

Psalm 65: 9-13 Pastor Bill Uetrict 7/14/17 Pentecost 6

To begin the sermon today, I want to read **The Message Bible's** rendering of the appointed Psalm for today. Speaking to God, the Psalmist says:

Oh visit the earth, ask her to join the dance. Deck her out in spring showers, fill the God-river with living water. Paint the wheat fields golden. Creation was made for this! Drench the plowed fields, soak the dirt clods. With rainfall as harrow and rake, bring her to blossom and fruit. Snow-crown the peaks with splendor. Scatter the rose petals down your paths. All through the wild meadows, rose petals. Set the hills to dancing. Dress the canyon walls with live sheep, a drape of flax across the valleys. Let them shout, and shout, and shout! On let them sing!

Isn't that marvelous poetry? The Psalmist, who is preparing for the fecundity of spring, and probably thinking about the upcoming harvest, the predictable patterns of planting, tilling, raining, gathering, speaks with such rhetorical embellishment. The rhetoric (the words) reflect the grandeur, the magnificence, the splendor of the reality being witnessed and anticipated by the writer.

I took a second and third look at this Psalm for today, and frankly, at our first reading from Isaiah, after I read these words from Brueggemann about the our Psalm for today: "Have we come to such a profane understanding of reality, such a reduction of creation to commodity, that we are incapable of speaking in [the way that the Psalmist speaks]?" Have we so turned the created world, the natural world, into a product that is to be marketed and sold that we have lost the ability to speak grandly, loftily, ostentatiously, extravagantly about the realm the faith calls "creation"?

I remember when I was young traveling with my parents throughout much of this country. My Dad, who really was a good guy, would often say, when we were traveling through barren portions of

our land, “What wasted space!” He was a man who grew up on a farm and who was shaped by the industrial world that he lived in. He looked at land that wasn’t capable of being farmed or put to work for the sake of human production or consumption as “wasted space.” Now again, my Dad was a real good guy. This is no critique of him. Frankly, he was a man who demanded very little from life. If it hadn’t been for my Mom he probably would have driven for most of his life the first car that he bought. And he certainly wouldn’t have moved a couple of times in search of a “nicer home.” He was a very content person. Yet still, he viewed land as seeking a purpose in human activity.

My Dad is not alone. For a long time now, land and other parts of the creation have been seen by so many as commodities—commodities to buy or sell; commodities that are useful in so far as they serve economic, human purposes. Many are questioning that view these days. We in Michigan are experiencing this questioning all the time. There are folks who are constantly reminding us, sometimes to our irritation, that wetlands have a purpose apart from human use. Many these days are speaking about the eco-system—a system that is larger, yet inclusive of, human beings. In other words, many are telling us that we human beings aren’t the only show in town! To not get this is often to speak of creation in such a flat way, to lose rhetorical flourish when it comes to the natural world.

I would like to share a poem with you, and I wonder if you will understand what it is about. I trust you will.

You caress Chicago’s bony wrist all the way up
to the fleshy fingertip of the Upper Peninsula,
rustling winds that ignite daydreams:
your sweet beach grass, your quartz singing sands,
the thrill of building a castle, hoping you’ll melt it with grace,
give me a new start, wash my mistakes (and maybe my sins).
Your meteorology strikes the fear of God in me.
I forgive your lake-effect snowstorms
because summer looks so lovely on you.

Loch Ness has nothing on your fairy-tale
frozen mermaids shimmering deep beneath.
In a burst of silver and green they rupture in July's swelter,
dazzling the tips of your crumpled blue crests,
swelling in slow pulsing rhythms, undulating canvas
of your immense out-there. You, my dear, are a great lake.
Don't worry if other lakes seem superior, for you alone are the
mishigami, the great waters, the twenty-two thousand
square miles of uninterrupted aqua pura.
You alone hold the Petoskey stone with her honeycomb
eyes that see the past, tell the past.
You are big enough to hold my childhood.
You are wide enough to make me forget. You are deep enough.

This "Ode to Lake Michigan," composed by Philip Rice, sees the
Big Lake as an amazing arena for human activity, but certainly not
limited to it. It is not a commodity to be marketed and sold. It has a
life of its own that creates, that caresses, that cradles, that confounds.

Oh, [God], visit the earth, ask her to join the dance.
Deck her out in spring showers. Paint the wheat fields
golden. Dress the canyon walls with sheep.

Many writers of Biblical books, as they are expressing hope for
the future, often include the future of creation as integral to their
expectation. Isaiah, in today's first reading, addressing exiles who are
about to come home or have already come home, speaks these words:

For you shall go out (you shall exit) in joy, and be
led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before
you shall burst in song, and all the trees [will give you
a standing ovation.] Instead of the thorn shall come
up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the
myrtle.

The creation is joining the exiles in rejoicing. The creation is
taking on human-like characteristics—singing and applauding. And the
creation is also being transformed, just as the lives of the exiles are.
The bad and ugly plants, the weeds, the thorny, prickly shrubs-- they
are giving way to the beautiful flora. Hope for the author of this

portion of Isaiah included hope for all creation, not just for human beings. God's act of rescuing is for the sake not only of people, but everything.

Jesus, in today's gospel reading, uses a common image from creation to describe what life in the kingdom is all about. To people who would fully understand the realm of farming, he speaks about God as a farmer who scatters seed. Interestingly enough, this farmer is somewhat of a crazy farmer. He scatters seed all over the place, even in environments where seed would not easily take root: on the path, on rocky ground, among the thorns. This farmer is prodigal, wasteful.

Yes, God is remarkably extravagant with grace and love, which is why the disciples need to be encouraged not to give up, why they need to keep planting seeds, because who knows where some seed might take root. They need to continue to live prodigal, extravagant, generous lives, because that is who God is. God is extravagant with love, forgiveness, grace.

And by the way, Israel says, that extravagance can be seen in creation. That extravagance can be experienced in the wonder of breath, the majesty of the mountains, the stark beauty of the wetlands, the splendor of Lake Michigan, the spacious skies, the amber waves of grain, the fruited plain, the canyon walls garbed with live sheep, the valleys outfitted in herbaceous blue-colored plants. Creation speaks of the grandness, the majesty, the extravagance of God. God is a prodigal giver.

Gifts are meant to be treasured and savored, not used and abused. The natural world is not simply a means for human activity. The physical world is not simply a commodity to be marketed and sold. We people of faith say that the natural world is not just *the environment*; it is *creation*. We don't make it; we are not responsible for its existence. It comes as gift, sheer gratuitous gift. It deserves our embellished rhetoric. It invites us to walk on it more gently, care for it more passionately, and speak of it more soaringly.