

“Creation and Torah”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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Psalm 19 “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening our eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

In June, my husband and I took a vacation to Oregon. I had never been to this state, which is really sad because this place was one of the most beautiful places on this earth. I found myself being mesmerized by its beauty. Our first bed and breakfast looked out over Mt. Hood, which has snow skiing offered 365 days a year! You are guaranteed a snow-capped mountain year round. From there, we went onto Crater Lake, which was formed from a volcanic eruption that took place over 6,000 years ago. It looked like God took a huge ice cream dipper and took a big scoop out of the earth, forming this crater that has filled with water. With the surrounding mountains reflecting in the lake water, the view is spectacular. Then there was a day filled with exploring magnificent waterfalls which fed into rivers of huge boulders and rocks. Finally, we made it to the coast which has enormous rock formations with the ocean waves washing over them.

It is truly God's country. I'm sure you can think of a place where you were surrounded only by God's creation, no man-made structures. Did it give you the wonder of God's handiwork? This is what the heavens are telling of God's glory in our text today. There are no words, nor is there speech but God's presence for me is especially felt when I am in the midst of God's creation. While we were at Crater Lake, we saw one of the park rangers climbing up to his lookout post. This was one of the highest peaks in the park. It took him a good 15-20 minutes to walk up the steep slope of the mountain. His view had to have been amazing. I wonder what it would be like to spend days in silence looking out on God's glorious work. Would there be a connectedness or would eventually you take it for granted?

I love how the Psalmist moves from the whole of creation and focuses directly on the sun. When I was in Oregon, we met up with a friend from our high school youth group. She said there are weeks sometimes when the sun does not show its face. We can totally relate to this in Indiana. I know when we are in the last 4-5 weeks of winter and all we have seen are gray days and piles of dirty snow, I am so hungry for the sun I can't stand it. Then when it finally comes out in the spring, I love to go and soak it in. I love the sun's light and warmth.

God promises that the sun will always be there, to hear the words of the Psalmist, “We will never be hid from its heat.” It, like all of creation, works in harmony with God's plan. It obeys God's will. We can count on its rising and setting.

Things are going pretty good with the images of this passage. It is though we are hiking down this road of God's glory, then verse 7 comes and we take a sharp right turn, directing us on a new

path. At first glance, it appears the Psalmist changes course. We go from creation to law. We hear words like law, decrees, precept, ordinances, commandments and fear. It doesn't sound like creation at all, does it? These words all fall into relationship between God and humans.

The Message, which Eugene Peterson's paraphrases, uses these words:

The revelation of GOD is whole
and pulls our lives together.

The signposts of GOD are clear
and point out the right road.

The life-maps of GOD are right,
showing the way to joy.

The directions of GOD are plain
and easy on the eyes.

This passage was originally written for the Jewish people. The law of God was Torah. Torah in Hebrew means to teach or to guide. It really wasn't about dos and don'ts. One commentator says, "Torah was a way of life based on love that found its expression in right relationship with God, self, and one another. These laws were given to Moses by God and they are the ways that can help one live out Torah." (Feasting on the Word-Year B, Carol Dempsey; Westminster John Knox Press; 2009; p. 59) The expectation of God was that living out the law was like breathing or instinct. Living out the law was truly about living in harmony with God's will.

It may at first appear that the Psalmist is going off course but in all reality the passage speaks to all of creation. It is about the order of God. God creates and gives order to nature and God gives order to man and woman. In Midrash, the rabbis believe the Torah was written by God before creation and God used it as the blueprints for creation. Just like the sun rises and sets, we are expected to be as constant.

We like the people of the Old Testament struggle with following the law or guidelines that God sets for us. We hear the words of the Psalmist, "Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression."

We are very busy people. We are busy taking the kids to their appointments. We are busy taking our loved ones places. We may not have children at home with us and we are just stuck! We are thankful for God's grace and forgiveness. We are thankful to God for the passage from Psalms that reminds us that we need to reconnect to God. We need to be reminded that stopping and listening for God to show us the right way is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey.

Over the next several months, we will be preparing for our time of Sabbath Keeping while Frank prepares for his Sabbatical. What does this mean? One commentator share that, "It is the discipline of making time in our busy lives to be still and know that God is God, a time for loving both God and neighbor. Most of us have a special place where you feel closer to God. One commentator calls it your thin place." (Feasting on the Word - Year B, Richard M. Simpson, Westminster John Knox Press; 2009; p. 61) It is different for everyone.

I had one woman share that she likes to go to the beach with her family. She puts her cell phone aside and her busy schedule. And another person shared, they like to go out and tinker in their workshop. It gives him time away from other demands and gives him time to clarify what is on his mind.

For my parents, I would say this place has to be my uncle's lake house, where they are care takers. This place sits in the thumb of an inlet on Sweet Water Lake. It is a little piece of heaven on earth. You are surrounded by water and trees. It is glorious to go on the back porch and just sit in the warm sunshine. Our family has had many fun filled times out on the water in the boat, pulling the large inner tube with the rope. We have sat around the dining room table, which was my great grandmother's, sharing a meal or in the early evening playing cards. There are no real schedules or stresses. Much love has been shared with family and friends at this place.

The thin place for me would have to be Montreat Conference Center, located in Black Mountain, North Carolina. This place truly renews my soul! The music and worship conference is my favorite. If you ever get a chance, you need to go! You not only have the beautiful mountains to drink in God's goodness but you have the opportunity to worship God every day for a week. Last summer, Tom Troeger, who is the dean at Yale School of Theology, was the preacher. He preached a sermon on the theme of "Loving God, Neighbor and Yourself". He challenged us for the rest of the week to get up every morning and say "Love God, Love Neighbor, Love Yourself" This is what Jesus tells us in our passage from Matthew is the greatest commandment of God's law. Then he had us repeat it again. I recalled Father Tim in the Mitford series books would get out of bed each morning and say, "Lord, help me be a blessing to someone today."

Let us hear and heed the prayer of the Psalmist, "May my words, my voice, my actions be acceptable to you, God, our Rock and Redeemer." Amen.