



July 2018

God is our Refuge and Strength

**Readings, Reflections, Prayers
on God and His Creation 2**

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Monday, July 9: Psalm 46

This month we continue thinking about God's creation. Summer is a wonderful time to reflect on God's amazing world. We will look at a few themes:

- (1) how do we understand some of the dangers in God's creation – storms, earthquakes, etc.
- (2) how do we care for God's creation as His stewards; and
- (3) what is the future of God's creation.

Sometimes creation is scary. The relationship between people, nature, and God is ambiguous. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts and other natural disasters happen. Human violence and war happens.

On the one hand, we praise and celebrate God's goodness in creation (as in Psalm 148, yesterday).

On the other hand, creation can demonstrate the awesome power of evil, through lightning, thunder, fire, sea, beasts, and disease. This experience of the dark side of nature can lead us to spiritual reflection, too. Experiencing the terror of nature's fury can move us to worship and to nurture a faith in a God of power, whose strength is ultimately greater than that of monsters of the deep or lightning bolts from the skies.

An old Irish prayer, attribute to Brendan (484-577) who, according to legend, sailed to North America in a small open boat, prayed, "*Deliver me, Almighty Lord God, from every danger of sea and land, and from waters and from the phantasms of all beasts and flying creatures and serpents. Defend me, O God, from fire, from lightning, from thunder, from hail, from snow, from rain, from wind, from dangers of the earth, from whirlwind, from earthquake, for all evils ...*" There are times I may need to pray such a prayer.

Psalm 46 helps us express our deepest fears and struggles to God:

*God is my refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.
So I will not fear when earthquakes come
and the mountains crumble into the sea.*

*Let the oceans roar and foam.
Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge.
A river brings joy to the city of my God,
the sacred home of the Most High.
God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed.
From the very break of day, God will protect it.*

*The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble.
God's voice thunders, and the earth melts.
The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Israel is my fortress.*

*Come, see the glorious works of the LORD:
He causes wars to end throughout the earth.
He breaks the bow and snaps the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.*

*"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be honored by every nation.
I will be honored throughout the world."
The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Israel is my fortress.*

Idea for the day: buy local products (minimize transportation) – try the farmer's market

Psalm 46

Tuesday, July 10: Job 9:1-10

Earthquakes happen when the tectonic plates that make up the Earth's surface move. Areas along the plate boundaries – like the west coast of the Americas, the east coast of Asia, and the Middle East – are particularly susceptible to earthquakes because they are located plate boundaries. The area we know as Israel has directly suffered 40 damaging earthquakes over the past 2500 years – surrounding areas (like Turkey and Iran) have suffered many more. Not surprisingly, the Bible makes note of earthquakes regularly (Amos 1:1, Zechariah 14:4-5)

Earth's tectonic plates are not a design flaw: they are essential for stability and flexibility of the Earth's surface given the composition of the Earth's interior (molten rock). Earthquakes are not a failure on God's part; they are an essential side effect of an overall stable, habitable planet.

Sometimes, in the Bible, God even uses earthquakes for His purposes:

- People recognize God's presence and power when the earth shakes (Judges 5:4-5, Exodus 19:18, 2 Samuel 22:7-8, Habakkuk 3:6)
- God speaks to Elijah after an earthquake (1 Kings 19:11-12)
- When Jesus dies on the cross, the earth shakes (Matthew 27:54)
- Paul and Silas are released from prison in Philippi during an earthquake (Acts 16:25-34)
- Earthquakes are signs associated with events before the return of Jesus and the renewal of all creation (Matthew 24:7, Luke 21:11, Revelation 6:12, 8:5, 11:13, 19, 16:18)

Most often, however, tectonics plates simply move, and earthquakes happen. On Boxing Day, 2004, an earthquake and tsunami that hit Sumatra, Indonesia. With overcrowded conditions, intense poverty, no engineering guidelines, a poor warning system, and inadequate transportation, over 230,000 died. When a much stronger 9.1 magnitude quake hit Japan in 2011, there were few direct deaths from the earthquake because of Japan's strict engineering guidelines. Tsunami warnings were given, but 40% of those in affected areas chose to ignore them: 19,000 died. Most could have/should have got to safety.

Earthquakes and their devastation highlight two significant issues:

- Natural disasters affect poorer people/countries without adequate resources to plan and build safely, more than wealthy areas who can afford the engineering guidelines and warning systems. Poverty and vulnerability to the effects of natural disasters are closely correlated.
- More and more people are living on earth, often in especially vulnerable locations (for example in low lying coastal areas at risk from tsunamis). As global populations increase, and population density increases, the potential for loss of life inevitably increases as well.

Is this God's "fault"? One of the harsh realities is that human choices can reduce or exacerbate effects of natural disasters. In Japan, engineering guidelines, tsunami walls, advanced warning systems, and good transportation infrastructure help mitigate loss of life, even in devastating earthquakes. In Sumatra, Indonesia, none of these exist. God is not to blame. The people of Sumatra are not to blame. As a global community we need to ask how much our collective failure to address global inequality is to blame.

Jesus is our great example in responding to such crises. We are called to be agents of Christ's love and mercy. Following His example, we must be to mourn with those who mourn. The unspeakable grief and incalculable suffering experienced by people who suffer natural disasters should lead us to generosity, sympathy, and prayer. The people of Jesus should (and usually are) among the first and most generous to respond in crises like these. In the longer term, we need to reflect on how we can make the entire world a more equitable, safer, more resilient place. Supporting development projects that help people be better prepared for potential disasters is a very worthwhile investment.

We can never answer the question "Why?" when disasters happen (although we can perhaps shoulder some responsibility for the extent of them). We can begin to answer the question, "What next?" We can be passionately engaged in a response.

*I give you thanks, O God, that I have risen today,
to rise and serve You this new day;
may this be a day to Your glory, O God of every gift,
that Your glory might be known far and wide.
O great God, help my soul;
by Your own mercy and grace, forgive my sins.
Help me to avoid every sin,
and to run from every source of temptation.
As the mist scatters when the sun rises on the hills,
scatter the haze in my soul so I may see You clearly.
As Your sunshine warms me from the outside in,
may Your Son warm me from inside out.
May Your glory shine through me today:
through my thoughts, deeds, words, desires, senses, and all my ways.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: Use rechargeable batteries; dispose of batteries safely

Wednesday, July 11: Psalm 29

On November 12, 1970, over 500,000 died when Cyclone Bhola hit Bangladesh. Forecasters knew it was coming for days. But there were no means to warn the population and no safe refuges for them to flee to as almost all of Bangladesh is within a few metres of sea level. On November 15, 2007, an even stronger hurricane, Sidre, hit Bangladesh. This time, with adequate warning and simple shelters (simple rooms on raised concrete posts), this time only 3450 people died – a 99.8% decrease.

The most devastating natural disasters are not earthquakes or tsunamis, but floods. The worst floods in recent history occurred on the Yellow River in China: in 1887 a flood killed an estimated 1-2 million people; in 1931 a flood killed between 1-4 million people (accurate records are not available).

Like earthquakes, floods disproportionately affect poor people. In New Orleans, when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, 1800 people died – mostly those who were sick, elderly, poor, and black. Why? The evacuation plan called for people to use their own cars to leave the city. Over 112,000 people in New Orleans – mostly poor, elderly, and infirm black people – had no personal vehicle and were left behind to fend for themselves. It took more than a week AFTER the hurricane to evacuate these people, who had been abandoned in the flood zone without power, water, medicine, or supplies.

