

Connecting with God Through Creation

Romans 1:19-20a Job 12:7-10 Psalm 19:1-4a Rev. Todd B. Freeman
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa June 2, 2024

Last Sunday's Memorial Day Weekend service was held in our Fellowship Hall instead of outdoors at my home. But the hope was to reflect upon what we may have seen and experienced as if we were outside in nature, God's good creation. Our Call to Worship from that service, from Celtic poet and author John Philip Newell, former Warden of Iona Abbey on an island in Scotland, included the lines, "There is no plant in the ground but tells of your beauty, O God. There is no creature on earth, there is no life in the sea, but proclaims your goodness... Kindle our will to be caring for creation."

That's our focus for today, **connecting with God through creation**. For creation does indeed cry out the glory of God. As we heard in our Old Testament readings, this is nothing new. This particular approach to spirituality used to have much more of an emphasis in Christianity. In the **Book of Job**, he counsels us to ask the animals, the birds, the plants, the fish, and they will *teach* us that the hand of God has done this. "**In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.**" (12:10).

- Question is, are we aware and alert and discerning enough to recognize that hand in every living thing and every human being?

Psalm 19 declares, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork." Or, as summarized in the image on the cover of today's worship bulletin, "**God speaks through creation.**"

- Question is, are we aware and alert and discerning enough to hear that voice speaking through creation?

And this is how it is echoed by the apostle **Paul in Romans 1**. "Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been **understood and seen through the things God has made.**"

- Question is, are we aware and alert and discerning enough to connect with God through the things God has made?

John Philip Newell wrote a book in 2014 entitled, ***The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings***. Newell is acclaimed for his work in the field of Christian Celtic spirituality and spiritual formation. Using his terminology, this **rebirthing of the Divine from deep within us** is something we cannot create on our own, but is rather something – by God's grace – we let spring forth and be reborn anew in our lives. **What a wonderful twist on that old biblical phrase to be born again** from the Gospel of John.

In the introduction of Newell's book, he writes, "We can be part of midwifing new holy births in the world." And the first step, one of the primary features of rebirthing, is a **coming back into relationship with the sacredness of the earth**. That's something indigenous peoples never left. For them, it was simply obvious and a matter of common sense. **Eco-theologian Thomas Berry** writes, "**We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world.**" In 2015, **Pope Francis** released an encyclical entitled, "On Care For Our Common Home." Writing from a deeply moral and ethical perspective:

233. The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, **there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face**. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to **discover God in all things**.

- How do you discover God in all things?

As part of my own spiritual practices, I do this, in part, in and through **photography**. "**God is in the details**," as they say. **The key is to see in the visible things that which is invisible – the Divine. That's sacramental theology**. Creation, then, is a way of communing and connecting with God. **David Adams**, in his Celtic writings in the book **Border Lands**, echoes an understanding that God is beyond us (that's transcendence) as well as among and within us (that's immanence). For some, like myself, that's **the very definition of The Trinity. God beyond, among, and within all creation**.

Adams affirms that **creation points us to God. No, we do not worship nature, as some claim. Rather, in looking closely and admiring creation, we are pointed to and worship the Creator**. And he writes, "**We can see creation as the first incarnation**, where God dwells and it is in God. For us the primary scriptures are creation. **God is waiting to be revealed through God's world**. If we fail to understand God's world, or decide that we do not like it, how can we understand or love its Creator?"

Sixth-century Celtic monk **Columbanus** adds, "**Understand the creation if you wish to know the Creator**." And it is said that after studying the Book of Genesis for 15 years, **St. Augustine** (yes, the "original sin" guy), at the turn from the 4th to 5th century CE, came across a remarkable understanding. It's that **God is revealed in two books. These are the Book of Nature (which is the natural world itself) and the Book of Scripture, the Bible**. The two complement one another; and both Scripture and the natural world reveal God's truth, as both have God's hand on them. **Together, they speak a single truth, and they are, at their deepest level, in accord. So much for the argument about the incompatibility between science and religion**.

It's now relatively accepted as fact that **everything in the universe is related and connected to everything else in the universe, as mind-boggling as that is**. From an ecological standpoint, then, this means that the earth's well-being is an essential part of our well-being. And I suspect, vice versa. Reconnecting with the sacredness of the earth, therefore, is a good first step in a deeper understanding of connecting with God, and a call to action to protect that sacredness. Perhaps you, when out in nature, recognize and experience a Sacred Presence – through a sense of absolute wonder and awe – when looking at and touching the structures, substances, and processes of the earth.

Newell writes, "**We are not an exception to the cosmos. We are not an addendum. Humanity has emerged from within the matter of the cosmos.** We express the nature of the universe..."

Jesus comes to lead us not into a detachment from the earth or a separation from the other species and peoples of the world, but **into a dance that will bring us back into relationship with all things.**"

- Are we dancing yet?

Recognizing the sacredness in other people and in the earth itself, has profound implications in how we see and treat one another, and for how we relate to the resources and creatures of the earth. If you were not aware, that has become a priority for us here at **College Hill**, being recognized by the Presbyterian Church (USA) as an officially designated **Earth Care Congregation**. And it's something we explore every time we gather in our **Celtic Circle** group, of which all of you are invited to be a part of. It has been masterfully led by Mark Miller for the past 11 years.

So, if we truly desire to connect with God, **we must reconnect with the earth and all of creation, including connecting with that which dwells in the depths of our being. And that is NOT sinfulness, as Augustine (original sin) and John Calvin (total depravity) supposed. Rather, what is deepest in us is that Sacred Presence, God's image in you and me, and in all people.**

I encourage you to look for ways to do so this week and beyond by being **ever-more aware and alert and discerning.**

Amen

Resources:

John Philip Newell, *The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings*, Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2014

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care For Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter, May 24, 2015.

David Adams, *Border Lands: The Best of David Adam's Celtic Vision*, 1999.