

Psalm 96—The Message

¹⁻² Sing God a brand-new song! Earth and everyone in it, sing! Sing to God—*worship* God!

²⁻³ Shout the news of his victory from sea to sea, Take the news of his glory to the lost,
News of his wonders to one and all!

⁴⁻⁵ For God is great, and worth a thousand Hallelujahs. His terrible beauty makes the gods look cheap;
Pagan gods are mere tatters and rags.

⁵⁻⁶ God made the heavens—Royal splendor radiates from him, A powerful beauty sets him apart.

⁷ Bravo, God, Bravo! Everyone join in the great shout: Encore! In awe before the beauty, in awe before the
might.⁸⁻⁹ Bring gifts and celebrate, Bow before the beauty of God, Then to your knees—everyone worship!

¹⁰ Get out the message—God Rules! He put the world on a firm foundation; He treats everyone fair and square.

¹¹ Let's hear it from Sky, With Earth joining in, And a huge round of applause from Sea. ¹² Let Wilderness turn
cartwheels, Animals, come dance, Put every tree of the forest in the choir—

¹³ An extravaganza before God as he comes,
As he comes to set everything right on earth,
Set everything right, treat everyone fair.

Psalm 8 – A Psalm of David. NRSV

¹ O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark
because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals^[a] that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Creation Sings

June 11, 2017

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I
hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed: Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to
thee: How great thou art! How great thou art! Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee: How great thou
art! How great thou art! (How Great Thou Art, Stuart K. Hine, 1953)*

This is the song that comes to my mind when reading Psalm 8 as well as so many other Psalms that sing of
God's creation. It is the poetry of the soul and reminds us of the mystery and wonder of being alive and our
place in the universe. It is the poet's quest to answer that question that we all have at times which is so
beautifully expressed here, "Who am I that you are mindful of me?" How is it that we make sense of our lives
in the midst of the grandeur of all creation? And how do we express our wonder and joy as we continue to sing

psalms of praise for all creation throughout our lives? This morning I want to share a few stories about this amazing world we live in as well as some other expressions of this moving Psalm that sings of wonder and praise.

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil crushed...Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings." (paraphrased by me.)

Some of the readings for this Trinity Sunday are from the creation passages from the book of Genesis where the Spirit moves over the waters of the earth which was formless and void and creation has it's beginning. And as we heard last week, the Spirit has been with us from the very beginning and continues to bring about new beginnings.

It reminds me of a wonderful creation story found in the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S Lewis, where Aslan, the great lion, the son of the great Emperor over the Sea (who represents Jesus in the story), appears at the dark of creation. As the children who are present watch, they hear him singing. And as he sings the world comes into being. Colors, water, plants and flowers bloom, animals come out of the earth, even the sun rises, all because of the song that Aslan is singing. And I always think to myself, "Wow, what a beginning." Music and sound are such an important part of the creation and it is all around us if we listen.

I was sitting on the porch recently drinking my coffee and watching the world come into morning light. And I could hear the bumble bees in the rhododendrons next to the me as they were visiting each flower gathering nectar. As I listened closer it dawned on me that they were buzzing at different intervals. I could hear them singing a perfect fourth, which sounds like the interval in the first two notes of, *Here Comes the Bride*. *Buzz...buzz*. A little music theory for you.

And one night across the street there were frogs singing and as I listened I realized they were singing a major second which sounds like the beginning of "*Doe, a deer, a female deer. Ray a drop of golden sun.*" that song from *The Sound of Music*. *Do-Re*. (trill) I guess you might need a music background to appreciate it but it was beautiful and surprising. There was also a video that was going around a while ago, that took the sound of common crickets and when slowed down it sounded like some sort of heavenly chorus, creating this hauntingly beautiful melody. You see, God's song of creation is still being sung. Sometimes you have to slow down and sit quietly to hear it and when you do you too might be amazed. This world that God has given us to be stewards of is full of amazing creatures, don't you think?

God of the sparrow

God of the whale

God of the swirling stars

How does the creature say, "Awe!"

How does the creature say, "Praise!"

This week I heard this wonderful interview on the NPR program *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross. She was interviewing conservation photographer Paul Nicklen who has spent more than two decades documenting the ice and wildlife in some of the most inhospitable places on Earth — the Arctic and the Antarctic.

It's a risky business: Nicklen often finds himself immersed in frigid waters, just a camera's length away from deadly predators. Once, in Antarctica, he came face-to-face with a 1,000-pound leopard seal: "She opened up her mouth and her head is twice as big as a grizzly bear, and I am staring down her throat," he says. It was an incredible encounter.