It is tempting to blame God for floods, of course. Sometimes they do just happen. But often people are very culpable in the extent of their devastation:

- We insist on building cities in river valleys, flood plains, and in low lying coastal areas (or, like New Orleans, BELOW sea level!). One of the best decisions Lethbridge City Council ever made was to move everyone out of the river valley to higher ground. Rebuilding High River? Hmm ...
- We don't protect ourselves. A report by the University of Louisiana into the causes of the breaches in the protective levees around New Orleans concluded "*failure of the NOFDS (New Orleans Flood Defense System) was a predictable, predicted, and preventable catastrophe ... this catastrophe did not result from an act of 'God' ... it resulted from acts of 'People.'*"
- Climate change is resulting in stronger storms, greater climate extremes, rising sea levels, and higher potential for flooding. Climate change is occurring (visit the Columbia Icefields to see how far the glacier has retreated in a century). The results will be more extreme, violent weather.

WHY do floods happen? We cannot answer that adequately. As people of Jesus, however, we can respond to people in crisis. This is right and good. In calmer times, it's good to reflect on how we can prepare to mitigate their effects (flood barriers, diversions, dikes, etc). This all costs money. Are we willing to pay to protect ourselves? Are we willing to invest in development projects to protect people in other places?

*Help us Lord -
To live in Your light;
to act in Your might;
To think in Your wisdom;
to walk in Your kingdom;
To abide in Your love;
Your presence to prove.
Amen.*

Welsh prayer

Idea for the day: Don't use herbicides on your lawn; pick the weeds (the stretch will do you good)

Thursday, July 12: Genesis 50:1-21

In the 20th Century alone, famines caused an estimated 70,000,000 deaths. "*Starvation is the characteristic of some people not HAVING enough food to eat,*" wrote Amartya Sen. "*It is not the characteristic of their BEING not enough food to eat.*" The world has more than enough food. The problem is the distribution of food between those that have more than enough (us) and those who do not have enough (2/3 of the world).

In our age, unlike in the biblical age, famines are most often caused by the direct actions of autocratic rulers, warfare, and climate change. Famine is potentially the easiest natural disaster to solve because enough food exists ... if there were the political will to do so. In our day, we cannot blame God for the overwhelming majority of famine related deaths. They are our (collective, human) responsibility.

Back in Joseph's day things were a bit different. Without a global transportation and production system, when drought, floods, or other issues resulted in a famine, people would starve. One of the key themes in the story of Joseph is how God used his misfortunes – being sold into slavery by his brothers, being thrown into an Egyptian prison – to enable Joseph to sustain both Egypt and his extended family during a devastating seven-year famine (Genesis 37-50).

Did God CAUSE Joseph's suffering so that he would preserve two nations through a famine? The Bible never says God purposely inflicted pain and sorrow onto Joseph.

God CAN bring good, even out of tragedy? Absolutely. This is the theme of the Joseph story. DESPITE Joseph's suffering and pain, God's will for good is done. God brings blessing out of heartache. Paul writes, "*We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them*" (Romans 8:28). God does not cause all things to happen. But when things do happen, God can bring blessings from them.

The problem is NOT there is not enough food. The problem is some people don't HAVE enough food:

- How can we help those in need locally (donate to the Food Bank? Volunteer at the Soup Kitchen?)
- How can we help globally (CBM's Hopeful Gifts of Change? <https://hopefulgifts.ca/>)

*God, guide me with Your wisdom,
God chastise me with your justice,
God help me with your mercy,
God protect me with Your strength.
God fill me with Your fullness,
God shield me with Your shade,
God fill me with your grace,
for the sake of Your Anointed Son.
Amen*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: Lend/borrow tools rather than buying them all (remember to give them back ☺)

Friday, July 13: Romans 5:1-11

Paul focusses us on Jesus, and the new life we have in and through His death and resurrection. As we think about the problem of suffering and evil, it is always good to see Jesus and remember He suffered and died for us. He knows what suffering is all about. We have a God who can empathize with us.

Notice what else Paul says, here? *"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love."*

Paul speaks to us with some credibility. In a rebuttal to those who are questioning his integrity and work ethic, Paul writes, *"I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?"* (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). This is a man who knows what he's talking about.

So when Paul then says, *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them"* (Romans 8:28), we can believe him. NOTE: God does not cause all things to happen. When things do happen, God can bring blessings from them.

What are you going through? Are you going through tough times? Bring them to God. He is the One who has overcome all evil. Ask Him to bring something good, even out of the darkness.

*A rainbow, skillfully painted
from the spectrum of colors contained in Your glorious palette:
warm colors encircling us,
embracing Your earth with a promise,
a reminder of your covenant with all Your creation.
Such love, eternal and everlasting.
Thank You, creator God, for the beauty of the rainbow,
and the beauty of Your love,
for all that You have made,
and for all You are going to make.
Make you make my life a temple for Your Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Celtic prayer

Idea for the day: Only print what you REALLY need from your computer.

Saturday, July 14: Romans 8:1-11

We live "according to the Spirit." What does that mean? It means that we invite God to transform our lives (see Romans 12:1-2). Psychologist, M. Scott Peck, writes, *"There are many people I know who possess a vision of personal development yet seem to lack the will for it. They want, and believe it is possible, to skip over the discipline, to find an easy shortcut to sainthood.*

"Often they attempt to attain it by simply imitating the superficialities of saints, retiring to the desert or taking up carpentry. Some even believe that by such imitation they've really become saints and prophets,

and are unable to acknowledge that they are still children and face the painful fact that they must start at the beginning and go through the middle."

We are saved by God's grace (the old word for this is "justification"). But it's still hard work – it takes commitment, discipline, time, and effort – to grow to be a person formed by the Spirit (what folks used to call "sanctification" – becoming more "saintly" or holy). There's no easy way around the "hard work" of discipline, commitment, effort, and determination to become more and more like Jesus.

The joy of "success" comes through the hard work of self-sacrifice and discipline. It's true in sports, in art, in vocations – in life. When we really work at something, we feel good about the results.

The same is also true in our spiritual lives. Paul puts it this way, *"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step"*(1 Corinthians 9:24-26).

If we want to truly know Jesus' rest and enjoy His light burden and easy yoke, then we have some work to do. There's no way around it. There wasn't for the first disciples (read Acts.). And there isn't for us. At least twice, Jesus said, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"*(Luke 9:23-25, 17:30-35).

It's a paradox isn't it? Only when we do the "work" do we enjoy the reward ...

*I will kindle my fire this morning,
in the presence of God, the Creator of heaven and earth;
I will kindle my fire this morning,
in the presence of Jesus, my Saviour and King;
I will kindle my fire this morning,
in the presence of the Spirit who cleanses and guides me.
Without anger, without jealousy, without enmity, without fear,
without ill will toward anyone under the sun,
with the holy Son of God to shield me.*

*God, kindle within my heart a flame of love
for my neighbor, for my enemy,
for my friend, for my family,
for the brave, for the knave,
for the leader, and for the servant of all.
Kindle within my heart a flame of devotion to follow You
and the ways You would have me go:
ways of service, ways of giving,
ways of prayer, ways of fasting,
ways of study, and ways of love.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: Use re-usable gift bags not wrapping paper

Sunday, July 15: Romans 8:12-27

The sinfulness of humanity has serious effects on creation; the *"whole of creation groans"*(Romans 8:23). In verse 21, Paul states the sure hope that creation itself will one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God (note it is not destroyed, but renewed).

