

June 2018

The Earth is the Lord's

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



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Monday, June 11: Psalm 24

This summer I'm encouraging us to think about God, His creation, and how we live responsibly in and care for His world. As we grow to love God, we naturally appreciate His art gallery, His glorious creation, the world around us. Through God's good gifts, like science and art, we value His creation and worship our Creator better. Since we live in this glorious world, created "good" by God, we ought to live wisely, caring for and protecting His creation. This is one specific ethical application of our faith in Jesus.

The prayers this month come from several sources including: *Celtic Prayers from Iona* (Philip Newell), *The Open Gate* (David Adam), *Carmina Gadelica* (Alexander Carmichael) and www.faihandworship.com.

We are all parts of an amazing, beautiful, glorious universe (or, potentially, multiverse¹) God has created. As His precious creations, it's good to reflect on how we can worship God and serve Him well alongside all the other flora and fauna, the Earth, our solar system, galaxy, and beyond which He has fashioned.

It is good – and humbling – to remember the Earth is ***the Lord's***. It is not ours.

- The Earth is the Lord's: what does this mean for how we live in His creation?
- The Earth is the Lord's: what does this mean for how we care for His creation?

As Psalm 24 continues (3-10), we are challenged to have "clean hands" and a "pure heart." What is God saying to me?

We have the privilege – through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit – to come into God's very personal presence with our lives, our prayers, our hopes, our fears, our joys, our failures, our aspirations, our problems ... What a privilege. Verses 7-10 describe creation as God's palace/temple. We are welcome into God's palace, His temple, to speak with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This Earth is God's Temple; He welcomes you. We are God's family; He welcomes you. *"God sent his Son to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child"* (Galatians 4:5-7). As God's child, you are welcome in His presence. We come to Him as "Abba" (Hebrew for "Dad"), not just as King of the Cosmos. Your loving Father welcomes you with open arms. Bring your worship – and prayers – to Him.

*If there is righteousness in the heart,
there will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character,
there will be harmony in the home.
If there is harmony in the home,
there will be order in the nation.
If there is order in the nation,
there will be peace in the world.
Lord, so let it be. So let it be.
Amen.*

Scottish Prayer

Idea for the day: Like Dad always said, "Turn off lights when you're not in the room."

Tuesday, June 12: Psalm 19

Calvin DeWitt, Professor of Environmental Studies (University of Wisconsin-Madison) writes, *"God lovingly provides the rains and cyclings of water, provides food for the creatures, fills people's hearts with joy and satisfies the earth (Psalm 104:10-18, Acts 14:17). It is through this manifest love and wisdom that creation*

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiverse>

declares God's glory and proclaims the work of the Creator's hands (Psalm 19:1). The good news of creation permeates the universe (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20), and from the very beginning creation's witness to God's integrity and love for the world has been pervasive; its voice has gone out clearly through all the Earth. Creation's declaration of God's kingdom and love is so forceful that God's eternal power is clearly seen and God's divinity is manifest, leaving everyone without excuse (Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1)."

Many people – including C.S. Lewis and myself (in part) – have discovered God through observation of the natural world. Many of the great scientists of history (Newton, Boyle, Pasteur, Pascal) saw God as the "why," the purpose behind the "what" of their studies. The orderliness and design of creation suggests an intelligent creator: God. A person can come to see God as Creator, by carefully observing creation. However, while creation may be able to reveal a little about God, it is insufficient to understand the depth of God's love. To really know God, you must know Jesus.

What is necessary is what John Calvin calls, "the spectacles of faith." Calvin says a person who does not yet know Jesus is like a person with a sight problem: everything is blurry. We see vague inklings of God, but do not really know Him. But when you put on spectacles of faith, you can see clearly. So, when the Holy Spirit works within a person or someone reads the Scriptures and responds by faith, their mind is cleared through regeneration and they are able to see the truth. Looking just at creation we see God indistinctly – but when we meet Jesus, put our faith in Him, and allow His Spirit to fill us, we see Him in all His glory.

Praise God that creation may be a starting point in someone's faith journey. Pray for those you know, who needs Jesus, that maybe observing God's glory around them might inspire them to search for Jesus ...

*I am a lowly creature, but I am still God's servant,
and I hope that he will choose to wake me from slumber.
I hope that he will set me on fire with the flame of his divine love,
the flame that burns above the stars,
so that I am filled with desire for his love and his fire burns always within me.
I hope that my little lamp should burn all night in the temple of the Lord, this world,
and shine on all who enter the house of God.
Lord, I beg you in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and my God,
give me a love that cannot stumble so that my lamp can be lit but can never go out:
let it burn in me and give light to others.
And you, Christ, our gentle Saviour, in your kindness
light our lamps so that they shine forever in your world
and lighten our darkness and dispel the shadows of the earth.
I beg you, my Jesus, fill my lamp with your light.
By its light let me see the holiest of holy places, your own temple – your world –
where you enter as the eternal High Priest of the eternal mysteries.*

*Let me see you, watch you, desire you.
Let me love you as I see you,
and before you let my lamp always shine, always burn.
Beloved Saviour, show yourself to us who beg a glimpse of you.
Let us know you, let us love you, let us love only you, let us desire you alone,
let us spend our days and nights meditating on you alone,
let us always be thinking of you.*

*Fill us with love of you, let us love you with all the love that is your right as our God.
Let that love fill us and possess us,
let it overwhelm our senses until we can love nothing but you, for you are eternal.
Give us that love that all the waters of the sea, the earth, the sky cannot extinguish:
as it is written, love that no flood can quench, no torrents drown.
To you be glory forever and forever. Amen.*

Columbanus (543-615)

Idea for the day: Take a walk in a park

Wednesday, June 13: Job 1-2

It may seem odd to continue this conversation about God's amazing creation with Job. Job is a good, righteous, godly person. He worships God faithfully and shows genuine spiritual concern for his family. The book of Job tells of Job's experiences through terrible troubles and sufferings within God's creation. But what can we learn about God and His creation through Job? Be patient. We'll see ...

The book raises one of those huge life-questions: the problem of evil. How can an all-loving, all-powerful God allow good people to suffer while evil people – or those who deliberately rebel against God – seem to prosper? Conventional human wisdom suggests that, if you are good and godly you should be blessed in this life; if you reject God, disobey His commands, and sin, you should expect suffering in this life. Therefore, if you are suffering, you must have sinned; if you are prospering, you must be good.

But life isn't like that, is it? Why not? The book of Job wrestles with the disparity between what we might expect and what we actually experience.

The book also gives us insight into Satan. His strategy is not to lure Job into little acts of sin (lies, violence, sexual immorality), but to tempt him into the BIG SIN of giving up on God altogether. He is tempting Job to walk away from "*loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.*" Ultimately Satan's goal for each of us is that he break up our relationship with God – that he get us to give up on Jesus – that he bring us to the point of rejecting the Holy Spirit's voice in our lives.

Having read these chapters we are wiser people. We know Satan's goals:

- to spiritually discourage us ("Life is not 'fair' [in my sense of how things ought to work]");
- to separate us from God ("How could a loving God allow this to happen to me?");
- to cause us to ignore the Spirit's voice ("Where is God when it hurts? He seems too far away.");
- to give up on prayer ("It doesn't seem to change anything, anyway. I pray but get no answer.").

When I feel like this, I need to remember where those feelings come from.² They are NOT from God.

In Hebrews 13, I read, "*God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you' (Deuteronomy 31:6-8). So I can say with confidence, 'The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?' (Psalm 118:6).*" Jesus says, "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

*Lord Jesus Christ,
You have called us to be Your people in the world.
Through Your Holy Spirit,
You have given us all various gifts to minister in Your name.
In the power of the same Spirit,
help us so to respond to Your call,
and so to use Your gifts,
that we be good stewards in your world,
build up Your Church together
and bring others to know God in You.
Work in me, Lord Jesus,
that I might live for you this day and all days.
Amen.*

Welsh Prayer

Idea for the day: Start a compost pile/bin

² A wonderful book to help you reflect on this is CS Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. Tongue-in-cheek, Lewis writes letters from a senior devil to a younger tempter on how to lead a person away from God. It's helpful to think about how Satan might be tempting me ...

Thursday, June 14: Job 3

Job is **not** suffering because he is a bad person (Ok, he might be a bit self-righteous, but generally he is a good guy). If you are having a rough time, it **may** be because you have made bad choices and have sinned, but it **may not** be because of that, either. It **may** be "just because ..." – no discernible cause.

Job does stay loyal to God. As a result, his conscience is clear. Although his suffering was extraordinary, his pain was not compounded by guilt. Open rebellion and blatant sin can add to our suffering by piling guilt onto our pain. We can make our situation much worse by making poor choices. What might I be doing that is making things worse in my life? Keep the faith. Would/ could I do that in his circumstances?

Job does not suffer in silence. Far from it. He complains to God and argues with his friends. Whatever else a relationship with God includes, it certainly has room for an openness based on trust and the security of His love: we can be honest and transparent with God our perfect, loving, heavenly Father. A good family has room for honest communication and complaint. Jeremiah, David, Habakkuk – even Jesus – complained to God and found comfort in their suffering. Lord, hear me as I speak to You, honestly, with all my emotions.

Friends are important during tough times. But you also must be a bit wary of their advice. Job's friends are a bit simplistic, naïve, and not always helpful. They blame Job for all his problems.

