

“In Appreciation of the Maker”

October 7, 2012

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Psalm 104

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honour and majesty,

² wrapped in light as with a garment.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,

³ you set the beams of your [⋆]chambers on the waters,

you make the clouds your [⋆]chariot,

you ride on the wings of the wind,

⁴ you make the winds your [⋆]messengers,

fire and flame your [⋆]ministers.

⁵ You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.

⁶ You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸ They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰ You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,

¹¹ giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.

¹² By the streams [⋆]the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.

¹³ From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use, [⋆]
to bring forth food from the earth,

¹⁵ and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

¹⁶ The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷ In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.

¹⁸ The high mountains are for the wild goats;

the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

- ¹⁹ You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
²⁰ You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
²¹ The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
²² When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
²³ People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

- ²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

- ²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, ^a they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

- ³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—
³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.
³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

Some of you may recall that one of the big new stories from the beginning of this past summer was the discovery of the Higgs Boson at the Large Hadron Collider -the underground lab used for physics research in Europe. The discovery of the Higgs Boson was the source of a lot of excitement in the world of physics. There were many who weren't even sure that the particle existed, in fact there are many who still aren't sure that it does...such is the nature of debates within the scientific community. Yet on July 4, two different teams confirmed the identification of a Boson mass. Until that moment the Higgs Boson existed only in theory, as an elementary particle in the universe that gives things their mass.

For many of us, when we learned about the discovery through the mainstream media, what we learned was that these physicists had identified what some had decided to call, "The God Particle." Although it really is a misnomer, the name "God Particle" was being used all over the place. It was as if not only had one of the building blocks of the universe been discovered, but humans had uncovered the power of God. As an aside, you know there was much debate as to the religious affiliation of the Higgs Boson. After careful thought it was determined though that the Higgs Boson must be Roman Catholic because without it you cannot have mass!

Now I mention the God particle this morning because it's discovery reveals something about the world we live in and how our perspectives can change. Including our perspectives of God and of the Universe and our place in the world around us. Yes, we know that the God-particle is just a name (and that actually many physicists are offended by that name) but in an age of discovery and scientific enquiry, there is a growing belief that we humans can have mastery over almost anything. We have the ability to break things down and take things apart. We have the ability to make God seem very small in relation to us. We make God too small when compared to our own sense of control and importance.

Now I know in the past I have mentioned how the true test of greatness is the ability of the great to enter the small. If we examine closely the stories of the God of the Bible we find evidence time and again of a God who is known and works through the small. Israel was a small nation of people. The first King Saul came from the smallest tribe. King David was a small shepherd boy. Mary a young woman from a small town. Jesus picked up small children and basically said "Here is God." God has a track record of working through the little things. But it is

possible that in life we get so caught up in the small things that we lose sight of what is large? We lose sight of the largeness and greatness of God? We lose our appreciation for the whole. We forget the obvious.

It's like the story that the theologian N.T. Wright tells in one of his books about a man who owns an old car. The car still goes, he can drive it to work. But it doesn't always run as smoothly as he thinks it should, it makes strange noises and he's worried that one day it might fall apart altogether. So he takes it to the garage down the road. After a couple of days pass he goes and speaks to the mechanic.

"Well" says the mechanic behind the desk, "this is quite interesting. It's been a long time since I've seen one of these. There are some genuine 1950's parts in there. But there seem to be some things that don't belong –I don't believe they were intended to be there."

"But," replies the owner, "is it going to be all right? Will I still be able to drive it?"

"And another thing," continues the mechanic, "The tires are the wrong sort for those wheels. They are already quite worn and could get worse. And the cylinders –well they're a mess. We've been having quite a debate in the garage as to whether they will really do the job."

"But where is the car?" asks the owner, getting agitated. "Have you got it going? Can I still drive it?"

The mechanic shrugs his shoulders, "Come and see," he says.

They go to the garage in the back. There is the car, dismantled into a thousand parts, each one carefully labelled and laid out all over the workroom floor. The owner of the car stares in dismay.

"My car!" he shouts. "What have you done to my car?"

"Hey, take it easy man!" replies the head mechanic. "These parts –we've all been admiring them. Sure, we've cleaned up some of them, and we'll probably replace some others. Enjoy the view! You should be proud."

And the owner, lost for words, shakes his head sorrowfully and walks away.

You know sometimes I think that this is how we treat life and our relationship to the whole. Sometimes we get so focused on the parts on all the little things that we fail to have an appreciation for what they mean when they're all together. That in spite of what the individual parts may look like, (and yes things on their own do hold a value and a purpose) we still need to remember that there is a larger purpose. There is a greater beauty to behold when we understand the miracle of how everything works together. -Of how things are dependent upon each other to do and be something that they cannot be on their own.