The biblical narrative is a story with three essential 'characters': God, humans, and nonhuman creation,"

writes Richard Bauckham. *"In the modern period the biblical story has all too often been represented as a story about God and humans. The rest of creation could be forgotten because it was thought of as a mere stage-set for the human drama or merely a resource for humans to exploit in the interests of the human story. It ceased to be an active character. It has taken our contemporary awareness of the catastrophic disruption of the relationship between humans and other creatures to reawaken us to the fact that our history is a history of mutual interdependence and reciprocal interaction between humans, the earth, and the other creatures with whom we share the earth ..."*

*"Romans 8:19-23 is a concise version of the biblical grand narrative, a version in which all three characters (God, humans, and nonhuman creation) appear, but in which nonhuman creation takes center stage ... Creation, it appears, is the innocent victim of human wrongdoing, since 'it was subject to futility, not of its own will' (v.20), and must therefore await the liberation of human before it too can be liberated and participate in the coming glory (v.21). The intimate connection between creation and humans has so far been to creation's detriment, but eventually it will be to its advantage. Meanwhile they are bound up together in both suffering and hope."*¹

It's not hard to see how human sin does affect nonhuman creation: "islands" of plastic in the oceans, human-caused extinction of species, unsafe drinking water, smog in major cities, climate change, destruction of the ozone layer, garbage in the coulees, human-caused wildfires, etc., etc., etc.

We could be fatalistic, throw up our hands, and say, "This is just who we are – sinners who subject God's creation to abuse!" Or, as with all sin – from sexual sin to lying, from substance abuse to cheating – we need to confess we all have sinned, repent, determine to do better, AND actually change our behavior to do better. The fact we have sinned in the past is not an excuse to continue doing what we know is wrong.

In what ways have I, personally, not treated nonhuman creation well? In what ways have we, as a society, sinned against God's nonhuman creation? How do I need to live more "lightly" on God's earth?

*God the Father, all-powerful –
Jesus, all-loving –
Holy Spirit, all-filling –
Three-in-one, ever-living, ever-mighty, ever-lasting,
who brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea,
who brought Jonah to land from the belly of the great creature of the deep,
who brought Paul and his companions in the ship from the torment of the sea,
from the fury of the waves,
from the gale that was great,
from the storm that was heavy,
save us and shield us and sanctify us.
King of all creation and the elements,
be seated at the helm of our lives
and lead us in peace to the end of our journey,
when the winds blow wild and swirl and whirl,
keep us safe and free of harm.
You are the God who saves us.
In the end bring us to a safe harbor in heaven,
where the winds are soft and the eddies calm.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: Buy quality things you won't have to replace every few months.

¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the contemporary world*, pp.97-98

Monday, July 16: Joel 1

Does human sin have consequences for God's nonhuman creation? (Remember the earth and everything in it – in fact everything that is in all the universe – is God's creation)

Yesterday we read in Romans 8:20-22, that, "*Against its will, **all creation** was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*"

Joel 1 is a devastating description of "death and decay." This ecological destruction is not "natural," but rather the direct result of human greed, evil, and sin. As you read through Joel, it is clear that these "natural" disasters are not "natural" at all, but are actually human-induced disasters, caused by greed, injustice, violence, corruption, and sin. How many of our social, political, and environmental problems are actually "natural"? How many are actually the product of human sinfulness?

Notice **all creation** mourns and suffers due to human sinfulness: the land (1:10), domestic animals (1:18), and wild animals (1:20). Of course people suffer, too: farmers (1:11), the "people" generally (1:12), and he prophet himself (1:19). Human sin is serious business with serious consequences for ALL of God's creation: the image of the whole earth "mourning" as the result of human sin is common in the prophets (see Jeremiah 4:23-28, Hosea 4:1-3, Isaiah 24:4-6, Zephaniah 1:1-3).

There is good news – great news – in Joel, too. Joel writes: "*The Lord says, 'Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.' Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unending love. He is eager to relent and not punish*" (Joel 2:12-12).

The Bible never gives us a license to continuing sinning. When we know something is wrong, we are called to confession, repentance, and a new way of living, centered on God and His grace. Joel, like Paul in Romans 8, is challenging us to see our role in the destruction of God's good nonhuman creation.

Turn to God. Give Him your heart. Are there issues in your life that need to be dealt with? Tear your heart not your clothes. God is merciful and compassionate.

*Let me bless almighty God,
whose power extends over sea and land,
whose angels watch over all.
Let me study sacred books to calm my soul:
I pray for peace, kneeling at heaven's gates.
Let me do my daily work, gathering seaweed, catching fish (earning a living? shopping?),
giving food to the poor.
Let me say my daily prayers, sometimes singing, sometimes quiet,
always thanking God.
Delightful it is to live a peaceful life, in a quiet way,
serving the King of kings.
Amen.*

Columba (521-597)

Idea for the day: collect rainwater from your roof to use for watering

Tuesday, July 17: Psalm 104

It is interesting to think of ourselves, humans, as "*not the be-all and end-all.*" We live in a bigger story in which **GOD** is really the be-all and end-all, and we are partners with nonhuman creation as His creation.

We are so used to hearing the "gospel" (the good news) as simply a human-centered truth. In particular,

we assume it is a very *personal* human-centered truth. But remember, "*God so loved the 'kosmos'*" – all of His creation – that He gave His Son ... As we shall see, images of Jesus' return and the fulfillment of God's mission include **ALL** His creation, not just people, particularly in the Book of Revelation.

In reference to Job 37-39 (remember them?), Richard Bauckham, Professor of Theology at the University of St. Andrew's, writes, "*In what sense does Job have dominion over the creatures to whom God so graphically and incisively draws his attention? The whole point is that he does not, that he has no bearing on the value and purpose of their existence for God's and their own sake. The lesson is to teach Job his place as one creature among others in a creation of which he is not the be-all and end-all.*"

"Psalm 104 treats humans (v.23) simply as one of the many kinds of living creatures for whom God provides. It depicts the world as a shared home for the many kinds of living creatures, each with its God-given place ... Biblically, the Earth is not exclusively our home, but the home we share with God's many other creatures."

It's interesting to actually reflect on the truth that "*the Earth is not exclusively our home, but the home we share with God's many other creatures.*" How do those truths affect the way we live? The way we worship God? The way we care for other people? The way we care for creation?

As you read through this psalm, allow yourself to be amazed at the wonder of God's creation. The psalm, of course, does not use modern "scientific" language – it's poetry. But it captures so much of the glory of God's creativity. How does it help you understand God better? How does it help you appreciate God's creation in new ways? How does it help you see yourself in new ways?

*All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia. Alleluia.
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam.
O praise Him. O praise Him. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*

*Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along, O praise Him. Alleluia.
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice.
O praise Him. O praise Him. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*

*Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear, O praise Him. Alleluia.
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.
O praise Him. O praise Him. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*

*Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness, O praise Him. Alleluia.
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One.
O praise Him. O praise Him. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*

Amen

William Henry Draper (1855-1933)

Idea for the day: Try NOT to use air conditioning unless it's absolutely necessary.