Relationships are great but be cautious of uncritically accepting all your friends' counsel and "wisdom." Ultimately "*God is our refuge and strength, our ever-present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear ...*" He is the one who can help me in the tough times.

*Good Jesus, you have graciously allowed me
to drink in the sweetness of your word.
Lord God, open my heart and illuminate it
with the grace of your Holy Spirit.
Spirit, may I always seek to do what is pleasing to you;
direct my thoughts and feelings
so that I may at last come to the unending joys of heaven.
Thus, on earth may I keep your commandments,
and so be worthy of your everlasting reward.

May your Spirit, O Christ, lead me in the right way,
keeping me safe from all forces of evil and destruction.
May I search diligently in your Holy Word
to discover with the eyes of my mind your commandments.

Give me the strength of will
to put those commandments into practice through all the days of my life.
At the last, I pray, you will bring me into your presence,
that I may listen to your voice which is the source of all wisdom,
and watch your face forever.
Amen*

Bede (672-735)

Idea for the Day: Make your own birthday/special event cards

Friday, June 15: Job 27 and James 5:7-12 (Sunday's sermon text)

Wouldn't it be great if good people were always blessed? Wouldn't it be right if evil people always got what they deserved? That's the way the world SHOULD work. Does it?

Back in April-May we read Solomon's wisdom in Ecclesiastes. He struggled with the same questions. As Solomon observed the real world, he saw how often unjust people do prosper, while the righteous suffer. This is the real world in which we live.

Job – a righteous man – wants to believe things are totally predictable. Job 27 SOUNDS great (this is Job speaking, NOT God). We'd like to believe evil people will get their just desserts and righteous people will be blessed. But in the real world, it doesn't always work that way. For Job this is bad news and good news. The bad news is that awful things do happen to good people. The good news is that, given Job is suffering, his pain does NOT mean he is being judged as a bad person.

Tom McLeish, Professor of Physics at Durham University, UK, preached a sermon on Job at Durham Cathedral: "*Job, a rich and righteous man has lost family, wealth, herds, house and even his health. He sits, scraping his sores and tormented by his so-called friends. For their brittle religious world views can only explain his suffering by supposing it to be divine retribution for sins – and they choose to let him know it. He feels the injustice keenly and demands vindication, yet they become increasingly personal in their accusations.*"³ Job's "comforters" – his friends – still operating with a simplistic good= blessing, evil=suffering worldview have been accusing Job of being a miserable sinner.

How do we come to grips with the mystery and challenge of a world in which things don't always go as **we** think they should? Where the rain falls on the just and the unjust? Where suffering happens to the good as well as the not-so-good? Where a "brittle religious world view" – in which good people experience good things and bad people endure hardships – doesn't match with reality?

One of the reasons we're beginning with Job is that the book is recognized as one of the oldest books in our Bible. It is interesting that Job, one of the earliest writings in Scripture, deals with one of the most challenging theological issues: the problem of evil.

Jesus recognizes this ambiguity as He says, "*You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect*" (Matthew 5:44-48). Yes, we live in a mysterious and (what we might consider) unfair world. We are called to live with integrity – and compassion – as the people of God within it.

*God to enfold me; God to surround me;
God in my speaking; God in my thinking.
God in my sleeping; God in my waking;
God in my watching; God in my hoping.
God in my life; God in my lips;
God in my hands; God in my heart.
God in my working; God in my slumber;
God in my soul; God in my eternity.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: combine errands while driving so you don't need to make several trips

Saturday, June 16: Job 28

You might wonder why I quote Dr. Tom McLeish, a Professor Physics, as an expert on Job. In fact, he is obsessed with Job. He has written two books focusing on the relationship of Job with science. This is how he continues his sermon on Job: "*Job 28 sings with a new voice into the spiraling and tense arguments and accusations of this extraordinary book ... What on earth is going on? Indeed, what **under the earth** is going on? The text takes us down a mine shaft! It muses on the special human ability to dig down and so see the Earth from beneath – the precious stones glinting in the miners' lamplight, the seams of gold and*

³ <https://tcbmcleish.wordpress.com/category/wisdom-literature/page/3/>

silver. Not even the falcon's sharp eye can perceive all this – the hidden sources of rivers.

"The passage actually condenses a theme that runs right through the book alongside that of unjust suffering – it's about the way we fashion our relationship with the physical world around us. It concerns where we go – 'there is a path...', what we see – 'unseen be eye of falcon', what we understand – 'bringing to light what is hidden' and what we do – 'they split open channels in the rocks'.

"Some translators have found this language so powerful that they have turned the subject of this deep seeing from humans to God. But as a scientist I see in this a fitting metaphor for what we do – there really is an astonishing human ability to explore nature from beneath its surface and to understand its workings."

"In a comical game of hide and seek we look for wisdom in all the land – no, not there – at the bottom of the sea – no, not here either. Perhaps significantly we follow the wisdom trail to the opulent markets of Cush and Ophir. Old Testament scholar Carol Newsome notes the measure of their wealth – five different words are used for gold in as many verses! But wisdom is not to be found in the marketplace.

"Finally the writer 'draws back the curtain' and reveals why God knows the way to wisdom. Divine wisdom begins with a new deep way of seeing – 'He looked to the ends of the earth.' Divine wisdom finds ways of channeling nature's forces, not suppressing them – 'he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderbolt.' Divine wisdom participates in what Paul Fiddes has called 'Seeing the World and knowing God' – it becomes an invitation to us to follow in Wisdom's way of living. Wisdom is not an object we could possess, nor an accumulation of precepts and aphorisms. It is a way of seeing into the world, a way of serving creation, a way of partnering with each other and with our Creator."

God's wisdom, revealed to us in His creation, invite us to "see" in a new way. We are invited to see God's creation as GOD'S creation, in all its wonder and mystery. When we do so, we see things differently:

- God's creation – all of it (not just people) – is beautiful, good, and precious.
- God's creation is intentional, masterfully designed.
- God's creation is far more complex, nuanced, and balanced than we can comprehend.
- God's creation calls us to humility, reverence, awe, and a healthy "fear of the Lord."

Job 28 invites us to a new sense of our place in God's creation. Yes, we are incredibly valuable. But so is all of His world: how then should we live? He calls us to a renewed sense of humility in the presence of God's wisdom and power: how then should we live?

*I arise today through a mighty strength:
God's power to guide me;
God's might to uphold me;
God's eyes to watch over me;
God's ear to hear me;
God's word to give me speech;
God's hand to guard me;
God's way to lie before me;
God's shield to shelter me,
God's host to secure me.
Amen*

Brigid of Kildare (451-525)

Idea for the day: Consider a clothesline/rack rather than the dryer

Sunday, June 17: Job 38

Job 4-37 contain a series of conversations between Job and his friends, a litany of Job's complaints, and a long "lecture" by one of Job's friends, Elihu. They make for interesting (if a bit depressing) reading. Job defends his innocence and his righteousness. His friends argue this cannot be true (they operate in a

simplistic, "If-you-are-suffering-then-you-must-have-sinned" world).

Job questions God's goodness and power ... How can God really be good while allowing godly people to suffer and the evil to prosper?

In Job 38, God answers Job in His own time and His own way. He does not wade into the interminable debate between Job and his buddies. He does not "defend" Himself or give a direct answer to Job's persistent question about "fairness" (as Job defines it) in the universe. God's "answer" is surprising.

God deals with Job's question by showing His power at work in the universe. Does Job have the power to create and to understand heaven and earth, stars and sea, morning and night, light and darkness, snow and hail, etc.? God is so much bigger than Job can comprehend. And His ways are so far beyond my understanding of "fairness" or "how things should work." I cannot understand God's creation, let alone God, Himself, in all His infinite power and glory. His works are beyond me – His ways far beyond me.

"Wildness is God's underlying message to Job, the one trait his creation all shares. God is celebrating his created world which will never be domesticated by human beings. Evidently, wildness serves an essential function in the world as God sees it. It brings us down a notch, reminding us of what we prefer to forget: our creatureliness. It also announces to our senses the splendor of an invisible, untamable God. The heavens declare the glory of God; and so do breaching whales and pronging springbok." (Philip Yancey)

How is God's speech an answer to Job's "problem of evil"? How does this chapter speak to me?

*O God, listen to my prayer.
Let my earnest petition come to You,
for I know that You are hearing me as surely as though I saw You with mine eyes.
Anything that is amiss for my soul,
may You, O God, sweep it from me.
And may You shield me in the blood of Your love.*

*Let no thought come to my heart,
let no sound come to my ear,
let no temptation come to my eye,
let no fragrance come to my nose,
let no fancy come to my mind,
let no ruffle come to my spirit,
that is hurtful to my body or ill for my soul.
May You yourself, O God of life, be at my breast, be at my back,
You to me as a star,
You to me as a guide, from my life's beginning to my life's closing.
Amen*

Celtic Prayer

Idea for the day: Donate your no-longer-useful clothes to charity

Monday, June 18: Job 39

God goes on to confront Job with his human limitations and God's own infinite power and knowledge. (As an aside, note that each animal in God's incredible menagerie is unique – not only in appearance, but also in behaviour. What an incredible, diverse, beautiful, and glorious world God has created ...)

