often we express annoyance when the situation calls for hope. How often are the first words out of our mouths ones of frustration and not of patience? How quickly do we see a problem first instead of an opportunity?

Whenever I read Matthew 18—where Jesus tells us that unless we become like little children, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven—I am reminded of this family encounter with a frog. It is so easy to lose a childlike sense of wonder at the beauty of creation that we can fail to appreciate the appearance of one of God's little creatures after a summer rain. It is easy to become so jaded and cynical with the problems an unexpected event causes that we fail to relish the spontaneous and impromptu moments of life. And it is far too easy to treat both people and things as intruders, to fail to demonstrate the hospitality and welcome we are commanded to show. If out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, our words and our tone often reveal that we've lost the humor, joy, and pleasure of those small moments when God's imprint is revealed.

My lovely neighbors accompanied us back to our house. As I ushered them into my home office, with fears about what had transpired in the two minutes we had been away, I saw that the tiny frog was exactly where we left him and the house unscathed. With quick hands, my neighbor gently ushered the creature back outside and into our flower garden. From first hop to a return to the great outdoors, this entire experience probably took five minutes. It was enough time for my daughter and my neighbor's daughter to name the frog. For weeks afterward they eagerly checked the garden to report on additional sightings of frogs and other creatures.

More than a decade later, I am still sitting with lessons I learned that day about both frogs and people. Like the tiny frog, God has gently and kindly redirected my path when I've gone astray. God has tenderly placed me back where I belong, even after detours of my own making. I have found myself in unexpected places and far from home; God has restored me and safely delivered me from harm's way. And as tiny and insignificant as I may feel many days, a great and mighty God still cares for me and provides for my needs. In the words of hymn writer and poet Cecil Frances Alexander, concerning all things bright and beautiful and all creatures great and small, indeed: "the Lord God made them all."