Wednesday, July 18: Psalm 90

When I need a boost, I turn to the psalms. When I'm rejoicing, I turn to the psalms. When I'm struggling, I turn to the psalms. When I'm happy, I turn to the psalms. When I'm mourning, I turn to the psalms. DO you see a pattern emerging? I love the psalms. The psalms give me language to express myself to God.

The psalms also have amazing theology that remind me who God is, who I am – and who God’s nonhuman creation is (as in Psalm 104). They help me not be so me-centered or even people-centered. They remind me that God’s creation, purpose, and plan encompasses ALL of his creation.

"As the Creator of all, God also is Owner of all," writes Calvin DeWitt of the University of Wisconsin-Madison: *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26); "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14). God is the land Lord and we are God's tenants (Leviticus 25:23). Our response to this is joy. "For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise" (Psalm 47:7). God's ownership precedes us and it follows us. We can say: "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2).*

"While we know this from the scriptures and from Creation itself, some suppress the truth (Romans 1:18), "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen" (Romans 8:25). The Bible teaches, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1)."

The image of a well-lived life in Scripture is one centered on God, lived fully and completely for Him. While it sounds odd to live for Someone else, those of us who try to live that way find that, when we do aim to honour God through our lives, we find life a more full, fulfilling, and joyful experience. It’s a paradox: when we lose our lives for Jesus we really do truly find them.

May the Lord take pity on us, His servants. May He satisfy us each morning with His unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives (Psalm 90:13-14).

*Jesus, You are the light of the world:
a light no darkness can quench.
Upon Your church,
wrestling with the darkness of evil, battling against doubt –
let Your light shine.
Upon world governments,
facing gloom and despair, battling against disaster –
let Your light shine.
Upon those who live in the shadows,
caught up in sorrow and strife, struggling against pain –
let Your light shine.
Upon those who are poor,
hungry and homeless, feeling hopeless and unloved –
let Your light shine.
Upon those who feel helpless,
unsure where to turn or who to turn to, confused and convicted –
let Your light shine.
Come, my Lord, my light, my way ...
Come, my lantern, night and day –
let Your light shine.
Come, my healer, make me whole ...
Come, my Saviour, protect my soul –
let Your light shine.
Come, my King, enter my heart ...
Come, Prince of peace, and never depart –
let Your light shine. Amen.*

David Adam

Idea for the day: Use leftover vegetable water to water your plants

Thursday, July 19: Psalm 103

Like Psalm 90 (yesterday), Psalm 103 keeps me grounded – literally (103:14-16). In Job's words, "*Your hands shaped me and made me ... you molded me like clay*" and God will ultimately allow us to return to dust again (Job 10:9). Is that a bleak view of life?

If we have no belief or faith in a loving Creator – if we are simply born, live, die, and return to the dust – then yes, life is pretty bleak (Solomon wrestles with this kind of atheism in Ecclesiastes). For those without faith in God, life can seem pointless, meaningless, and painful.

But if we do believe and have faith in a loving Creator, everything changes. Life and here and now does have purpose and meaning. We live in an ongoing relationship with God through His Spirit. Our purpose is to be ambassadors of His Kingdom: giving Him praise and worship, living His love and mercy, sharing His grace and justice, and inviting people to know and experience Him personally, too. Life is full, rich, and purposeful.

Psalm 103:20-22 invites us to

- Praise God with all of our being: who we are and what we think, say, do (103:1, 20-22)
- Remember and celebrate what God has done for us: forgiving, saving, caring for, and blessing us (103:2-13).
- Remember God is the One who has done all this; He is our salvation. We cannot save ourselves. That takes some of the pressure off (103:14-16)
- Live in God's love amazing grace (103:17-19)

How does Psalm 103 express God's good news?

This is not something we want to keep for ourselves. How can you live out His amazing grace in your relationships with others?

*This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.*

*This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.*

*This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their maker's praise.*

*This is my Father's world: he shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass I hear him pass;
he speaks to me everywhere.*

*This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.*

*This is my Father's world: why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King; let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let the earth be glad!*

Maltbie Babcock (1858-1901)

Idea for the day: Recycle whatever you can

Friday, July 20: Isaiah 6:1-8 and 66:1-2

This is our Father's world. This is His creation, created for His glory. How then should we live within it? One of the images used to describe this Earth is that it is God's palace or temple: it has "foundations,"

"beams," "the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the land tremble" (24:18). In Job 38, God's demands, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone Who shut up the sea behind doors When I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail?"²

If you think back to Genesis 1-2, the entire description of creation can be thought of as God creating a vast Temple – the universe – in which His glory and His image – human beings – can dwell. If you think of an ancient temple, the builders who select a site, mark it off, construct the entire glorious building, and then – as the final act of creation – they would install the "image" of the God. The last great creative act of God in the first creation narrative is God unveiling His image – people, created in the image of God – within His Creation temple. This reading of Genesis seems strange to us, but would have been a logical way for the people in ancient Israel to have understood Genesis 1:1-2:3. Their God – the One and only True God – is SOOOO much bigger, grander, and more amazing than the little petty gods of other nations, that He cannot even be contained in all of creation, let alone a building constructed by human hands.

Isaiah 6:1-8 and 66:1-2 picks up this imagery. Where do you find a throne and a footstool if not in a palace? And what is the palace of God, if not a temple? The whole of creation is God's palace-temple. If all of creation is God's palace-temple, how then should we treat it?

Consider Isaiah 6:1-8:

- What do I learn about God?
- About myself?
- About God's call on my life?

Consider Isaiah 66:1-2: What ought our attitude be before the Lord? What does it mean

- to be "humble" before God?
- to be "contrite in spirit"?
- to "tremble at His Word?"

Our amazing Creator has placed us in His Temple, His creation. He invites us to be His ambassadors, sharing His good news of life and love in Jesus. We can help others know the astonishing, incredible grace of God described in Psalm 103 (yesterday), lived out in Jesus. What is God saying to you, today?

*I, the Lord of sea and sky
I have heard my people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart
I, who made the stars of night
I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart*

² In fact, the Hebrew Bible is built on architectural imagery describing creation. It speaks of the foundations of the earth (Ps 18:15; 82:5; 102:25; 104:5; Prov 8:29; Isa 51:13,16; 2 Sam 22:8,16; Zech 12:1; cf. 2 Sam 22:8), the pillars of the earth and of the heavens (1 Sam 2:8; Job 9:6; Ps 75:3; Job 26:11), the heavens' windows (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Isa 24:18; Mal 3:10; 2 Kgs 7:2; Ps 104:2), the stretching out of the heavens like a canopy/tent (Isa 40:12,22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13; Jer 10:12; 31:37; 32:17; 51:15; Amos 9:6; Zech 12:1; Job 9:8; Ps 102:25), and storehouses (Deut 28:12; Jer 10:13; 50:25; 51:16; cf. Ps 33:7; 135:7; Job 38:22).

*I, the Lord of snow and rain
I have borne my people's pain
I have wept for love of them, they turn away
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart
Amen*

Dan Schutte CCLI 662904

Saturday, July 21: Psalm 98

"Bruce, you're crazy. God only cares about people. Nonhuman creation – got over it! It's disposable, just here for our benefit, right? Seriously, how can the sea, the earth, rivers, or hills praise God?" Is that what you are thinking?