"God is paying Job the greatest compliment a teacher can give a student. Instead of giving answers, God only asks questions. Instead of stating conclusions, God presents facts. Induction, not deduction, is God's method of teaching. He might have pronounced His conclusion to Job and then presented the supporting facts as a deductive teacher. If He had done so, Job's fear of being 'swallowed up' would have been realized. But God shows how much He cares for His creation by refusing to violate Job's freedom or insult his intelligence. God gives Job assorted facts and counts on him to make the connections, see the meaning,

and apply his understanding to the next higher and more complex level of learning” (David McKenna).

God is inviting Job to think. If the great God who created such an amazing universe is in charge of things, are things really out of control? Even the greatest human minds cannot know ALL there is to know about God’s creation, so how can we think we know how the universe should run? When things happen to us, who are we to pass judgment on what is “fair” or “unfair”? How could we possibly know such things?

God is challenging Job to recognize his own “finite-ness” and God’s “infinite-ness.” How is reflecting on my “finite-ness” helpful? On God’s “infinite-ness”? What is God saying to me through this chapter?

*I arise today, through the mighty strength, the power of the Trinity,
Through belief in the three-ness,
through confession of the one-ness
of the Creator of creation.*

*I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection and His ascension.*

*I arise today through the strength of heaven:
Light of sun, radiance of moon,
splendor of fire, speed of lightning,
swiftness of wind, depth of sea,
stability of earth, firmness of rock.*

*I arise today through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me from snares of devils,
from temptations of vices,
from everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and anear, alone and in multitude.*

*Christ to shield me today.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

*I arise today, through the mighty strength, the power of the Trinity,
Through belief in the three-ness,
through confession of the one-ness
of the Creator of creation.*

Amen

attributed to St. Patrick (died 493?)

Idea for the day: Read a book; don't watch TV or YouTube.

Tuesday, June 19: Job 40

Job has been "blown away," literally (remember God is speaking "out of a whirlwind" [Job 38:1]) and figuratively [Job 40:3-5]). But God isn't finished with Job yet.

Remember we are created "in God's image." God is doing Job a huge favour (maybe?) by taking him into His confidence and telling Job what is on His mind. God never answers the "why" question: "*Why do bad things happen to good people?*" or "*Why do the wicked prosper?*" Instead God chooses to answer a "who" question: "*Who created the heavens and the earth?*" and "*Who is in charge of things?*" The "who" question makes the "why" question irrelevant. If we know who God is, we can trust Him with the whys. We don't need to know "why" if we have faith in the WHO: the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise Creator.

Sometimes we get it backwards: we create God "in our image." We impose on Him **our** ideas of right and wrong. We limit His wisdom to what **we** think is fair or unfair. We create a "little God" – an idol – who looks a lot like us.

"Job shatters idols in people's minds and leaves a realistic picture of God. This view of the free God opens people to mysterious purposes, to righteous goals in the suffering He may allow. He is seen as mighty but not mean, victorious but not vindictive. He will work good through suffering, even though one rightly may hate every bit of the pain"(William LaSor). His ways are beyond our knowledge.

"Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge. How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways. For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice? And who has given him so much that he needs to pay it back? For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36).

*In the beginning, O God, You shaped my soul and set its weave.
You formed my body and gave it breath.
Renew me this day in Your image, the image of Your love.
O great God, grant me Your light.
O great God, grant me Your grace.
O great God, grant me Your joy this day,
and let me be made pure through Your Spirit.
O Healer of the wounded,
hear my prayers for those who are hurting ...
O Saviour of the broken,
hear my prayers for those who have fallen ...
O Guide to the wandering,
hear my prayers for those who are lost ...
God before me, God behind me,
God above me, God beneath me,
Keep me on Your path, O Lord.
And be with me, on my way, O God:
With me in the twistings of the road,
with me in the currents of the river,
With me by day, with me by night.
Amen.*

Philip Newell

Idea for the day: Recycle your plastics, paper, cans, plastic, cardboard

Wednesday, June 20: Job 41

I wonder if God ever gets tired of my bickering and complaining about what I think is unfair in my life ... and if He might, someday, blow me away like He did Job? Chances are He may not give me a lecture on cosmology, geology, and biology ... but I know He could put me in my place pretty quickly if He wanted to.

Maybe I need to be careful what I pray for. I might just get an answer that I don't expect. And I may not be able to handle it when He speaks to me. In Job 41, God continues to make His point to Job.

Job 38-41 challenge us to see the world in a new way. As scientists continue to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos, God reminds us that we are (to quote, Johannes Kepler, founder of physical astronomy), merely, *"Thinking God's thoughts after Him."* The "discoveries" we get so excited about are not news to God – He created it all in the first place. We are just learning more about who God really is.

Rodney Holder, an astrophysicist writing about contemporary atheistic discussions on cosmic origins, concludes, *"In the end, surely it is far more rational to believe that the universe was deliberately designed by God, with the express intention of producing intelligent beings with the capacity for a relationship with their Maker, than the alternative of a multiverse minus God. Indulging in wild and totally unscientific speculation about hypothetical, unobservable universes, the vast majority of which are completely dead and boring, in order to explain the very special nature of this particular one, looks irrational."*

God's point in all this is to emphasize to Job that, despite appearances, He is still God. He chooses to give His creation tremendous freedom ("leviathan" can do what he pleases.). And within that freedom is the possibility to do tremendous good and incredible evil. But love, necessarily, permits freedom. No freedom = no love. And within that freedom all sorts of good ... and not so good ... things are allowed to happen.

How can knowing that God is the Creator of the universe encourage you today?

*Be a bright flame before me, O God,
a guiding star above me.
Be a smooth path below me,
a kindly shepherd behind me today, tonight, and forever.
Alone with none but you, my God, I journey on my way;
what need I fear when you are near, O Lord of night and day?
More secure am I within your hand
than if a multitude did round me stand.
Amen.*

Columba (521-597)

Idea for the day: Pick up a random piece of litter

Thursday, June 21: Job 42

Job's response (42:1-6) is a wonderful model of the attitude I am called to have before God. *"The LORD has told you what is good,"* writes the prophet Micah, *"and this is what He requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8). Job did right. Job loved mercy. Now Job needs to learn to walk humbly with God.

What about me?

- Do I "do what is right"? How is God challenging me to be a more "righteous" person?
- Do I "love mercy"? Are there people I need to forgive? To help? To care for?
- Do I "walk humbly with God"? What does that mean for me?

God does not promise material prosperity, health, and wealth in this (limited and finite) life. Like Job, I need to be able to let these comforts go; they may disappear in an instant.

But God does promise us an eternal home where *"God will wipe every tear from your eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

How is that an encouragement today? And He also promises His presence every moment of every day. In a sense we already experience "heaven" through His Holy Spirit within us – right here, right now.

*Living God, who turns dry land into pools of water;
lead us to the spring of eternal life.
May we drink and be satisfied,
and become channels of Your grace.
May those who still thirst find in You the water without price.
Enable me to play my part in leading them to You,
the never-failing fountain of life.
Amen*

Welsh prayer

Idea for the day: driving? – accelerate and decelerate slowly (it saves gas.)

Friday, June 22: Proverbs 1:1-7, Psalm 14

A "fool," in the Bible, is not a comic buffoon. Rather, a "fool" can be a serious, knowledgeable person ... who does not know how to apply his knowledge wisely in his life. A fool can be a smart person with lousy ethics. One of the fool's blind spots is not recognizing God. "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline*" (Proverbs 1:7). The fool does not see the Creator as the architect of Creation: "*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'*" (Psalm 14:1).

Christians have always been among the leaders in scientific enquiry. We know that as we study the world we are learning about God (God's creation). We know that just as we can learn much about an artist by studying her paintings, we can learn much about God by studying His creation. Scientific enquiry is a profoundly religious activity. Many leading Christian scientists approach their work this way.

Since the nineteenth century, however, conflict has developed between *some* (not all) Christians and *some* (not all) scientists. Vicious verbal and legal battles ensued over a variety of issues:

- Science was supposed to explain things logically and naturally. Religion was perceived to explain things entirely in terms of the miraculous, without logic or reason.
- Science purported to deal with facts, which could be observed and proved. Christianity was supposed to deal only with values and emotions, which were unverifiable.
- Science was considered to be logical and progressive. Christianity was alleged to be based on an illogical leap of faith, and to be opposed to progress (even regressive).

Note that none of these assertions is accurate. Christian scientists, while acknowledging the reality of the miraculous, still seek order, logic, and reason; they believe God create the universe in an orderly, logical way. Christianity does deal with facts – about creation, human history, Jesus' life and death, etc. While Christianity does involve a leap of faith (about the WHO of creation), so does a belief in no God (not believing in God is a faith position as well). Some Christians have been opposed to "progress," but so have some non-Christians.

Some scientists have suggested that if a phenomenon can be explained "naturally" or logically, God must not exist. Some Christians, unfortunately, have often encouraged this idea, agreeing with the assertion that God only exists in the "gaps" – the "supernatural" parts of experience which science cannot yet explain (the problem is that as we learn more and more, the "God of the gaps" gets squeezed out). These Christians are put in the awkward position of having to "believe the Bible" against the "facts of science."

The Bible, however does not distinguish between the "natural" and the "supernatural." God is seen as just as active in the daily revolution of the Earth as in the provision of miraculous quail from heaven in Exodus. God is just as real, whether his methods and creation can be described logically by science, or whether they appear to be miraculous. Science is rightly seen by Christians, not as in any way disproving God, as in proving how amazingly God created the world and continues to sustain it. Science is really a branch of theology – as we do good science, we are learning about the God who establishes and sustains order.

