

A Chorus of Creation
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
Psalm 148
9-8-2019

If you come over to my house after supper time, well really anytime, but especially after supper time, all the talk is of animals and nature.

My little girls want to know what God has created. And how fun it is to see the world through their eyes – people experiencing a giraffe, or a tree, or puffy clouds for the first time.

Old McDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm he had a _____. With a _____-_____ here, and a _____-_____ there, here a _____, there a _____, everywhere a _____-_____, Old McDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O.

We flip through the books of Eric Carle, learning the names of special animals – we meet a fox and his kit, and a seal and her pup, and we can squeal and bark just like them. Our neighbor Miss Cathy gave us a book that tells us about all of the of plants and flowers in our yard – we learn how the bulbs are planted, and warmed in the soil by the sun, and nourished with nutrients and water, and how they grow leaves, and eventually beautiful flowers of every color – Mommy’s favorites are daffodils. They’re yellow, and look like little tea cups. And we see them every March and April at church.

Our friend Rebecca gave us a book that sets the lyrics of *What a Wonderful World* against the backdrop of beautiful water-colored images. Trees of green, red roses, too; skies of blue, clouds of white, the bright, blessed day, and the dark sacred night; the colors of the rainbow, also evident in the faces of people passing by; handshakes and hellos, another form of love; babies crying, and growing, and learning; What a wonderful world, a wonderful, connected, vast, creative, expansive world.

And Daddy doesn’t get to say goodnight, until we sing about the things God’s got in his hands or her hands (the girls choose their pronouns each evening): baby

sisters, and the Paw Patrol, and church buddies, and school buddies, and tomato plants, and ladybugs, and ice cream, and Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

Now, I know I'm not describing anything out of the ordinary for households with young children. But I wish we would reclaim or re-designate such time as sacred and liturgical. I realize that the events I am describing are organic and fluid. But in their own way, my daughters and their peers are acknowledging what's sacred in their lives: all creation around them. They don't see God's creation as something that's subordinate to them. They see it as this remarkable gift. They are curious about it. They want to know it, and love it, and be a part of it.

But here's the most important part. They aren't yet adults. They haven't spent all this time processing their own experience, and especially how their experience is different, or better, or more unique than other beings. Instead, they envision that a tree might dance or think; that a puppy might laugh; that a flamingo might enjoy putting on a dress and a bow; that a squirrel might feel scared, or hurt, or anxious, or sad, or silly, or nervous, or loved, or happy; or that the wind, and the ocean, and the sand might need a hug from their mommy, or a band-aid for their boo-boo. And therefore, it's not a leap for them to believe that other created things, be they plants, animals, or objects, can be loved by God, can be in conversation with God, and can have a purpose to be fulfilled by God.

Today's text is a Psalm about nature and creation. And I think it's written by someone who hasn't lost a partnering relationship with his/her fellow creatures. This is a communal psalm in every sense of the word, written with the wisdom of a child.

I don't have to explain to my daughters why it's important for us to be psalmists or praise-makers. They just get it. But just in case you need a refresher, here's why praise matters.

When we praise God, I believe that means we do three things: 1) We converse with God, expressing our happiness, our delight, our thanksgiving for being created beings. 2) We acknowledge our purpose – that is to love what God has created – all of creation – by using the gifts that God has given us. 3) We celebrate our connectedness as part of God's creation.

In today's text, the author mentions a collection of 32 parts of creation, all simultaneously praising God, all communicating together. Lemme give you a snapshot:

The conductor raises her baton, and the orchestra includes: sun and moon speaking in tongues of light; waters splashing, oceans tumbling, rivers rushing, fish flapping, whales and walrus bellowing, dolphins squeaking, rain pitter-pattering, winds whistling, mountains and hills adding visual delight with their greens, blues, and purples; flowers and plants adding a sweet aroma; cows mooing, pigs oinking, dogs barking, bees buzzing; kings and princes and everyday Joes singing as best they can....Maybe it's one beautiful congruent note; maybe it's an unbelievable racket, maybe it's both. God dwells in the messy, and in the ordered, in the silence and in the song. But it's a chorus nonetheless. God's chorus.

And think of all the purpose that is fulfilled in such a gathering: some create heat and light to power a world; some make milk to feed a world; some offer shade; some quench thirst; some are poetry in motion; some offer companionship; All are vital, all love in their own unique way. All have been given purpose by a creator; all have been endowed with unique gifts; all are loved by God, and even better, enjoyed by God.

And what a celebration! This very morning, we gather to sing praises for our God. And just as we are making the turn to verse four of our hymn, the birds, and the crickets, and the wind, the leaves on the branches, the squirrels, and the sweet potato bushes, and whatever else fills our church grounds are joining us. Think about the beauty. Think about the diversity. Think about the creativity. All of it a gift of God. That's a chorus I want to be a part of!

This kind of praise matters. It does. It really, really does! Such collective, communal praise connects us as human beings – we need to know that whether we are vulnerable or mighty, wise or foolish, young or old, or sitting upon any spectrum of life, we are bound together by a higher, more pure, more real, more true love than we can ever comprehend. And as old-fashioned as it might sound, I don't think we ever begin to fully understand our value as children of God, until we hear it out loud, and speak it out loud, and act it out loud – both the giving and receiving.

And then, when such praise, transcends the boundaries of human community, to include all the components of our biosphere, our connection to and our empathy for other created beings is enhanced. And I think that means our world is better protected.

I was flipping channels the other night, and there was a ballerina on stage. She was a psalm in motion. Her muscles all poised and pointed in one direction to create a fleeting moment of pure art and beauty. She'd channeled the gifts of her Creator into an expression of praise for her Creator, and connected her fellow beings in such an expression. And the world was a better place for such an expression.

And then the next morning, I drove on campus, and I noticed a tall oak tree. What strength it must have to keep its spine straight, and to hold its branches outright, and to work to make its leaves dance softly in the gentle winds. And it occurred to me that this tree has lived its life as an expression of praise for its maker, and that my life and yours, too have been enhanced by such an expression.

When I hear today's text, it makes me eager to listen for the chorus of creation. To find kinship in its myriad of created beings. To praise God in community.

And in just the same way that identifying my human neighbors as God's beloved makes me see them in a new light, the same is true for my non-human neighbors. If they have been created as God's beloved, deemed worthy, and given gifts to share, then I need to be mindful of how my actions, how my words, and how the faith I live out impacts their wellbeing.

Friends, praise has the power to change our perspectives. May we be a community whose praise leads us to care for all whom God has made, and for all who praise God alongside us.

Amen.