Read God's Word. What does Psalm 98 tell us? It's there in black and white. I can't say it any more (or less) bluntly: deal with it 😊.

"Why should evangelical Christians care for the world in which we live?" asks Howard J. Van Till, Professor of Physics at Calvin College. His answer: *"Stated as simply as possible, because it is 'the creation', the luxuriant garden given to us by our generous Creator.*

"One of the basic tenets of Christian belief is that the world of which we are a part has being only because the God of whom the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures speak chose graciously to give it being 'in the beginning' and to continue to sustain it in being from moment to moment. Caring for it is, therefore, no mere matter of global pragmatism. Caring for the creation is for the Christian but one element in an integrated package of appropriate responses to the knowledge of who we are.

"From the Christian perspective, caring for the creation is an essential act of worship – our public declaration that God is deserving of our unrestrained praise, thanksgiving and service."

Psalm 98 reminds of the wonder of all of creation praising God.

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,
join me in glad adoration.
Praise to the Lord, above all things so wondrously reigning;
sheltering you under his wings, and so gently sustaining!
Have you not seen all that is needful has been
sent by his gracious ordaining?
Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
if with his love he befriends you.
Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him.
Let the Amen sound from his people again;
gladly forever adore him.
Amen*

Idea for the day: Take time to simply sit and worship God in His creation

Sunday, July 22: Psalm 96

The wonder of God's majesty, wisdom, and glory astound me. As a geographer, I can only stand back, look at His creation, and say "Wow!"

"All the creatures of this beautiful world lead the soul of the wise and contemplative person to the eternal God, since they are shadows, echoes, and pictures ... They are set before us for the sake of our knowing God, and are divinely given signs. For every creature is by its very nature and kind of portrayal and likeness of that eternal Wisdom, God." (Bonaventura, 1217-1274)

"The biblical doctrine of creation invites us to value both nature and the respectful investigation of nature as a means of appreciating the splendor of the creation and glimpsing the still greater splendor of its creator. It affirms the human sense of wonder at the glories of the natural world – and hence the longing to study them more deeply – while investing them with a transcendent significance." (Alister McGrath)

Victorian poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, celebrates God's creation and reflects on what we, as human beings, do to creation ... and the resilient care of God, the Creator:

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not wreck his world?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Spirit over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah, bright wings.*

We serve an amazing God. We have a victorious, risen Saviour. We are filled and empowered by His Holy Spirit. How can you praise the Lord, today?

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

Idea for the day: see what you can re-use rather than throw out

Monday, July 23: Matthew 6:19-34

When we do wonder if God cares for us – when times get hard – what is Jesus' message to us?

As we look at God's care for the world around us – the birds, the flowers – we are reminded of how much God cares for His good creation. And human beings, made in His image – us – are at least as precious.

Although these words are specifically to us – humans – about how God cares for us – humans – what do they say about how much God loves and cares for nonhuman creation?

Spend some time reflecting on what these verses are teaching you ...

- about God?
- about His creation?
- about yourself?
- about your priorities?
- about your life?

We do have an amazing God who is more than BIG enough to care for each and every person – including you and I – AND all of His nonhuman creation. We don't need to shrink God down to being a human-centered, only-human-focused deity. This is GOD – the Creator and Ruler of all – we are talking about. He is more than capable of caring for people AND every sparrow, lily, birch tree, and mountain peak.

Yes, Jesus, loves you – desperately! Celebrate and worship Him for His grace and mercy.

Jesus loves all the rest of His creation, too. Praise Him!

*I have felt the wind blow,
Whispering your name
I have seen your tears fall,
When I watch the rain.*

*How could I say there is no God?
When all around creation calls!!
A singing bird, a mighty tree,
The vast expanse of open sea*

*Gazing at a bird in flight,
Soaring through the air.
Lying down beneath the stars,
I feel your presence there.*

*I love to stand at ocean shore
And feel the thundering breakers roar,
To walk through golden fields of grain
With endless bloom horizons fray.*

*Listening to a river run,
Watering the Earth.
Fragrance of a rose in bloom,
A newborn's cry at birth.*

*I love to stand at ocean shore
And feel the thundering breakers roar,
To walk through golden fields of grain
With endless bloom horizons fray
I believe*

Brian Doerksen CCLI 662904

Idea for the day: remember this is "God's creation" not just "nature" or "the environment"

Tuesday, July 24: Psalm 24

We read this psalm back in June. I wanted us to reread it because it is used as the introduction to a fascinating document, "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)". This is a thought-provoking outline that challenges us to think about how we could/should care for God's creation as His people. It's fairly lengthy so we'll work our way through it this week (not all in one day). This is how it begins:

"The Earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof - Psalm 24:1

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

Because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.

Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.

Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator – whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through Scripture and in Christ. We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.

These degradations of creation can be summed up as 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation.

Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.

We recognize that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation.

Many concerned people, convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological, are exploring the world's ideologies and religions in search of non-Christian spiritual resources for the healing of the earth."

(We'll look at the "So what? How do we respond?" section tomorrow)

What do you think? At the root, are many of our environmental problems more spiritual than technological? If so, then how do you think we should respond? What can you do?

*God of harvest, Gardener supreme,
you place us in your good garden.
Feed us, equip us and provide for us our daily bread.
More than this, help us look to a different harvest:
a fruitfulness of lives
in service to you and others.
God of harvest,
feed us,
prune us,
harvest us,
that our lives might bring glory to you.
Amen*

adapted from faithandworship.com

Wednesday, July 25: 1 John 1:1-10

If any part of our environmental issues is the result of human sin, how then do we respond? The good news, in 1 John 1, is that as we confess our sins, God forgives us. This is an essential part of the good news Jesus has given to us through His words, death, and resurrection.

Here is the first part of the "So What do we do now?" section of "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)".

"As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the Bible calls us to respond in four ways:

First, God calls us to confess and repent of attitudes which devalue creation, and which twist or ignore biblical revelation to support our misuse of it. Forgetting that "the earth is the Lord's," we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it.

Second, our actions and attitudes toward the earth need to proceed from the center of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures. We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.

Third, we seek carefully to learn all that the Bible tells us about the Creator, creation, and the human task. In our life and words we declare that full good news for all creation which is still waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," (Rom. 8:19).

Fourth, we seek to understand what creation reveals about God's divinity, sustaining presence, and everlasting power, and what creation teaches us of its God-given order and the principles by which it works."

We will look at some specific ideas for how to respond tomorrow.

It is good for us to reflect on God, ourselves, and nonhuman creation from a biblical perspective (as we have been doing). What are you learning? How are your attitudes changing? How are your actions changing?

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy Hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed,
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

*When through the woods and forest glades I wander
I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

*When Christ shall come, with shouts of acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art!"
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

Amen

Carl Boberg (1859–1940)

Idea for the day: listen to/sing your favourite "God/Creator/Creation" song

Thursday, July 26: Psalm 8

As the people of Jesus, we want to base our beliefs, actions, and hopes on biblical truth. I appreciate that "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)" is based on good, biblical theology. Although this may sound (or read) a bit dry, it is important. This is a good summary of some of the basic biblical principles we hold to as people of Jesus, and how they apply to our concern for God's creation.

