

The psalmist reminds us that there are two languages for expressing the majesty and power of our God, one spoken, and one unspoken.

Let's start with the unspoken. In the first part of our lection, the Psalmist tells us that God's creation has the ability to speak without words. And it's so true! I heard God in the snow this past week, even when the snow stopped being those little sleet pellets pinging against my gutters, and fell in quiet flakes. The thin blanket of white told me to slow down. As it melted, it revealed blades of green grass, made even greener by the shock of freeze, and a much-needed drink of water. Spring isn't here yet, but renewal is under way. And best of all, old snow, piled up, and drenched in dirt, is a kindergartener's delight. There's a whole world out there to explore. Nature tells us a story of the rest, and renewal, and discovery God offers creation.

Nature also tells us a story of sacred rhythms. If we so choose, we can get up early enough to watch the sun rise every morning. You can set your watch to that very phenomenon. How is it though, that nearly every sunrise is different, intriguing in its own special way – a color or shade we've never seen, something so fleeting, and yet so permanent. And the moon, too. Here is light that never vanishes; that's always so present among us; and yet the light remains mysterious. Nature paints with the language of consistency. And nature could be a copywriter, or a Hollywood producer, because its content is always compelling, always keeps us coming back for more.

The Psalmist tells us that God's creation is a reflection of a loving, beautiful, accepting, creative, boundless, energetic God. And it's a demonstration of every element working in sync – each with its own purpose, each with its own gifts to share. And just like you and me, God's creation praises its maker with singing and dancing of its own. Who needs words when you can speak like that?

In verse seven, the Psalmist switches gears. We hear about Torah, the spoken language revealing the mystery and power of our God. There's rest, renewal, and discovery here as well. Green pastures and lakes of still repose; trees planted by streams of water, which yield fruit in their season; covenants and prophets that reveal God's presence in the hospitality of neighbors. And there are sacred rhythms, too, the ones that evoke God's consistency and mystery: Shema; Jubilee;

festivals of remembrance. Our canon is a collection of prose, poetry, story-telling, essays, codex, letters, narratives, satires, perhaps even plays, the list goes on. Torah is a symphony of literature, a shining example of eloquence. God's wonder spoken aloud. Who needs pictures when you can speak with such vivid words?

When I read Psalm 19, I'm usually tempted to focus on the idea of praise. We have nature and Torah as linguistic guides in helping us to express our awe and appreciation for the God of creation. And after all, to praise our maker, to worship God, is indeed part of our very purpose. And here, between these two fine sources, we can and should draw inspiration for our own expressions of praise and worship.

But strangely enough, it's not the first ten verses that capture my attention today – though to be sure I am grateful for them, and I do enjoy them, and I am especially glad they inspired the likes of Bach and Beethoven. Still, it's the last four verses that strike a chord.

Maybe it's because I have trouble carrying a tune, and dancing isn't my strong suit, but the choreography and eloquence of both nature and scripture are a bit overwhelming. Would that I could have the grace of a sturdy rose dancing in the wind for even a moment, or the eloquence of the psalmist for even a couplet.

I too know the reward of faithfulness is great. But my charm isn't always polished. I am cranky, and stubborn, and clumsy, and forgetful, and selfish on more occasions than I wish to be. And even if I'm rigorous in my study and discipleship, is it possible for all that rigor to cancel out my awkwardness?

I live in the world, one I know is made and ordained by God, but I still crave worldly things from time to time. I want to serve, too, but sometimes I'm an insolent servant.

The psalmist captures and shares the same anxiety I feel. Maybe you share it, too. Yes, yes, yes, we say it, we hear it, we preach it every chance we get at Sardis: we are enough, because we are children of God. But at the end of the day, is our enough-ness enough? Did we apply Torah correctly? Did we live out God's purpose with conviction? Do our very human, very ordinary, very vulnerable acts

of worship do any kind of justice to the excellence of Torah's prose or nature's beauty?

And isn't it crazy, the Psalmist wrote all this, thought all this, carried all this anxiety in the age before social media influencers!

As is the pattern with so many psalms, we hear a statement of praise and confidence in the introduction – God is the source of life, and God's creation reflects the goodness of that source. But the confidence is tempered with anxiety – are we worthy of that source?

The prayer of petition follows: Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

It occurs to me, Sardis, the sun rises each day to shine God's light on us. And the words of Torah are spoken, from generation to generation to remind us of God's presence in the present, and of our capacity to be agents in God's unfolding story.

Our lives, that is our collective acts of worship, are not intended to be in competition with God's various creations. Nature and Torah are examples of heartfelt movement. That's what makes them precious.

But nature and Torah are also intended to remind us of God's investment, confidence, and solidarity with every created entity. The same God who designed sunsets and oceans, designed me and you, too. And just as God delights in nature, and nature recounts the goodness of God, so too does God delight in our createdness, and our lives reflect God's deep and lasting goodness. And Torah, a creation of humanity, written by people just like us, expresses the deepest desires, concerns, and experiences of human life. Torah is the product of vulnerability and strength authentically expressed in conversation with God, and ultimately transcribed for shared community.

The Grand Canyon was no less an expression of God's goodness when it existed as little trickle dripping against a stubborn boulder. And a life is no less an expression of God in its embryonic state. Why then should thoughts still taking shape be any different?

**Meditations of the Heart**  
**Bob Stillerman**  
**Third Sunday After Epiphany, 1-23-2022**  
**Psalm 119**



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We needn't be anxious. We are loved. And we are created in God's image. And we too can reflect God's goodness like nature and Torah. Our words, our meditations are worthy. Let us never be afraid to share them with the God who delights in them, who delights in us, who is our Rock and our Redeemer.

Who knows, maybe years from now, Zoom worship, and chicken scratch on notecards, and the occasional flat note in an anthem will be spoken of in the same poetic coupling with an Appalachian vista, or an Atlantic sunset...meditations and expressions of the heart revealing glimpses of the divine in our midst.

That's a season of Epiphany that I could get used to. May our hearts and minds be open to such an authentic translation. And may that day be soon!

Amen.