As I said, when we begin to take things apart for examination, it can give us a sense of control and mastery. Maybe make us feel more important than the whole. This has been one of the ways that we have treated the environment. We humans can somehow see ourselves as separate from the environment. There are humans on the one hand and then on the other hand there is the environment that we believe we can somehow control, exploit, dismantle and even heal or save for our purposes. People on different sides of the environmental movement have done this for years.

I was listening to an interview with the Canadian activist Davis Suzuki recently and this is something he has admitted to in his own life. That his background in science had given him a perspective that meant he saw the environment as something that he had control over in terms of how to go about treating it, like it was an experiment in a test tube. That it was something separate from him. Suzuki said that it was rally only in recent years, as he started to learn more about some of the spiritual teachings of First Nations people that he came to develop a different understanding. He mentioned how in the teachings he gained a perspective that taught him how humans are understood to be a part of creation and not apart from it. We have a relationship to the whole because we are a part of the whole. We are the environment just as a tree , or a duck, or a stream.

That's what the Psalmist speaks of in our text this morning. Thousands of years before we had an awareness of Higgs Boson, or automotive mechanics, or even things like climate change, the poet who wrote the beautiful, picturesque, illuminating words of Psalm 104 was an environmentalist. The Psalmist had an appreciation for the whole of creation, he or she knew about the intricate interconnectedness and subtle interdependence of air, soil, water, plants and

animals, including humans. And the psalmist knew that humans weren't separate from the earth. There is a deeper relationship for humans. We are a part of creation. In the Hebrew, the word for humanity is "adam" and the word for "ground" is "adama." There is an etymological connection. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the origin and destiny of humankind is inextricably tied to the origin and destiny of the earth. Except the Psalmist's awareness was grounded not in an awareness of physical sciences...the psalmist's awareness was grounded in theology. The Psalmist was convinced of the profound interdependence of all living things because he or she believed that everything derived from and was ultimately dependent on God.

"The Lord God made them all."

Nature or the Environment, as we often call it today, is not a Divine idol to be worshipped, or a cadaver to be dissected. It is a sacred whole that includes us. It does not and cannot live apart from God and God's renewing breath. Because for the Psalmist, it's not just mass, but all life and our very existence comes from God. Our lives and the world are inseparable because we share a relationship with the same Maker. The psalmist wants us to remember what we may have forgotten that on the one hand, yes, there is a creation but yes, there is also a Creator.

That's what the Creeds of the church have sought to remind us of over the years. Be it the line of The Apostle's Creed that states, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth" or the line from "A New Creed" that says "we believe in God who has created and is creating." We are to be reminded that the Creation of which we are a part is not the work of a lesser Divinity or some sort of accident where humans get to show up and do whatever we want. The world we live in is God's world, it is sacred and we are sacred. These statements are not there to bring us into a debate about Creationism versus Evolution. They are there to remind us of the intrinsic value of the whole and of all its parts. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, "A human will become truly creative and truly our own when we are wholly God's." When we behold our relationship to the Maker, it adds value not only to the world but to our own lives and the work of our hands. There is a sacred whole. By taking the time to praise God, the Psalmist puts humans in our place, where we are called to not worship things more than the Maker. In fact our role is to give praise to the Maker. The opening and closing verses contain the same words, "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Remember the whole and remember the Maker.

A friend of mine told me a story about a few summers ago when he was walking along a boardwalk at a beach in Nova Scotia with his young son. If you have ever visited Nova Scotia, a lot of the beaches feature similar boardwalks that create trails through the tall grass and the sand. As his son was trotting along he was looking down at each board and nail that he stepped on and the railings along the sides, he then looked up to his Dad and asked him, "Why is it that all of these look the same on all of the beaches?"

His Father turned to him and said. "Well it's probably because the same person made them all." The boy paused and thought about it for a moment and then he said, "O Yeah...God."

Someone once said that when you're always looking down it's hard to behold heaven. Well that wasn't true for my friend's son because while he looked at that boardwalk he still had a mind to the whole and an appreciation for the Maker of heaven and earth.

My friends, When we look at the wonder and intricacies of the Creation that surrounds us there is evidence of a power that takes our breath away, it is the very same power that gives us breath and life. So even on Thanksgiving, when we give thanks for the little things, we are also reminded to give thanks for the big things, -for the whole- with appreciation to the Maker. Thanks be to God.