

May 29, 2022
Creative Arts Sunday
Let all created things praise the Lord
Exodus 35:4-36:1

Let all created things praise the Lord: Part 1 (Call to Worship)

The first time we meet God ... Is God a judge? Lawgiver? No ... God is Creator: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

The first time we hear about God's Holy Spirit is in the same paragraph, "*The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters*" (Genesis 1:2).

Intentionally echoing the words of Genesis, John writes, "*In the beginning was the Word (Jesus). The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it*" (John 1:1-5).

God – Father, Son, and Spirit – is the artistic genius of the universe in all its wonder, beauty, complexity, perfect natural systems, and glory. In response, everything in all creation is called to worship and praise Him (Psalm 148):

*"Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord from the heavens!
Praise him from the skies!
Praise him, all his angels!
Praise him, all the armies of heaven!
Praise him, sun and moon!
Praise him, all you twinkling stars!
Praise him, skies above!
Praise him, vapours high above the clouds!
Let every created thing give praise to the Lord,
for he issued his command, and they came into being.
He set them in place forever and ever.
His decree will never be revoked.*

*Praise the Lord from the earth,
you creatures of the ocean depths,
fire and hail, snow and clouds,
wind and weather that obey him,
mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
wild animals and all livestock,
small scurrying animals and birds,*

*kings of the earth and all people,
rulers and judges of the earth,
young men and young women,
old men and children.*

*Let them all praise the name of the Lord.
For his name is very great;
his glory towers over the earth and heaven!
He has made his people strong,
honouring his faithful ones—
the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord!"*

All Creatures of our God and King #64

Children's Moment – Mark

Let all created things praise the Lord: Part 2

We know – intellectually – that God is the Creator. But sometimes we fail to appreciate all that means. It means we live in God's art gallery. The wilds of Waterton, the waters of the Oldman River, eagles, chickadees, thunderheads, waterfalls ... all are created purposely, perfectly, by God. Human beings are tasked with the mandate to *"to tend and watch over it"* (Genesis 2:15). We are curators, caretakers of God's awesome creation. Think about how a curator/caretaker of the National Gallery or the Louvre handles artistic treasures ... how then should we treat the God-created, Spirit-inspired masterpieces in the world around us?

If we truly do believe that "This is my father's world / And to my listening ears / All nature sings, and round me rings / The music of the spheres" how then should I live within it?

Toward the end of Psalm 148, the psalmist (almost as an afterthought) adds human beings to the chorus of created things praising and worshipping God: *"Praise the Lord from the earth ... kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, young men and young women, old men and children."*

How do we praise God? Some of us, of course, praise God with song. Others through prayer. Others through poetry or written words. Others through visual art. Others through going for a walk and simply "being" with God in His creation. Others through service to other people. Others through thinking deep theological thoughts. Others through campaigning for justice. Others through intentionally caring for God's creation. Others through learning more about God's amazing creation through science. There are a myriad of ways people in Scripture and throughout history has praised and worshipped God.

Of course, we all do all these things to some extent. But some of us are more gifted/called to focus on one form of worship and praise than another. We are not all the same. That's what

makes it all so interesting and exciting.

We thank God for our prayer warriors. We thank God for our musicians. We thank God for our social change-makers. We thank God for our poets. We thank God for our passionate servants. We thank God for our visual artists. We thank God for our scholars. We thank God for those who are care-givers. We thank God for our scientists. And we all use our unique gifts and abilities to praise God ...

VIDEO: Creative Arts Show

I Sing the Mighty Power of God #59

Let all created things praise the Lord: Part 3

After that first mention of the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:2 (*"the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters"*), the next mention of the Spirit is when Joseph is able to interpret Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41). Following that, as the Israelites are enroute from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, in the middle of the desert, God instructs Moses and the people of Israel to build an elaborate ark, tent complex, furnishings, and special garments they will carry with them – through the wilderness – ultimately into Canaan.

For several chapters, God describes a beautiful tent – or Tabernacle – which was to be God's "dwelling place" among the people. It is a precursor to the Temple in Jerusalem. God describes its furnishings – things like the ark of the covenant, an altar, and special – glorious – garments for the priests. God is concerned for the details. The sights and smells, the glow of the colours, the feel of the fabrics, the grain of the wood and the sparkle of the precious stones are all lovingly described in Exodus.

But they don't spring fully formed from heaven. It takes ordinary men and women to work hard, using their God-given skills, and keeping in step with God's Spirit, for the Tabernacle to become a beautiful reality, a suitable focus for God's holy presence.