"Thus we call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society.

- *The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.*
- *Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.*
- *God the Creator is relational in very nature, revealed as three persons in One. Likewise, the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship.*
- *The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation "good" (Gen. 1:31); promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17); delights in creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41); and wills, in Christ, "to reconcile all things to himself" (Col.1:20).*
- *Men, women, and children, have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures.*
- *Men, women, and children, created in God's image, also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its Creator.*
- *Our God-given, stewardly talents have often been warped from their intended purpose: that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures; that we nourish civilization in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilization back in praise to the Creator. We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed, rather than care.*
- *The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land... Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away" (Hosea 4:1,3). Thus, one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future."*

Our lives are purposeful and meaningful! From the very beginning we were created in God's image to be a blessing to other people and to all of God's creation. How can I live this out?

*Lord of all creation, of the water, earth and sky,
The Heavens are Your Tabernacle, glory to the Lord on high.
So early in the morning, I will celebrate the light.
And as I stumble into darkness, I will call Your name by night.*

*God of wonders, beyond our galaxy, You are holy, holy.
The universe declares Your majesty, You are holy, holy.
Lord of Heaven and Earth.
Lord of Heaven and Earth.*

*Hallelujah to the Lord of Heaven and earth.
Hallelujah to the Lord of Heaven and earth.*

Amen

*Marc Byrd / Steve J. Hindalong
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Friday, July 27: Romans 8:28-39

My apologies. You are getting a good dose of theology for late July! Hopefully the warm days can give you opportunity to sit back and ponder the truths of our faith. "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)," based on good, biblical theology, continues:

"We call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society.

- *God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).*
- *In Jesus Christ, believers are forgiven, transformed and brought into God's kingdom. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). The presence of the kingdom of God is marked not only by renewed fellowship with God, but also by renewed harmony and justice between people, and by renewed harmony and justice between people and the rest of the created world. "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12).*
- *We believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin.*
- *Therefore, we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.*
- *We encourage deeper reflection on the substantial biblical and theological teaching which speaks of God's work of redemption in terms of the renewal and completion of God's purpose in creation.*
- *We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God's ordinances for creation.*
- *We encourage Christians to incorporate the extravagant creativity of God into their lives by increasing the nurturing role of beauty and the arts in their personal, ecclesiastical, and social patterns.*
- *We urge individual Christians and churches to be centers of creation's care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God's gift, and enjoying it as God's provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.*

*Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,
O thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.*

*Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,
robed in the blooming garb of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer
who makes the woeful heart to sing.*

*Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,
and all the twinkling starry host:
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
than all the angels heaven can boast.*

*Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine.*

Amen

Idea for the day: Send some time reflecting on a small change you can make in your life ...

Saturday, July 28: Micah 6:6-8

This is the last section of "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation](#)," based on good, biblical theology. It challenges us in ways that may make us uncomfortable, asking questions about the sustainability of our lifestyles. Spend some time prayerfully reflecting on what God might be saying to you ...

- *"We recall Jesus' words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self-restraint and frugality.*
- *We call on all Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God's sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognize that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore, we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty.*
- *We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.*
- *We invite Christians – individuals, congregations and organizations – to join with us in this evangelical declaration on the environment, becoming a covenant people in an ever-widening circle of biblical care for creation.*
- *We call upon Christians to listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation, with an eagerness both to learn from them and also to share with them our conviction that the God whom all people sense in creation (Acts 17:27) is known fully only in the Word made flesh in Christ the living God who made and sustains all things.*

We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to reconcile all things, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's good garden, our earthly home."

Do you agree? Disagree? Why? How does this "fit" with Micah 6:8? Pray through what the Declaration is suggesting.

*By faith, I gaze up to the heavens
and know within its vastness
that this is your creation,
planned and effected within eternity.*

*By faith, I pluck an ear of corn,
and know within its symmetry
lies the chemistry of life,
the potential of creation within my hand.*

*By faith, I listen for your voice,
and know the whisper that I hear
breathed a world into existence,
yet listens to the prayer within my soul.*

*By faith, I strive to do your will,
and know the door that I approach
may lead me to shadows,
where my roll is to become your light*

*By faith, I cling to your word,
and know the strength that I receive
has it's source within the love
that is at the centre of all things.*

Amen

faithandworship.com

Sunday, July 29: Psalm 107

You made it through "[The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation.](#)" Good for you. Enjoy Psalm 107 as a reward.

I love this psalm. Using imagery drawn from God's creation, it reminds me that God is always with me no matter where I am or what I am going through.

Read it through a couple of times.

Horatio Spafford wrote our prayer/hymn (note his use of natural imagery throughout, too). Spafford (1828-1888) was a prominent American lawyer and Presbyterian church elder. Spafford invested in real estate in Chicago. When the Great Fire of Chicago reduced the city to ashes in October 1871, it also destroyed most of Spafford's sizable investment. Then scarlet fever killed his four-year-old son. Two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday somewhere in Europe, and chose England knowing that his friend D. L. Moody would be preaching there in the fall. He was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four daughters.

On November 22, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the steamship "Ville du Havre," their ship was struck by another ship. 226 people drowned, including all four of Spafford's daughters. Only his wife, Anna Spafford, survived the tragedy. Arriving in England, she sent a telegram to Spafford beginning "Saved alone." Spafford sailed to England, going over the location of his daughters' deaths. According to Bertha Spafford Vester, a daughter born after the tragedy, Spafford wrote "It Is Well with My Soul" on this journey.

*Refrain: It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
Your face, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!*

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

Amen

Horatio Spafford (1828-1888)

Monday, July 30: Ezekiel 28:1-19

We were created for Eden. We were created be stewards of Eden. Ezekiel 28:12-14 captures something of this glorious vision: *"You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and exquisite in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Your clothing was adorned with every precious stone – red carnelian, pale-green peridot, white moonstone, blue-green beryl, onyx, green jasper, blue lapis lazuli, turquoise, and emerald – all beautifully crafted for you and set in the finest gold. They were given to you on the day you were created. I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire."*

And then things go terribly wrong (28:15-19): *"You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you.*

- *Your rich commerce led you to violence, and you sinned ...*
- *Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty ...*
- *Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor ...*
- *You defiled your sanctuaries with your many sins and your dishonest trade."*

The tragedy of Tyre is that, like Adam and Eve (and many people today), they think they know better than God. And what they know is that it's all about business. As long as you are making a profit, you are showing returns for investors, your dividends are paying out, unemployment is low, and the economy is booming, it's all good ... right? Poor people? God's creation? Suffering? Injustice? Surely if the economy is good enough, those things will all take care of themselves ... *"You regard yourself as wiser than Daniel and think no secret is hidden from you. With your wisdom and understanding you have amassed great wealth – gold and silver for your treasuries. Yes, your wisdom has made you very rich, and your riches have made you very proud"*(28:3-5). What is the inevitable result (28:6-11)?

Think of classical Greece, Imperial Rome, and the British Empire ... all have faded away. The same is inevitable for the contemporary U.S., Japan, China, and every other "power" based on economic greed.

What attitude ought we then to have?

- In Micah 6:8, Micah says, *"The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."*
- Jesus says, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'"*(Matthew 22:37-39).