Jean Bodin (1539-96), French lawyer, politician, and philosopher, wrote: *"We have come into the theatre of this world for no other reason than to understand the admirable power, goodness, and wisdom of the most excellent Creator of all things, to the extent that this is possible, by contemplating the appearance of the universe and all His actions and individual works, and thus be swept away more ardently in praise of Him."*

How can we celebrate God's wisdom – from science? From the Bible? How can science help us know God better? How can God help us "do science" better?

*I am bending my knee before my Father, who created me,
before the Son, who died for me;
before the Spirit, who cleanses me, in love and worship.
Pour down upon me from heaven the rich blessing of Your forgiveness, O Lord;
You who are holy and pure, please be patient with me.
O Savior of glory, please give me a true knowledge of God,
His love and His direction,
that I may do the will of God on earth at all times
as angels and saints do in heaven;
and each day and each night please give me Your peace.
Please give me Your peace.
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer

Idea for the day: Plan to turn your thermostat down one degree in winter

Saturday, June 23: Proverbs 8:22-36

"The prime mission of the Book of Proverbs is to set out strikingly, memorably, and concisely just what it means to be fully at God's disposal" (William LaSor).

Proverbs 8:22-31 is a wonderful description of creation: God's wisdom is part and parcel of the world we enjoy. The natural world is not some random thing that has haphazardly evolved, it is the work of the Great Artist, God, created with order and purpose. Creation bears witness to God's wisdom, just as a great building bears witness to the genius of its designer. For instance, St. Paul's Cathedral (London) is considered one of the most beautiful buildings ever designed/built. There is no monument to the architect, Sir Christopher Wren, in the cathedral. Instead, there is an inscription over the door: *"If you are looking for a memorial, look around you."* Wren's creative masterpiece in his memorial. God's creation is His memorial.

We've mentioned Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who studied planetary motion, optics, and mathematics (thank him for calculus.), who wrote his pursuit of the natural sciences was *"thinking God's thoughts after Him."* Kepler's scientific research was a spiritual journey to understand the Creator through His creation.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) - physicist, mathematician, and astronomer - wrote, *"This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. And if the fixed stars are the centres of other like systems, these, being formed by the like wise counsel, must be all subject to the dominion of One ... This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all."* (Newton is also reported to have said: *"In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence."*)

Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), a botanist who devised "scientific names" for species (e.g. the American Robin is *turdus migratorius* ... yes, it really is.), believed God created everything in orderly fashion. Part of our role as humans is to discover that order. Then, he argued, we can make wise choices as God's stewards.

John Polkinghorne, Professor of Mathematical Physics and President of Queen's College, Cambridge (co-discoverer of quarks), writes: *"The world in which we actually live is multilayered in the richness of its reality. One of the attractions of the Christian account is that, in seeing the will and nature of the Creator underlying and unifying the varieties of human experience, it makes this richness more intelligible. Our*

scientific explorations are insights into the rational order with which God has endowed his universe. Our experiences of beauty are a sharing in his joy in creation. Our moral perceptions are intuitions of his good and perfect will. Our religious experiences are encounters with his hidden presence. Such a view is whole and satisfying."

Note: these folks not only see God's handiwork in creation, but also see the moral imperative that we live differently as a result (see Proverbs 8:32-36). Throughout Scripture, simply "knowing" the right thing is not true wisdom: "*knowing AND doing*" the right thing characterizes the wise person. Lord, help me be wise.

*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)

Sunday, June 24: Proverbs 9:1-12

Aside from "fools" – who know the truth but don't do it – there are "mockers": "*The proud and arrogant man – 'Mocker' is his name; he behaves with overweening pride*" (Proverbs 21:24). The mocker is a cynic – he is contemptuous of virtue and "good" people; he is sarcastic; he sneers at those who believe in God.

We know these people in the world –

- They are those who argue Christians are not too bright because they believe in God.
- They are, perhaps, those Christians, who mock those in the sciences as being close-minded.

Both science and Christianity deal with evidence – facts. Science does deal directly with evidence we can see, touch, and measure in our world. Christianity does deal with evidence about historical events, places, and personalities. For instance, we can investigate the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The facts of the Bible and the facts of science are complementary, not contradictory.

The scientific method insists you consider the evidence and construct a *theory* that best explains the evidence and predicts future events. *Theories are guesses – well-informed guesses, but guesses nevertheless.* In order for something to be proved (a *law*) you must demonstrate that there are never – ever – any exceptions. For centuries, people considered Newton's theories to be inviolable laws – until Einstein demonstrated they were false. In the natural sciences ...

- there are very few proven *laws* – none of which contradict the Bible.
- there are lots of *theories* (*unproved guesses*) – some of which are presented as laws, but which are still only speculation.

Good scientists will be very careful to distinguish between *laws* and *theories*. Alas some scientists, because of their values, will present theories as law (proven facts). This is poor science.

At the same time, Christianity cannot be "proved" (or disproved) scientifically. We can provide compelling logical arguments for the existence of God, the deity of Jesus, and the resurrection (see Josh MacDowell's, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* or Lee Strobel's, *The Case for Christ, The Case for a Creator* and *The Case for Faith*). But people can question the evidence. Historical events and personages are notoriously hard to "prove" (consider the debate over whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays credited to him ... or

whether a person named Shakespeare even existed.). The evidence supporting the Bible record is overwhelming (see, for instance, F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*).

Both science and Christianity deal with values. Values influence the questions scientists ask, the way they conduct their research, and how they interpret the results. The current debate on medical and reproductive technologies (e.g. cloning, stem cell research), for instance, is a discussion about values. Christian values influence how we make choices and conduct our lives, also. Some people suggest the "facts" of science and Christianity are contradictory when what they are really talking about are their *values*.

Both science and Christianity require a leap of faith. Christianity demands that at some point a person simply believes Jesus is God and places their faith in Him. Scientism (unqualified faith in science) can insist we take the leap of faith to believe only what we can perceive with our senses is true. But what of emotions like love? Values like beauty? We know these things exist, but we cannot see, smell, touch, or measure them. Most scientists acknowledge that science has limits; it cannot deal with values or emotions.

Science and Christianity complement one another. Science emphasizes the ***what*** of creation, but says little about the purpose or value of creation. Christianity addresses the ***purpose*** and the ***value*** ("it was good") and ***who*** (God) of creation, but does not speak in detail about the ***what*** and ***how it works*** of creation. *There is absolutely no logical contradiction between being a good scientist and being a solid Christian.*

"The Lord mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble." (Proverbs 3:34)

*Lord, we have fallen into sin,
we have fallen into wickedness,
we have fallen into evil.
Lord, lift us up and set us free.*

*Lord, we have fallen into rebellion,
we have fallen into disobedience,
we have fallen into unrighteousness.
Lord, lift us up and set us free.*

*Lord, we have fallen into despair,
we have fallen into disillusionment,
we have fallen into depression.
Lord, lift us up and set us free.*

*Lord, we have fallen into loneliness,
we have fallen into darkness,
we have fallen into hell.
Lord, lift us up and set us free.*

*We come to You, Lord,
for You alone can heal and restore us.
We are not able to heal ourselves;
we are not able to forgive ourselves;
we are not able to restore ourselves;
we are not able to sanctify ourselves;
we are not able to satisfy ourselves.*

*We come to You, Lord,
for You alone can make us whole.
Amen.*

David Adam

Idea for the day: shower a minute less (even better, turn off the water while you lather up)
or run your bath 2 cm (about 1 inch) less deep

Monday, June 25: Colossians 1:1-14

Who am I? Who are you? Colossians 1:1-14 are packed with important truths about who we are as God's creation, created male and female, "in His image."

- 1:1-3: We are "saints" ("holy people"), "brother and sisters in Christ" (with one another, also with Jesus). Do I think of myself as a "saint"? Why? Why not? What does it mean to me that God sees me as His "holy one"? What does it mean that other people in the church are my "brothers and sisters in Christ"? What does it mean that Jesus is my "brother" as well as my Lord and Saviour?
- 1:4-5: We are eternal beings. That gives us faith ... and love for all God's people. How does knowing God has a place for me change how I live? How can Jesus help me love other people?
 - Our faith and hope come from Jesus – through His life He showed us how to live; through His death He paid the price for our sins so we can again enjoy that perfect relationship with God; and through His resurrection He established once and for all His all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing authority over everything. How does that affect me?
- 1:6-8: The good news about Jesus is out of our control. It's going all over the world. How is that an encouragement to me? Love for others is a gift of God's Spirit. Lord, give me this gift, I pray.
- 1:9-12: What does Paul pray for me?
 - Knowledge of His will
 - Wisdom and understanding through the Holy Spirit
 - So my life honours and pleases God
 - So I bear fruit (a metaphor reminiscent of the trees in Genesis 2)
 - So I learn to know God better and better
 - Strength by His power so I may endure and learn patience
 - That I may know joy from God
 - That I may be thankful.
- 1:13-14: How is this possible? Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection (see notes for v.4-5).