Nicklen adds that his utmost concern is for the well-being of the animals he encounters. "I want to get close, but I also never want to harass an animal," he says. "What you learn about these animals is how communicative they are, how intelligent they are, how social they are, how forgiving they are." (I thought that was so powerful and we could probably do a whole series on how forgiving some animals are to us and others.) He goes on to say,

"This leopard seal stayed with me for four days straight. And every time I would show up on the water, she'd be there to greet me. She would follow me back to the sailboat at night. Once she established her dominance, she completely relaxed, and then she disappeared and I thought the encounter was over.

Then she showed up a few minutes later with a penguin in her mouth. She had just caught a penguin chick — she was holding it by the feet — and the penguin is flapping, trying to get away from her. And she would sort of line it up with me, and when it was lined up perfectly with me she would let it go, and it would swim off, she caught it, she did this over and over.

And I realized at that moment that she was trying to feed me a live penguin. And I think she realized quickly in this encounter that I was not capable of catching a live, moving, swimming penguin, and so she brought me another penguin. She did all these different attempts to feed me live penguins. And at one point ... there's a photo of her looking dejected, sort of disappointed in me that I'm so useless that I'm unable to catch or accept one of her gifts, so then she started to bring me dead penguins, and at one point I had five penguins floating around my head. ...Further on in the encounter ... she got so tired of me being unable to accept one of her penguins that she grabbed it and she flipped it on top of my head.

I definitely fell in love with this seal. It's embarrassing to admit this to you. ... I'd fall asleep at night with tears coming down my cheeks. ... I was just so grateful, just to spend your life out with animals and to be fighting to get yourself into a situation where you can try and get close, where you can try and even get within 100 meters of something. And all of a sudden here's a top predator, and not only are you getting to see it, it's interacting with you; it's trying to force-feed you penguins, it's trying to take care of you. It's a very, very, humbling thing. ... Just to flop yourself into its world and for it to spend that much time and energy trying to figure out who you are and to interact with you. ... I think that's why I get emotional, because we had such a connection."

There is an old Jewish legend that goes like this: "Before the world was created, the Holy One kept creating worlds and destroying them. Finally, He created this one, and was satisfied. He said to Adam: This is the last world I shall make. I place it in your hands: hold it in trust."

O God, Your Creatures Fill the Earth ELLACOMBE 8.6.8.6 D
("I Sing the Mighty Power of God"; "Hail To the Lord's Anointed")

*O God, your creatures fill the earth with wonder and delight,
And every living thing has worth and beauty in your sight.
So playful dolphins dance and swim; Your sheep bow down and graze.
Your songbirds share a morning hymn To offer you their praise.*

*You made the pets we welcome in — They're wondrous blessings, too.
With paws and whiskers, wings and fins, They offer praise to you.
O Lord, you call us to embrace These creatures in our care.
May we show kindness, love and grace To all pets everywhere.*

These are, of course, the wonderful lyrics of Carolyn Winfrey Gillette that she shared for any creation themed Sunday. She goes on with these verses...

*You made the creatures on each farm; You know the things they need.
May they grow healthy, safe from harm, And safe from human greed.
Just as a shepherd loves the sheep, You know their joy, their pain.
Lord, bless the animals we keep; May all farms be humane.*

*Your creatures live in every land; They fill the sky and sea.
O Lord, you give us your command To love them tenderly.
We're called to have dominion here — To care for them always.
By loving creatures you hold dear, We offer you our praise.*

The psalmist's response is the most appropriate one: awe before the creator and the creation, wonder at our place in the world. Maybe we have forgotten who we are in this world, but maybe we can begin to pay attention again, to recover a sense of wonder, to practice repentance and relearn gratitude and humility for all God's creation. We have such a small place in the family of creation, and yet such a grand place, partly because its well-being has been placed in our hands. What a gift, what a trust, what a wonder! (Pastor Stacey Simpson)

Pastor Sylvia Purdie wrote this wonderful version of Psalm 8 which she titled, **Out of the Mouths of Babes**. And I'll close with this today but I hope you will be thinking about writing your own psalm of praise, your own song of gratefulness for your place in this amazing, wonderful, glorious world! And I hope as you go through your life you will learn to listen to all the songs of creation that are yet to be heard.

God, our living God,
you are amazing!
You are higher than I can look,
You are wider than I can see.
But I can hear you – Listen!

We can hear you in the laughter of a little child,
We can hear you in the babbling of a baby.
You don't need words to tell us of your power.

Why do you need us at all?
We are so small, and the world is so big,
the stars are so many and space is so enormous.

God, our living God, you are amazing!
You made everything.
Why do I matter?

But we do matter!
God cares for us most of all,
and through us God cares for all the world.
You put everything into our care,
all the animals, all the birds, all the fish,
everything that creeps or flies or runs or swims,
even the land and the air and the sea.
It is all ours to look after. God, our living God, you are amazing!
Amen!