Do I ever live as though money, splendor, or trade is the most important thing in life? What if the most important things are not money, commerce, splendor, or trade? What if loving God and loving our neighbour are really most important? How then would I live?

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father and I, Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart;
O King of glory, my treasure Thou art.*

*O King of glory, my victory won;
Rule and reign in me 'til Thy will be done;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall;
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.
Amen*

8th Century Gaelic Poem

Tuesday, July 31: 1 Kings 7:13-47

Solomon built the first Temple in Jerusalem. This is a description of some of its furnishings. Notice the importance of water? One of the furnishings you may not have noticed in descriptions of the Temple – but which you could not help noticing if you were there in person – is a huge “sea” 2.2 m (7.5 feet) tall and 4.5 m (15 feet) in diameter, holding upwards of 66000 litres (15000 gallons) of water: an overwhelming amount in the semiarid Middle East. What is this all about?

In the beginning, God created the sea and all the creatures of sea and declared them “good” (Genesis 1:10, 21-22). God is the ruler and Lord of all of creation including the seas and all that is in them. Having the “sea” in God’s Temple is a reminder that God is sovereign over all His creation, including the oceans which cover 70% of the earth’s surface. While the ocean is sometimes a symbol of chaos in the Bible, ultimately it is still a good, important, part of God’s great creation.

Some of us love the sea. My feelings are encapsulated well by poet John Masefield (1878–1967):

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel’s kick and the wind’s song and the white sail’s shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea’s face, and a grey dawn breaking.*

*I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.*

*I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull’s way and the whale’s way where the wind’s like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick’s over.*

But the sea is also dangerous. John Newton (1725-1807) was a slave trader. In a culture where sailors commonly used oaths and swore, Newton gained notoriety for being one of the most profane men his captain had ever met. In March 1748, Newton’s ship almost sank in a storm; the ship was repeatedly patched and bailed; a crew member who was standing where Newton had been moments before was swept overboard; the crew ran short of food; and they almost ran out of water. After the storm, Newton began to think about the faith he always strenuously rejected: “*There never was, nor could be, such a sinner as myself,*” he wrote, “*I concluded, at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven.*”

Newton’s guilt was not helped by the captain’s constant joking that Newton must be the cause of their woes and should, like Jonah, be cast overboard to save them all from death. Newton comments, “*He did not intend to make the experiment, but the continual repetition of this in my ears, gave me much uneasiness, especially as my conscience seconded his words, I thought it very probable that all that had befallen us was on my account. I was, at last, found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast ...*

“I began to pray – I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God; and call Him Father. My prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus, whom I had so often derided; I recollected the particulars of his life, and of his death; a death for sins not his own, but, I remembered, for the sake of those, who, in their distress, should put their trust in him ...

Finally, Newton writes, "I began to know that there is a God that hears and answers prayer."

The sea and its fury led Newton to compose one of the most beloved of all hymns:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.*

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*

*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.
Amen*

John Newton (1725-1807)

Wednesday, August 1: Ezekiel 47:1-12

Fresh, clean water is a good thing. It's essential to all of life. It is significant that there is a river in Eden (Genesis 2:10-14). And in God's Temple there is a river that brings food and healing for all the earth: trees will be watered, fish nurtured, and dead waters will be made alive. As we shall see, this vision is a glimpse of future yet to come, reiterated almost verbatim in Revelation 22:1-2.

In the meantime, however, Ezekiel 47 reminds us of the importance of water for all of life. Worldwide, 780 million people do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion people lack access to reasonable sanitation (more than 35% of the world's population).³ In Canada, with 20% of the world's fresh water, as of January 1, 2018, there are 67 long-term drinking water advisories in effect for public water systems managed by the federal government (drinking water warnings in place for over a year). An additional 18 communities have had water issues for between two and 12 months.

³ According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, regions with the lowest coverage of "improved" sanitation were sub-Saharan Africa (31%), Southern Asia (33%) and Eastern Asia (65%)

Issues related to water quality are not technologically challenging: they are “fixable” with investment, political, and social will. Why do the problems persist in places like Canadian First Nations? Because there is neither the social or political will to make the required financial investment. In short, we could easily provide safe drinking water for everyone – if we are willing to pay for it.

Canadian water problems are also fixable by being careful how we fertilize, de-pesticize, dispose of waste, and otherwise contaminate our water systems, too.

Globally, the distribution of water is a significant problem. With climate change and groundwater withdrawal, regions like sub-Saharan African, central Asia, central South America, and Australia and the southwestern US are drying out. Due to climate change, those regions are receiving significantly less precipitation than previously. And people are using more water from the ground than the land receives from precipitation. The result is a major groundwater deficit.

- How can we care for our water resources responsibly?
- How can we use less water?
- How can we help provide safe, clean water for all?

*May God give you...
For every storm, a rainbow,
For every tear, a smile,
For every care, a promise,
And a blessing in each trial.

For every day, a purpose,
For every moment, a call,
For every task, a helping hand
And care for creatures small.

For every problem life sends,
A faithful friend to share,
For every sigh, a sweet song,
And an answer for each prayer.
Amen*

Irish Blessing

Thursday, August 2: Revelation 4

We began this study with creation: in the Psalms, Job, and Genesis. It seems appropriate we conclude with the final chapters in Revelation.

I don't know what your preconceived notion of heaven is, but every time I read Revelation I struggle to grasp all that God is showing me. We don't see human bodies floating up through the clouds to some disembodied heaven, Peter and the pearly gates, cherubs floating on clouds, or many of the other clichés we have inherited. Instead we have a grand vision of God's Temple.

If you recall, Genesis 1 (and much of the Old Testament) uses Temple imagery to describe God's creation – the earth and everything in it. We are created “in His image,” placed last within His Temple.

Revelation (especially chapters 21 and 22) provide us with a glorious image of God's creation, renewed and restored, perfected and purified through the work of Jesus – the Lamb of God.

Notice the importance of the sea in God's Temple. God is Lord of land and sea (and sky). Having the sea in God's Temple is also a reminder of our role as His stewards of His creation, including the oceans. In Genesis, humans are given responsibility to be caretakers of all creation, including the “fish in the sea” (1:26, 28). We are to be responsible stewards of the seas and oceans as well as terrestrial biomes.

Notice the four representative "living beings": a lion, greatest of the wild animals; an ox, greatest of the domesticated animals; a human, representing humanity; and an eagle, greatest of the birds (echoing the categories in Genesis 1). In God's Temple, the focus is not on humans. The focus is God. ALL of God's creation – the sea, will nature, domesticated nature, people, and the birds praise and glorify Him. Does this surprise you?

As the elders call out, *"You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased"* the phrase, *"all things,"* refers to ALL things – human and nonhuman creation – God is the creator and sustainer of everything. It is all precious to Him.

In a thought-provoking book, *Blue Planet, Blue God: The Bible and the Sea*, Meric Srokosz and Rebecca Watson write, *"God is bigger and his concerns are much broader than humans tend to imagine. The Bible, and indeed our whole experience and outlook, may be human- and land-centered, but God is not confined to that perspective. He values and nurtures all of creation, receiving praise and obedience from all his creatures"* (p.57).

- How does Revelation 4 help you think about Jesus differently?
- How does it help you worship Him more fully?

*Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king through all eternity.*

*Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.*

*Crown him the Lord of love; behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their burning eye at mysteries so bright.*

*Crown him the Lord of years, the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail! For thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.*

Amen

Matthew Bridges/Godfrey Thring (1823-1903)

Friday, August 3: Revelation 5

The focus of our faith is Jesus and what He has done for us, His creatures. Revelation 5 helps us appreciate the love of God, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the new life we have in Him in rich, symbolic ways.

Notice the natural imagery used to describe Jesus:

- How is He like a lion?
- How is He like a lamb?

Notice who is in God's Temple:

- The elders
- The four living beings (lion, ox, human, eagle)
- The angels
- All creatures from heaven, the earth, under the earth, and the sea

1. At first, the 24 elders bring the prayers of God's people before God and sing His praise.

2. Second, the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders sing in a mighty chorus.
3. Third, **every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea** sings praise.

Revelation gives a wonderful picture of a renewed creation in which ALL things praise God.

Notice, too, God's restored mission for His people: *"For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a **Kingdom of priests** for our God. And they will reign on the earth."* We are recommissioned to be God's image bearers, His people tending and caring for His creation once again (Genesis 2:15).

Peter writes, *"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his **holy priests** ... you are a chosen people. You are **royal priests**, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:4-5, 9).

Priests (1) bring God's good news and goodness to His people/creation, (2) intercede on behalf of people/creation to God, AND (3) care for His Temple. How can I

- (1) bring God's good news to His people/creation,
- (2) intercede on behalf of people/creation to God, AND
- (3) care for God's holy Temple, His creation?

*All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all!*

*O seed of Israel's chosen race now ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all.
Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all!*

*Let every tongue and every tribe responsive to his call,
to him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all.
To him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all!*

*Oh, that with all the sacred throng we at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song and crown him Lord of all.
We'll join the everlasting song and crown him Lord of all.
Amen*

Edward Perronet (1726-1792)

Saturday, August 4: Revelation 21

The coming of God's Presence and holy city to Earth is the final answer to the Lord's prayer that *"God's Kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Note, the new Jerusalem coming down to earth. God is coming here to restore, redeem, and renew all things.

In previous studies we have noted how often the wedding metaphor is used to describe the relationship between Jesus (the groom) and the church (the bride). Revelation 21 can be seen as the fulfillment of that wedding – heaven and earth come together (in ways we cannot begin to comprehend or imagine), and the two become one ... What are perfectly complementary – God and His creation – come together perfectly.

"What is promised in this passage is what Isaiah foresaw: a new heaven and a new earth replacing the old heaven and the old earth, which were bound to decay ... As the chapter develops, the bride, the wife of the Lamb, is described lovingly – she is the new Jerusalem promised by the prophets of the Exile, especially Ezekiel. But unlike in Ezekiel's vision, where the rebuilt Temple takes eventual centre stage, there is no

Temple in this city (21:22). The Temple in Jerusalem was always designed as a pointer to, and an advance symbol for, the presence of God himself. When the reality is there, the signpost is no longer necessary.

*"As in Romans and 1 Corinthians, the living God will dwell with and among his people, filling the city with his life and love and pouring out grace and healing in the river of life that flows from the city out to the nations. There is a sign here of the future project that awaits the redeemed in God's eventual world. So far from sitting on clouds playing harps, as people often imagine, the redeemed of God in the new world will be the agents of his love, going out in new ways to accomplish new creative tasks, to celebrate and extend the glory of his love."(Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp. 105-106).*

There is much about this vision that we cannot understand. What strikes you most? How is the vision encouraging to you? How does it challenge some of your preconceptions about heaven?

*Deep peace of God to you – three in one and one in three.
Deep peace of the running waves to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the Father of Mercy to you
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.
Deep peace of the Spirit of Grace to you.
Deep peace of God to you – three in one and one in three.
This His blessing: His deep peace to you.
Amen*

Irish Blessing

Sunday, August 5: Revelation 22

The really interesting questions about Revelation 21 and 22, Tom Wright suggests, are not about heaven and hell – who's in and who's not (although these are subjects the Bible does take seriously and deals with - at least in part – there is still much mystery). The really important questions in these chapters are *"How will God's new creation come? How will we humans contribute to that renewal of creation and to the fresh projects that the creator God will launch in this new world?"*(*Surprised by Hope*, p. 185). The image in Revelation involves us – God's people – still doing things in partnership with God. We are not sitting around on clouds playing harps!

A river that flows *OUT* of the city – growing on either bank are the trees of life, not a single tree, but a whole forest, the leaves of which are used for *"the healing of the nations."* We're not sure all this means, but it is undoubtedly good (drawing on Ezekiel 47).

"The choice before humans should then be formed differently," writes Tom Wright. *"Are you going to worship the creator God and discover thereby what it means to become fully and gloriously human, reflecting his powerful, healing, transformative love into the world? Or are you going to worship the world as it is, boosting your corruptible humanness by gaining power and pleasure from forces within the world, but thereby merely contributing to your own dehumanization and the further corruption of the world itself?"*

*"This reflection leads to a further, and sobering thought ... To insist on heaven and hell as the ultimate question – to insist in other words that what happens eventually to individual humans is the most important thing in the world – may be to make a mistake similar to the one made by the Jewish people in the first century, the mistake that both Jesus and Paul addressed. Israel believed (so Paul tells us and he should know) that the purposes of the creator God all down to this question: **how is God going to rescue Israel?** What the gospel of Jesus revealed, however, was the purposes of God were reaching out to a different question: **how is God going to rescue the world through Israel and thereby rescue Israel itself as part of the process,** but not rescuing just Israel as the point of it all?"*

"Maybe what we are faced with in our own day is a similar challenge: to focus not on the question of which

*human beings God is going to take to heaven and how he is going to do it, but on the question of **how God is going to redeem and renew his creation through human beings and how he is going to rescue those human beings themselves as part of the process, but not as the point of it all.***"

It's a different way – a bigger way – of thinking about God's work and God's will, isn't it? Wright is not denying the reality of judgment, heaven and hell – quite the opposite. But he is challenging us to realize that is not the "end" that should consume our thoughts and actions. Rather, we should be thinking about how we live as God's people **here and now**, so people see the reality of creator God in our lives, actions, words, and choices. Then, as we live His Kingdom on earth as it is heaven, people will see, know, and love God for themselves ... These chapters encourage us to live as His Kingdom people **NOW**.

It changes our personal – and the church's – sense of mission when we think about our purpose in these terms: how can God use **us** to help redeem, renew, and rescue his creation – including human beings? (We – people – are precious to Him, created in His image. But ALL of creation is God's creation, too.)

We think too small when we limit God's redemption simply to people. God can – and is – more than capable of redeeming ALL of creation. That's the challenge Revelation 21 and 22 put before us ...

How does this make you think about the glory of God? About God's purposes? About His power? His will?

How can you help see God's Kingdom and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven?

*May the road rise to meet you
May the wind always be at your back,
May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home,
And may the hand of a friend always be near.
May green be the grass you walk on,
May blue be the sky above you,
May pure be the joys that surround you,
May true be the hearts that love you.
May God be with you and bless you,
May you see your children's children.
May you be poor in misfortune,
Rich in blessings,
May you know nothing but God's grace from this day forward.
May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm on your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of His hand.
Amen*

Irish Blessing