This is a glorious vision and prayer for the restoration of that perfect relationship Adam and Eve had with one another and with God in the garden. And it's a prayer for a restoration of my vocation as one modeling God's love to other people and His creation. It **IS** possible for me to love other people – including those who are hard to love – and to live well in God's creation, because of what Jesus has done in history (the cross and resurrection) and what He is doing in me, today, through the Holy Spirit. I pray this prayer:

*I ask, You, O God,
to give me a more complete knowledge of Your will
and to give me spiritual wisdom and understanding.
May the way I live will always honor and please you, Lord,
and may my life produce every kind of good fruit.
All the while, may I grow as I learn to know You, my God, better and better.*

*I also pray that I will be strengthened with all Your glorious power
so I will have all the endurance and patience I need.
May I be filled with joy, always thanking You, my Father.*

*You have enabled me to share in the inheritance that belongs to Your people,
who live in the light.*

*For you have rescued me from the kingdom of darkness
and transferred me into the Kingdom of Your dear Son,
who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.
Thank you, my King, my Saviour, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

Idea for the day: buy in bulk (it's cheaper per unit, and uses less packaging)

Tuesday, June 26: Colossians 1:15-23

These verses pick up on the amazing work of Jesus in re-establishing a perfect renewed and restored relationship with God. And they help us re-understand our vocation to serve and preserve His creation.

There is a fundamental goodness to the world Jesus both created and reconciled to Himself through His death and resurrection. One day, some day, it will be perfected, when Jesus returns again.

Tom Mcleish comments, *"Colossians 1 tells us why we do not need to despair when evil happens, how, when all around is dark, it is not hopeless – any more than, as it turned out, Job's state was hopeless even at his own lowest point."*

"Paul writes to the early church in Colossae – using the same subject matter as in the Hymn to Wisdom (in Job 28), but transformed. Here are again all created things, here the visible and the hidden things both, here also the aching need to reconcile all that is broken in the world. But now, in the same transept that draws all these together, in the place that the Book of Job assigned to Wisdom, Paul sees Jesus."

"And the reason that this gives him hope is not that the darkness and death that threaten never come, not that the task of living as part of a complex and troubled world is not painful, but that because of Christ's entering all this, going through death but into the new life of the resurrection, hope turns from wistfulness into solid reality."

The Wisdom of God is Jesus:

- **Read verses 15-20 several times** *"with the ear of your heart"* – listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Listen for God's still small voice speaking to you. What phrase speaks to you the most? What themes resonate with your soul? Read slowly, attentively, listening to God ...
- **Ponder it in your heart.** Reflect on God's Word. Mull it over. What does it mean to you today?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life – with all of the changes that need to happen – to God. *"Lord, make this part of my life ..."*
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. If a special phrase or thought continues to resonate in your soul, celebrate it before God. Praise Him.

Now

- **Read verses 21-23 several times** *"with the ear of your heart"* – listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Listen for God's still small voice speaking to you. What phrase speaks to you the most? What themes resonate with your soul? Read slowly, attentively, listening to God ...
- **Ponder it in your heart.** Reflect on God's Word. Mull it over. What does it mean to you today?
- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you, personally, offer your life – with all of the changes that need to happen – to God. *"Lord, make this part of my life ..."*
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. If a special phrase or thought continues to resonate in your soul, celebrate it before God. Praise Him.

*You are the place to hide from harm;
You are the light that shines in dark;
You are the heart's eternal spark;
You are the door that's open wide;
You are the guest who waits inside;
You are the stranger at the door;
You are the calling of the poor;
You are my Lord and with me from ill;
You are the light, the truth, the way;
You are my Saviour this very day.
Amen.*

Celtic Prayer

Idea for the day: Buy energy-efficient stuff ... from light bulbs to cars.

Wednesday, June 27: Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-14

If I were to repeat the first line of this series, *"I'm encouraging us to think about God, His creation, and how we live responsibly in and care for His world,"* you might assume we would start with Genesis 1. After all it is Page 1 of the Bible. Remember, however, our Bibles are a library of 66 different books, written by various authors at various times. Their order is rather arbitrary. As a people of the resurrected Jesus, we could make a case for starting the Bible with one of the gospels or even the book of Acts. As people awake, alert and anticipating Jesus' return, we might suggest Revelation ought to be the first book. All this to say, it is not divine revelation, but an arbitrary human decision that Genesis 1:1 is the beginning of our Bibles.

I also wanted us (1) to begin to see that there are many creation passages in the Bible: Genesis 1-2 are just two of many creation narratives, and (2) to keep the New Testament emphasis of Jesus as the Wisdom in and through whom all things are created in perspective. If we always begin with Genesis 1, we can get sidetracked into (frankly silly) debates about the age of the Earth that are not helpful, divisive, poor biblical scholarship, and barriers to many people coming to faith in Jesus.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is a wonderful – powerful – statement. What does it say about God? About the universe and world around us? About ourselves?

- God and His creation are **not** two more-or-less equally powerful entities or principles (as in Plato);
- the Earth is **not** somehow divine itself (as in pantheism or other spiritualities);
- God is in no way limited by creation, although He usually chooses to work within and through creation in orderly, predictable (scientific) ways.

John, in John 1:1-3, is deliberately echoing the phrases from Genesis 1 (and Proverbs 8:22-31). Echoes of life, light, darkness, and the Word, intentionally tie back to Genesis 1, as well. Why? What's John's point?

John is not replacing Genesis 1, rather he is giving us a new way to read Genesis 1. John wants us to read Genesis 1 in terms of Jesus, co-creator with the Father and the Spirit. All history – from beginning to end – is really all about Jesus. When we read the entire Bible as the story of God's creation and redemption story, fulfilled through Jesus' death and resurrection, we see Jesus differently – He was, is, and is to come – and we see the world differently – Jesus has always been, is still, and will always be involved in His creation.

John shows us how, through Jesus, creation is renewed, the image of God in humanity is re-envisioned and reinstated, and our relationship with God (and his creation) is restored. John 1 is a poetic explanation of light overcoming darkness and a human being revealed fully in the image of God (for a brilliant interweaving of these Genesis 1/John 1 themes, check out this 3 minute video by New Testament scholar, Tom Wright: <http://ntwrightonline.org/how-john-weaves-creation-exodus-and-jesus-together/>)

Sometimes we think Jesus did not exist before He was born as a person in Bethlehem. John – like Paul in Colossians 1:15-17 – challenges us to have a much BIGGER concept of God as Father, Son, and Spirit – before all, creator of all, sustainer of all, and eternally beyond all: *"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see – such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together."*

In Revelation 1:8, Jesus says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end, the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come – the Almighty One."* Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-3 introduce us to God and to Jesus in BIGGER ways. How does this change how you think about Jesus?

"Through him all things were made ..." Whose world is this?

How then should we live within it?

*In the beginning, Lord, I was alone.
Like the earth before Your spirit moved over the waters, I
was formless and empty and darkness filled the depths of my heart.
Then, it was as if You declared, 'Let there be light'.
And out of the darkness I began to see hope
Like a shimmering ray of love
breaking through the parting clouds at the conclusion of the night.*

*In the beginning, Lord, I was alone,
but when I saw You in the light I was no longer afraid.
You held out Your hand and though I had a choice, I had no choice
Because to refuse was to embrace, again, the darkness.*

*In the beginning, Lord, I was alone.
Now I feel again a part of Your creation –
loved, wanted, needed, family.
In the light of Your presence
I hold out my heart that others might glimpse through it Your reflection
And be drawn from the darkness into Your sunrise.
Amen.*

Celtic Prayer

Idea for the day: visit the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre and learn about our natural systems.

Thursday, June 28: Genesis 1:1-25

Enjoy the beauty and rhythm of this description of creation. Who created the heavens and the earth? What is His evaluation of it? What does this mean for us?

For over twenty years, Marianne and I have taught Geography at two Christian liberal arts universities (online). One of the practices I ask my students to consider is to stop referring to God's created world around us as "nature" or "the environment." I encourage them to think about and speak of "**God's creation.**" The word "nature" can imply something separate from us – we may be God's creation but we tend to think "nature" isn't (actually it is God's creation as much as we are). The phrase "the environment" implies God's world is just a commodity we can exploit, use, pollute, and dispose of as we wish.

It changes the way we look at the world when we begin to think of and talk about "God's creation." Seeing, thinking, and living within God's world as His creation, we walk through the world with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to know God and His wisdom in deeper ways. We see God's hand and Spirit at work in all things, in all places, all the time. We treat His world differently.

*"Genesis 1 and 2 tell us WHO without giving many answers about HOW ... The message of these two chapters is this: 'You have seen the sea? The sky? Sun, moon, and stars? You have watched the birds and the fish? You have observed the landscape, the vegetation, the animals, the insects, all the big and little things together? You have marveled at the wonderful complexity of human beings, with all their powers and skills ... ? Fantastic, isn't it. Well now, meet the one who is behind it all.' ... Genesis shows us the Creator rather than the creation and teaches us knowledge of God the Father than physical science ... (J.I. Packer cited in *The Case for Christianity*).⁴*

Jesus calls Himself "*the bright morning star*" (Revelation 22:16, 2 Peter 1:19). The reason Venus, the

⁴ Some Christians get tied in knots, thinking Genesis 1 and 2 are all about the HOW of creation: are they literally 7 24-hour days? Did this happen 6-8000 or 4.5 billion years ago? However, this passage is really about the WHO of creation (God), and the wonder of His creation (it is GOOD). Neither this nor any other text in the Bible claims to be a modern scientific account of the HOW or WHEN of creation. Those issues were not important to the biblical authors – modern science didn't exist then (and God gave us the mental capacity and curiosity to figure much of this out, anyway). Significantly, Jesus never speaks to modern scientific issues around "days of creation" or "age of the earth." Neither do Paul or any other New Testament authors. It just wasn't an issue. If it isn't important to Jesus, probably it just isn't important. Debate about such things is almost inevitably unproductive and divisive. And it doesn't make a practical difference to daily life, does it? This chapter is really about the WHO not HOW of creation. That's what matters.

morning star, shines with a pure, steady, bright light is because it is not a star. Stars “twinkle” because their light is coming from light years away. Venus, a planet is much, much closer. Venus orbits the sun at a closer distance than the earth, so when Venus rises as a morning star, the sky is still as dark as at midnight, and there is no other sign in heaven or earth to show that day is coming. But when Venus appears, we know that, against all other evidence, day is almost at hand. We can hope for it and act upon it in confident hope.