"Moses said to the whole community of Israel, 'This is what the Lord has commanded: Take a sacred offering for the Lord. Let those with generous hearts present the following gifts to the Lord:

*gold, silver, and bronze;
blue, purple, and scarlet thread;
fine linen and goat hair for cloth;
tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather;
acacia wood;
olive oil for the lamps;
spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense;
onyx stones, and other gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece.*

"Come, all of you who are gifted craftsmen. Construct everything that the Lord has commanded:

*the Tabernacle and its sacred tent, its covering, clasps, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases;
the Ark and its carrying poles;
the Ark's cover—the place of atonement;
the inner curtain to shield the Ark;
the table, its carrying poles, and all its utensils;
the Bread of the Presence;
for light, the lampstand, its accessories, the lamp cups, and the olive oil for lighting;
the incense altar and its carrying poles;
the anointing oil and fragrant incense;
the curtain for the entrance of the Tabernacle;
the altar of burnt offering;
the bronze grating of the altar and its carrying poles and utensils;
the washbasin with its stand;
the curtains for the walls of the courtyard;
the posts and their bases;
the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard;
the tent pegs of the Tabernacle and courtyard and their ropes;
the beautifully stitched garments for the priests to wear while ministering in the Holy Place—
the sacred garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons to wear as they minister as priests."*

"So the whole community of Israel left Moses and returned to their tents. All whose hearts were stirred and whose spirits were moved came and brought their sacred offerings to the Lord. They brought all the materials needed for the Tabernacle, for the performance of its rituals, and for the sacred garments. Both men and women came, all whose hearts were willing. They brought to the Lord their offerings of gold—brooches, earrings, rings from their fingers, and necklaces. They presented gold objects of every kind as a special offering to the Lord ...

"All the women who were skilled in sewing and spinning prepared blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen cloth. All the women who were willing used their skills to spin the goat hair into yarn. The leaders brought onyx stones and the special gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light, the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense. So the people of Israel—every man and woman who was eager to help in the work the Lord had given them through Moses—brought their gifts and gave them freely to the Lord.

*"Then Moses told the people of Israel, 'The Lord has specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. The Lord has filled Bezalel with the **Spirit of God**, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft. And the Lord has given both*

him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach their skills to others. The Lord has given them special skills as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, and scarlet thread on fine linen cloth, and weavers. They excel as craftsmen and as designers. The Lord has gifted Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other skilled craftsmen with wisdom and ability to perform any task involved in building the sanctuary. Let them construct and furnish the Tabernacle, just as the Lord has commanded.”

All of this is not terribly practical. When you're slogging through a scorching, desiccated mountainous wasteland, the last thing you really need to pack along is an elaborate Tabernacle complex, fancy furniture, and gem-encrusted priestly garments. First of all, it will take time to make it – time they could spend doing “more important things.” Second, some of it is not specifically symbolic or useful – it's just art for art's sake – or, more properly, art for God's sake.

And yet, maybe that is exactly what they need. And what we need. **First**, we need to be reminded that God – the great, glorious, beautiful God of creation – is with us – even in the desert places of life. The world is not all dark. There is still joy, hope, love, peace, and beauty in the world – thanks be to God. **Second**, it is good for us to be reminded to take our eyes off ourselves and our woes, to celebrate the God of glory, beauty, and creation.

Everything

Prayer – Mark

VIDEO: All Things Bright and Beautiful – Bridge City Bells

Let all created things praise the Lord: Part 4

So what about the arts and creativity? How does that fit into our relationship with God?

Art can express our worship. We see this in music and poetry, of course. From great hymns like “To God Be the Glory” to contemporary songs like “Creation Calls.” Or poems we write. Or art we create. We can share our emerging understanding of God and His good news. For me, I love to paint God's creation. A painting of Mt. Rundle is not simply a painting of a random mountain, it is an act of worship of the Creator. I've noticed that many of the works of art I am drawn to, and I create, have a pathway or a road. They embody a sense of journey, from where I am to a place closer to God just around the corner.

Art can express our struggles. The writers of songs like “It is Well with My Soul” or “Blessed Be Your Name” process their personal pain and distress. When my facial pain first developed, it was crippling. One of the things I discovered was what I came to call “Lego-therapy.” Having young boys at the time, building things with Lego took just enough brain-power to take my mind off the pain, but not enough brain power that I was unable to function. And at the end of the day, you had something to show for your time. You felt like

you'd accomplished something. Writing a poem, making a jigsaw puzzle, baking cookies, going for a walk, taking pictures in the coulees are similar activities. They take just enough thought to distract me from my stress, help me process my struggles, but not enough to wear me out.

Remember your first love – how much you enjoyed creating as a child,” writes Makoto Fujimura, a painter. *“If you ever lose that sense of joy you will need to reflect on why you lost that spark.”* He goes on, *“A child of God knows that he or she is loved. And because of that love, which exceeds our own love, we can move out and take risks in creativity.”*

Most of us as young children loved to draw, paint, write stories, build with Lego, write stories. What happens, as we grow older?

God has created us with amazing minds, and amazing imaginations. Rediscover some of that creativity you had as a child. Try drawing a tree. Try writing a psalm. Sing songs in the shower. If you dare, dance like David to your favourite worship song (God wants to turn our *"mourning into joyful dancing"* (Psalm 30:11)). Whatever you do expresses who you are – as a child of God. Art is an inherently hopeful act, one that echoes the creativity of the Creator. Even if no one else sees it, God sees it. God rejoices in our acts of creativity, just as any loving father dotes on his child's wild drawings.

Art is good therapy for us. It can help us reflect on and worship God. And it may just help you draw closer to God. And find new hope, new peace, new love, and new joy in Him. Something in the creative process helps us draw nearer to the heart of our loving Father. In these dark, difficult times, pick up a pen or a pencil, listen to music, dance (in your heart at least). And know that God is with you.

The Power of Your Love

Doxology

Benediction – Bruce

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