Bede, a British monk in the 8th Century, loved this descriptor of Jesus. He wrote an entire book on Genesis describing how Genesis helps us know God and know Jesus, our bright Morning Star. Through Jesus, our morning star, we have hope, we know a new dawn is breaking, and a whole new reality coming into being ...

*O Christ, our Morning Star,
certain hope of a new dawn,
rise in our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies.
O Christ, our Morning Star,
Splendour of Light Eternal,
Fount of all wisdom and shining with the glory of the rainbow,
come and waken us from the greyness of our apathy
and renew in us your gift of hope.
Amen*

Bede (672-735)

Friday, June 29: Genesis 1:26-31

From the very beginning, humanity is defined as “male and female” – each gender complementing the other, neither complete in and of themselves. We are complete in relationship with one another and with God.

Alone among God’s creatures, humans are defined as being made *“in the image of God.”* What this means is a matter of considerable debate. It probably does **not** mean that God looks like us – with two arms, legs, eyes, ears, nose, etc. (God is usually described in the Bible using human-ish descriptors, probably because we could not imagine anything different). Jesus, however, is described as: *“the image of the invisible God”* (Colossians 1:15); He represents the “image of God” in all its perfection. What does Jesus show us? He shows us God’s nature, character, heart, goals, ethics, creativity, mission, grace, forgiveness, mercy, way of relating, love – and a whole lot more. And He shows all this in perfect relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are created to be human as Jesus is truly human.

Regent College professor, Rikki Watts, writes: *“If humans are made in God’s image, then the repercussions are serious indeed. In the ancient world, to deface the image of the king or deity was tantamount to high treason. If one did not want to live in his realm or under his kingship, that could be arranged, either by exile or death. If we take the Genesis 1 account seriously, namely, that every human being is made in God’s image, then we need to know that any act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason against the God whose image we bear and to whose kingship and sovereignty we therefore inherently bear witness. With this in mind, it is not hard to comprehend why Jews and Christians have historically put such a high value on human life, whether women, slaves, gladiators, newly born, or even unborn children.”*

Being made “in the image of God,” our calling is to model God’s nature, character, heart, goals, ethics, creativity, mission, way of relating, love – and a whole lot more, too. We do this in relationship with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and with one another.

Of course, Jesus was able to do all this perfectly. I am not perfect. I’m a work in progress. I have good days and bad days. I have my noble moments and my abysmal failures. But overall my calling is to *“love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength”* (as Jesus did) and *“love my neighbour as myself”* (as Jesus did). According to Jesus, those commands summarize all of God’s law. And if I were to do them, I would be living “in His image,” fulfilling God’s will and mission of building His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, leading people to faith in Jesus, tending and caring for His creation, etc. I try. But I fail. Thankfully God forgives me, picks me up, and gives me a second, third, fourth, fifth new start ...

Julian of Norwich once commented on a little hazelnut: *"In this little thing I see three truths. The first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; and the third is that God sustains it."* Those truths are true of me, too. God made me; God loves me; and He will sustain me every moment of every day. I am "good" in His eyes. God's blessing is an encouragement for my journey. My challenge is to live "in His image" every moment of every day. How can I be a bit more like Jesus, today?

*I awake this morning and live this day in Your presence, O God.
May heaven open wide before me, above me, and around me
so that I may see You, my Saviour.
May I see Your Spirit at work in all things on earth this day.*

*Keep Your people safe this day, O God:
enfold them, surround them, watch over them;
O God be with them in their hoping,
in their working,
in their playing,
and in their dreaming.*

*Watch now, O Jesus, over those who are weary, or wandering, or weeping.
Guide them to a house of Your peace
and lead me to be a caring for their tears.*

*Every creature, every plant, every rock and every grain of sand
proclaims the glory of its Creator
through colour, shape, scent, and form.
A multi-sensory song of praise.*

*Creator God, may we join with the whole of Your creation in praising You, our Creator,
Through the fragrance and melody of our lives.
Amen.*

Idea for the day: Only buy what you really need; resist impulse buying

Saturday, June 30: Genesis 2:1-3

The climax of the creation story is not the creation of human beings (Day 6). The culmination of the whole story comes on Day 7 when God – Father, Son, and Spirit – rests.⁵ God's Sabbath rest is to delight in His creation, to look with joy on His world and say, *"This is very good. Let's enjoy it."* This is the highlight.

Our lives are about more than labour, more than caring for the world, more than trying to improve society (though those are good things, to which we are called). The culmination/purpose of our lives – on a weekly basis and a lifelong basis – is Sabbath, a time to enjoy and celebrate God and His goodness.

Sabbath is not really a time to recover so we can go back to work on Monday renewed physically, emotionally, and spiritually (though those may be side-benefits).

Sabbath is a time for us to delight in God and in His creation. It is a time for us to worship (in a much grander sense than just going to church – though it includes gathering together with other believers and all of God's creation), to *"taste and see that the Lord is good."* It's a time to enjoy creation – with other people, in His creation around us, celebrating art, music, science, culture, and in many, many other ways.

"Scripture tells us little about what we are to do on the Sabbath. It gives us a clue by indicating what we are not to do, but if the Sabbath has its total focus in recognition of God, it would detract considerably if he had to tell us what to do. Be creative. Do whatever will reflect your love, appreciation, respect, and awe of

⁵ This is one of those instances when the chapter breaks, introduced in the 13th century, are not helpful: we may not naturally carry on into Day 7. The great story of creation goes from Genesis 1:1 through 2:3. Notice the seventh day does NOT end with the familiar formula, *"And there was evening, and there was morning – the ___ day."* We are living Day 7 still. The story has begun and will go on and on ... we are part of it.

the God of all the cosmos ... Think for a moment about the cultural phenomenon of holidays. Take Memorial Day (in Canada, Remembrance Day) – a day set aside to honor those who have died in wars, who have given their lives to preserve the ideals and freedom we enjoy. A significant aspect of the honor accorded is that the day is designated as a federal holiday when, as a rule, people do not go to work. But, as with the Sabbath, that defines what do not do rather than what we do.

"So what do we DO on Memorial Day to give honor? For the most part it depends on whether one has loved ones who gave their lives. The more gratitude one feels toward the sacrifice of those who died, the more effort will go into planning ways to give honor. Some have parades; some have graveside services; some buy flowers to plant by tombstones. What should be the personal response? The more the day means to a person, the more deliberate he or she will be about scheduling appropriate activities.

"This is similar to how the Sabbath works ... it is up to the individual to determine what his or her personal response will be in order to give the honor that is due. The parades and ceremonies of a holiday are matched by the worship services of the Sabbath. The more gratitude we feel toward God and the more we desire to honor him, the more the ceremonies will mean and the more we will seek out ways to observe the Sabbath." (John Walton)

*God's will would I do, my own will bridle;
God's due would I give, my own due yield;
God's path would I travel, my own path refuse;
Christ's death would I ponder, my own death remember;
Christ's agony would I meditate,
my love to God make warmer;
Christ's cross would I carry, my own cross forget;
Repentance of sin would I make, early repentance choose;
A bridle to my tongue I would put,
a bridle on my thoughts I would keep;
God's judgment would I heed, my own judgment guard;
Christ's redemption would I seize, my own ransom receive;
The love of Christ would I feel, my own love give freely.
Amen.*

Irish Prayer

Idea for the day: Walk or bike more, drive less

Sunday, July 1 (Canada Day): Psalm 72

The Motto on the Canadian coat of arms comes from Psalm 72:8: *"From sea to sea."* The context of that motto is significant. Psalm 72 is a prayer for good government – in Solomon's day, of course, that was centered on the king. In our day, we still need to pray for good government. We are called to *"Pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity"* (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Nowhere does Scripture urge us to insult, make nasty comments about, or bad mouth our leaders (see also 1 Peter 2:11-17). If you feel grumpy, pray. Don't belly-ache.

Today is a good day to pray for our governments (federal, provincial, and city). Pray for our Prime Minister, Premier, and Mayor. Pray for our Member of Parliament and M.L.A.s. Pray for our City councilors.

One of the big responsibilities our government has, of course, is the care and responsible development/use of our natural resources and the natural environment. As we have seen, these are not just nice revenue-generating natural resources. These are God's creation. Yes, we can make use of them. But as Christians we ought to be on the forefront of those advocating for responsible, reasonable use of them – not rampant exploitation. And not producing hurtful pollution. Pray for vision and wisdom among our leaders.

Chris Robertson was the first (and only) person in history to travel from bottom of mainland Canada 6,520

kilometres to the top under their own power. En route he challenged over 5 million Canadians to make Canada better by answering the question: "What will you do in your life to make Canada a better country than when you found it?" This is a prayer he wrote:

*I'm dreaming of Canada tonight.
A country where mountains and hopes touch the sky
A country where an ocean of kindness fills all hearts
A country where ideas are a forest of wisdom
Oh God let me wake up in Canada.*

*I'm dreaming of Canada tonight.
A country where compassion is as tall as a Douglas fir
A country where understanding is as deep as a great lake
A country where confidence grows like grain
Oh God let me wake up in Canada.*

*I'm dreaming of Canada tonight.
A country where happiness flows like the water of a river
A country where love is a breath of fresh air
A country where peace covers the land like snow
Oh God, please let me wake up in Canada, tonight ...
Amen*

Thought for the day: What will you do in your life to make Canada a better country?

Monday, July 2: Genesis 2:4-17

Job reminded us who God is – the all-mighty, all-wise, all-knowing Creator and King of Creation. "My ears had heard of you," said Job, "but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5). Did Job actually "see" God? No, not directly. But in God's creation, Job saw the wisdom, wonder, power, beauty, creativity, complexity, and glory of God ... so in creation Job saw God's "fingerprints," so to speak ... He saw God in His handiwork.

Genesis 2:4-17 is another version of the creation story, focusing on humanity. Note particularly 2:15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." One of our primary purposes is tend and watch over God's creation.

One of the meanings of being created "in the image of God" is we are God's people, His representatives, His ambassadors on earth. Just as the Governor General is the Queen's representative in Canada, we are God's representatives on earth. With that comes the responsibility to look after it on His behalf. Ultimately God sustains and care for His creation, but as His image-bearers we are called to be His hands and feet, caring for creation day-by-day. Created in God's image, we are to live as Jesus would live were He here. That's our mandate. Our vocation. Our purpose.

We are God's stewards/managers of what we "possess" – not owners (Jesus told several parables where **He/God** is the "owner" and **we** are good or not-so-good tenants.). How does a perspective that sees me as a steward, entrusted with a home, family, friends, money, talents, health, skills, knowledge, resources, etc., change the way I view my life? My possibilities? My responsibilities? What is God saying to me?

I may work many jobs, enjoy many recreations, and do many things in my life, but underneath it all, dare I ask myself: **Is what I am doing "working" and "taking care of" God's creation?** (natural creation, other people, beauty, culture)? Am I giving more than I am taking? Am I being a good steward of my blessings? Am I building up the Kingdom of God? **Or, Is what I am doing resulting in the opposite?** Am I taking more than I am giving? Am I being a poor steward of my blessings? Am I not representing the Kingdom well? What is God saying to me?

*In my journeying with You,
 may I never lose my sense of direction,
 never lose sight of the landmark to which I travel.
 And should cloud or rain obscure my vision, may I draw closer to You
 so that my feet may tread in Your footsteps,
 Your Word be my encouragement and Your love my protection
 against the storms that assail me.
 Your light is the only light I need
 as I travel through life's mystery;
 Your Word is the only voice I need to hear,
 that still small voice that leads me to the place where I should be.
 Your presence is the only company I need as I walk this narrow road;
 Your fellowship is the warmth I crave to help me on the way.
 Be with me –
 before me, behind me,
 beside me, above me,
 and beneath me –
 Lord Jesus.
 Amen.*

Celtic Prayer

Idea for the day: Use LED light bulbs

Tuesday, July 3: Genesis 2:18-25

As human beings, male and female, we are God's creations, too (Genesis 1:27). Some people get really exercised and upset about the "order of creation" (of male and female) in Genesis 2. God's point is **not** to suggest that one gender is somehow "better" than the other. Rather, the point is that men need women and women need men – we are inextricably bound to one another as a race of complementary beings.

I need to remember that:

- *I am made of dust.* I am not God, though my vocation is to represent God. I am very much part of His creation. He has created me "in his image" but my earthly body will not last forever (though I will enjoy a resurrected body [see 1 Corinthians 15]). Physical death is not my end. But my earthly body is biodegradable. How does this change the way I see my life as a physical being? As an eternal being?
- *As a human being, I am created in the image of God*
- *Male and female are created to be "side-by-side" in serving and preserving God's creation.* Genesis 2 does not imply superiority of either gender, but rather a glorious divine complementarity. What does this mean in society at large? In my relationships with friends? Family?
- *We are created for a free, uninhibited relationship with God.* This is possible again thanks to Jesus' death and resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit. Why do I sometimes choose to walk away and ignore God's Spirit and Word? Why would I ever pass by the gift of God's perfect presence?
- *God's creation (including your body) is "good."* Why am I so hard on myself? Why am I so critical of my body and my being? This is who God made me. Can I celebrate God's goodness?
- *What is the first thing that is "not good"?* (Genesis 2:18). What does this suggest about the importance of friendships/relationships with other people in my life?
- *I can use the resources in God's creation, but I need to be wise in how I do so.* I am a steward of God's creation. I am called to live in and steward creation *on behalf* of God, not *instead* of God.

What is God saying to me?

*Grant us a vision, Lord,
To see what we can achieve;
To reach out beyond ourselves;
To share our lives with others;
To stretch our capabilities;
To increase our sense of purpose;
To be aware of where we can help;
To be sensitive to Your Presence;
To give heed to Your constant call.
Amen*

Welsh prayer

Idea for the day: plan to water less this summer (plant drought-tolerant plants.)

Wednesday, July 4: Genesis 9:1-17

Directly after the Genesis flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants and "**with every living creature on earth**" (Genesis 9:10). A covenant is a two-party commitment. God's commitment is "*Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth*" (Genesis 9:11). What is Noah, his families' (humanity's), and creation's part of the covenant? To understand this we need to go back to understand why the flood happened ... "*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time*" (Genesis 6:5). Noah, however, "*was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God ... Noah did everything just as God commanded him*" (Genesis 6:9, 22). God's will for us is that we "walk with God" (follow Jesus), living by His commands (1 John 5:3).

Regent College professor, Rikki Watts, writes, "*If this creation is Yahweh's palace-temple, then we had best take good care of it. Far too many of us treat our homes far better than we treat this creation. We would never tolerate toxic waste or unbridled pollution in our living rooms, and yet we seem happy to do so when it comes to God's palace-temple ... This world is God's temple-palace and he has not abandoned it. If we are truly to bear his image, then neither should we ... With these truths firmly in mind and heart, it would be difficult for Christians not to change the world.*"

Peter Harris, founder of a Christian Conservation organization, A Rocha (Portuguese for "the rock"), writes: "*It is unlikely at best, and incoherent at worst, to imagine that God is indifferent to the widespread destruction of what he has created. To think that we can claim on the one hand to love God, and then to be indifferent to his creation, or even worse to live destructively, is even more tragic. As has been well said, 'It is impossible to say you love Rembrandt while you trash his paintings.'* Set the wonderful promise of God's redemption of creation against some of the current statistics - worldwide we risk losing fifty per cent of the meagre four per cent of plants we have already managed to describe in the wonderful treasure house of biodiversity which God has made ... What we are witnessing is casual, widespread, catastrophic destruction even while our awareness of the causes becomes ever more clear. We are in fact seeing the consequences of religious choices as human society on the western consumer model opts for personal comfort at the cost of the survival of the wider creation."

"*We (need to) reclaim the idea of nature as God's creation and act accordingly, bringing attitudes and actions into line with beliefs,*" writes Kings' College (London) Professor, Alister McGrath. "*We have been entrusted, corporately and individually, with the jewel of God's creation and given the responsibility of tending and nurturing it, before passing it on to others. We are like curators of the great art collection, who are accountable to posterity as well as to the present for our tending of its treasures. We must learn to appreciate and prize this entrustment, as perhaps the greatest privilege this earth can offer. And more than this: we must see nature as a continual reminder and symbol of a future renewed creation, a world that we do not yet know but believe to lie over the horizons of our human existence.*"

How can I be encouraged by this covenant? How am I challenged by it? How can I "walk with God"?

*May the blessing of God's light be on you –
light without and light within.
May God's blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.
And may God's light shine out of the two eyes of you,
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.*

*And may the blessing of God's rain be on you,
may it beat upon your spirit and wash it fair and clean,
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.*

*And may the blessing of God's earth be on you,
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;
and may it rest easy over you when,
at last, you lie out under it.*

*May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly;
up and off and on its way to Him.*

*And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly.
Amen.*

Scottish Blessing

Idea for the day: Turn off the tap while shaving/tooth-brushing

Thursday, July 5: Nehemiah 9:1-6, 32-38

Tucked away in the Book of Nehemiah is another passage on God's creation you may not have noticed.

Nehemiah records the story of the Jewish peoples' return from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. After 70 years of exile and servitude, miraculously King Artaxerxes of Persia lets the Israelites return home. Theologically the prophets see this as the completion of the Israelites' punishment for their sins (we read Micah back in May – rulers were corrupt, lied, cheated, and accepted bribes; the wealthy took advantage of the poor, widows, and orphans; people did not care for one another or the refugees among them). Now the nation of Israel had the opportunity to rebuild itself, literally and spiritually.

As part of the spiritual new beginning, their leaders read the Law (Genesis through Leviticus) aloud. Everyone stood and listened. Individually and corporately they confessed their sins. Nehemiah 9 is a prayer by Israel's leaders for the people. It is a recounting of the history of the Jewish people, from creation to the present, noting God's redemptive actions time and time again – and people's foolishness and sin time and time again (you are welcome to read it all; it recounts the history of the Jewish people).

It's significant that the leaders of Israel begin with creation: "*You alone are the Lord. You made the skies and the heavens and all the stars. You made the earth and the seas and everything in them. You preserve them all, and the angels of heaven worship you.*" It's good to be reminded that our God is the God who is the creator, sustainer, and Lord of all. When we go through challenging times He is always with us.

Sometimes our problems are self-inflicted. Certainly, many of the Jewish peoples' problems were the direct result of their disobedience and sinfulness. Sometimes we simply suffer, with no discernable cause (like Job). In all circumstances, the God who created us will still sustain us.

We may have hard times. As you read 9:32-27 you sense the ongoing struggle and pain the people are experiencing. But God will get them (and us) through.

Do I need to confess some things to God? Do I need to repent? Do I need to change?

*Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for the many gifts you have given me:
each day and each night,
each lake and each land,
each weather fair, each calm, each wild.*

*I am giving You the worship of my whole life,
I am giving You glory with my whole power;
I am giving You praise with my whole being;
I'm giving You honor with my whole life.
I'm giving You reverence with my whole understanding;
I'm giving You offering with my whole thought;
I'm giving You praise with my whole emotion;
I am giving You humility in the blood of the Lamb.
I'm giving You love with my whole devotion;
I am giving You service with my whole desire;
I'm giving You glory with my whole heart;
I'm giving You adoration with my whole sense;
I am giving you my very existence
with my whole mind and heart, body and soul,
O God of glory.
Amen*

Gaelic prayer

Friday, July 6: Acts 17:16-34

Creation (or in non-Christian terms, "nature" or "the environment") is a hot topic these days. I am excited that, as we as God's people rediscover the world around us as God's creation, we have a wonderful point of contact with others in our society concerned about the environment, too. In fact, recognizing this world is *God's* good creation, we should be leaders in the environmental movement.

People without Christian faith may be motivated to care for the environment out of a vague sense that it's the right thing to do, from a fear for self-preservation, out of a fuzzy naturalistic spirituality, or from a love of natural beauty – as people of Jesus, however, we care for creation because this is *God's* art gallery, because it is our divine calling (Genesis 2:15), and because it is part of our worship of the Creator.

As you reflect on Paul's encounter with the people of Athens, think about these ideas:

- *Creation provides a common ground or point of contact between believers and non-believers.* This is *God's* world. We are His trusted stewards of it (Genesis 2:15). As we care for our environment, we can develop relationships with non-Christians. Not caring about creation is a stumbling block to people coming to faith: there is a logical contradiction when we claim to love God, the Creator, but we do not care about His creation. By caring for creation we invite others to meet the Creator.
- *There is a possibility of **some** (albeit limited) knowledge of God from nature, apart from Scripture.* Non-Christian people may have a sense of "the divine" as they interact with the world. However they will not have a saving faith. While the environment may be a starting point, we need to help them discover the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ. Through creation, the Holy Spirit may have prepared folks to hear the gospel. This ought to be a motivation for us to help people discover a saving relationship with Christ and a Christian community where they can grow in their faith.
- *All people are inherently religious.* As God's created beings, each of us has some knowledge of God – whether or not we acknowledge it (this does NOT mean everyone knows Jesus or has faith and life in Him.). No one is really non-religious. We all have beliefs about life, the universe, and everything. Even atheists have beliefs about God, their personal purpose, and eternity (not

believing in God is just as much a faith conviction as believing in God). As you talk with people, seek to find those areas where you already agree (perhaps about creation) ... then talk about Jesus.

- *There will be complete harmony between what God reveals of Himself in Scripture and what God reveals of Himself in creation.* Since the created world around us is God's handiwork, we can expect what we learn from science to be in harmony with God's self-revelation in Scripture. Historically, Christians in science have seen their task of exploring the world as inherently spiritual – they were investigating God's creation and thus getting to know God more fully.

The natural sciences are NOT a threat to Christian faith. Rather, natural sciences affirm faith in a creator God. We need not fear science as a threat to our faith. Rather we can trust that any new truth natural science uncovers will point even more clearly to our creator God. Natural science, when done well, helps us know God better. As we study God's creation we get deeper insights into the creative Genius who is the Creator.

*All creatures of our God and King,
Life up your voice and with us sing.
O praise Him, 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.*

*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*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Idea for the day: Don't leave your vehicle idling for more than 10 seconds (unless at a traffic light, of course.)

Saturday, July 7: John 3:1-21

The words of John 3:16 are so familiar to us. But read them again. What/who does God love? The "world."

Dave Bookless, writes, "*Jesus the man is God made flesh and blood. It is the most stunning affirmation of the goodness of creation we could possibly have - that God was prepared to step into it himself, to consecrate it with his presence, and show that it can be good and perfect. And why did Jesus come? Most Christians would say to save us from our sins. Yes, but there's more. Listen again to one of the most familiar verses in the Bible, John 3:16. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son. The world, not just you and me. The Greek term used is 'kosmos'.⁶ God so loved the cosmos that he sent his Son. It makes sense when you get used to it.*

⁶ Bookless is absolutely correct: the Greek word used in John 3:16 is **κοσμος** – kosmos – which means all of creation.

"He loved the whole cosmos into being and keeps it going with his love. When he was tempted to destroy everything due to sin at the time of Noah, he relented and saved not only humans but all the animals and birds as well. The Covenant he made thereafter in Genesis 9 was with all living things - not just people. The rainbow - that great Christian symbol that the radical greens have hijacked and we need to recover - is a symbol of the promise that I am making with all living things. So when in the fullness of time God sends Jesus it is for the whole world not just human beings.

"I am aware this may be a new idea for some. It was for me until I started to read the Bible with an awareness of God's love for all creation. Yet it is so clear in scripture. When Jesus died the creation reacted with an earthquake and an eclipse. And according to Colossians 1:20, through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. This is the Apostle Paul, not some New Age mystic outlining the cosmic dimension to the work of the cross. When Jesus died the curse of the fall was destroyed, not only in our human relationship to each other and to God, but in the whole created order ..."

How does that knowledge, that John 3:16 is about all of the "cosmos" – all of creation – enlarge the way I read that verse? How does it change the way I look at the world?

*O loving Christ, who died upon the cross,
each day and each night I remember Your love.
In my lying down in my rising up,
in life and in death,
You are my health and my peace.*

*Each day and each night I remember Your forgiveness,
bestowed on me so gently and generously.
Each day and each night I affirm my love to You.
May there be life in my speech, truth in what I say.
I place myself with those who struggle today,
and I pray for them.*

*O Christ, You are a bright flame before me.
You are a guiding star above me.
You are the light and love I see in other's eyes.
Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is tender.
Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is true.
Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is strong.
Tonight, tomorrow, had always.
Amen.*

Philip Newell

Idea for the day: Learn how to fix things (or ask a handy friend to help) – the library/internet can help

Sunday, July 8: Psalm 148

Richard Bauckham continues, *"All creatures, animate and inanimate, worship God ... the creation worships God just by being itself, as God made it, existing for God's glory. Only humans desist from worshipping God; other creatures, without having to think about it, do so all the time."* Interesting, isn't it?

- The heavens (and all that is in them) praise God.
- The earth (and all that is on it) praise God.
- The seas (and all that is in them) praise God.

Worship and praise are intrinsically and inseparably woven into creation. All of creation – inanimate and animate – worship God. That's just how the universe operates.

Have you ever thought of creation that way? When you see a gorgeous starry night, a glorious sunset, a

beautiful flower, a tumbling waterfall, a soaring eagle, a flitting hummingbird, a mountain standing firm and strong ... that is God's creation worshipping Him. This is not just a poetic turn of phrase in the psalms. In Revelation 5:13, John hears "**every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea,**" singing praise to God: "*Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.*"

Only human beings have the "choice" **NOT** to worship God. Other creatures all worship God, naturally. They don't worship God as we do, of course, but they do worship God in their own ways. We tend to think that only we – humans – worship God. Scripture passages, like Psalm 148 and Revelation 5:13, remind us that we are part of a worship far bigger than ourselves. The rest of creation may actually worship better than we do, because it cannot choose NOT to worship. We alone can turn our backs on our Creator.

Bauckham adds, "*We should think of the rest of creation assisting our worship [in Psalm 148, the human praise follows the worship by all other creatures, from the angels downwards]. The key point is that implicit in these depictions of the worship by creation is the intrinsic value of all creatures, in the theocentric sense of the value given them by their Creator and offered back to him and praise. In this context, our place is beside our fellow-creatures as fellow-worshippers. In the praise in which we gratefully confess ourselves creatures of God, there is no place for hierarchy. Creatureliness levels us all before the otherness of the Creator.*"

- God is so much greater than us. Isn't that great?
- He is in control. Isn't that great?

Praise Him.

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I bless your name this day.
Let all creation praise you.
Let the daylight, and the shadows praise you.
Let the fertile earth and the swelling sea praise you.
Let the winds and the rain,
the lightning and thunder, praise you.
Let all that breathes, both male and female, praise you.
There is no plant in the ground
that does not tell of your beauty, O Jesus.
There is no creature on the earth,
there is no life in the sea,
that does not proclaim your goodness.
There is no bird on the wing,
there is no star in the sky,
there is nothing beneath the sun,
that is not full of your blessing.
Awaken my understanding of your presence all around me, Lord Jesus.
And kindle my will, to be caring for your creation.
Kindle within me, a love for you in all things.
Amen*

Philip Newell

Idea for the day: Pass on or recycle this study guide.