

“Praise God All the Earth”

Psalm 148

Our text this morning is one that is usually shared at a celebration for Earth Sunday. It is easy to let our imaginations soar and wander as the psalmist calls all creation to praise God’s name. No one and nothing is exempt from this call. From the angels to the tiniest organism, all creation is called to lift their voices in song as it celebrates its Creator. Although it is easy to see why this text is used for Earth Sunday, and of course, who could deny its beauty and wonder, too often Psalm 148 has been dismissed as being naïve, as not having a grounding understanding the workings of the real world. Too often Psalm 148 is seen as only being about sunshine and rainbows while ignoring the brokenness and ugliness that fills our world. And since this is usually the text shared by congregations and people of faith to illustrate our understanding as God our Creator, it can be said, and has been said, that it goes to follow that as people of faith, we are just as naïve as the psalmist, that we are just as lacking in our understanding of the working of the real world. Too often, critics of the Church say, that as people of faith, we are too simple in our theology concerning our Creator.

Yet as I have lived with this text this past week, I have come to realize that there is a sophistication that surrounds this text. And if one is too quick to judge it

as simply fluffy unrealistic praise, than it is easy to miss the very heart of its theology.

You see, the psalmist understands something that we have all forgotten over time. The psalmist understands and celebrates the fact that creation is not here to serve us. Rather, he lifts up the fact that creation is here, surrounding us each and every day. The psalmist understands that creation is here to remind us of the many ways God brings new life into our lives, to remind us of the many ways that God tells us over and over again that our God is gracious, that our God is loving. The psalmist understands that Creation is here to remind us that our God is still working in this world. In its call to praise, the author of Psalm 148 offers us an opportunity to claim this life giving, this life changing understanding about our Creator in our lives where only others see naivety

Let me explain: Think about some of the Bible stories that we were taught as children. When we think about these stories, we realize that creation was used in these stories as signs of God's promises of new life and light for the people of God. In the Bible, Creation becomes a way for God to interact with and reassure the people of God. In the stories found in our Bible, stories that we tell over and over again, we realize that Creation becomes a way for God to show God's love and grace to the children of God.

Right off the top of my head, the first story that comes to mind is the story of Noah's ark. Now in this story, we may remember that God had destroyed the world in a flood. Yes, I will admit, not God's finest hour, but the story of Noah's ark goes beyond telling us about the power and might of God. It also tell us about the grace and love of God. And it does this by telling us how God gave a sign, a sign found in creation to always remind people of God's love and grace. That sign was a rainbow.

In the story of Noah's ark, we are told that all the earth was full of darkness. It was full of churning water. And then suddenly the rains stop, and the light began to dry out the land. The light began to overcome the darkness. The Light began to overcome the chaos. And in that moment, when chaos and darkness was no more, God gave a sign, a sign of love and grace found only in creation, in that moment, God gave a sign to remind the people always of God's promises. In that moment, God placed the rainbow in the sky to show God's people that out of the darkness, light and life will burst forth. God placed the rainbow in the sky as a promise to the people of God that God will never destroy the world again. God uses the rainbow to show the people and to help us experience the love and grace of God in our lives always. So now, every time we see a rainbow, as people of faith, we remember. We remember the promises of God. We remember the love of God. We remember the grace of God. We remember the word of God and how it brought forth life.

The rainbow becomes a sign for all of God's children throughout time that in the midst of chaos, God will always make a living space for the people of God. The rainbow becomes a sign for all times that God will always make a space for grace and new life. It becomes God's way of reminding God's people, that no matter what dark waters may be churning in our lives, threatening to overtake us, God will always make a way for hope.

But this is just one story. Another story is the story of Abraham and Sarah. They were told by God to leave their homeland and to travel to an unknown country just so that God can establish a new nation for the people of God. Once again, maybe not God's finest hour. I'm sure that Abraham and Sarah were scared out of their minds, not knowing what to expect, probably wondering what on earth they were getting themselves into, following this God, getting pushed out of their comfort zones, just because God asked them to go.

But once again, to alleviate their fears, God uses as sign found in creation. God tells them to look out at the night sky and count the stars. God then tells Abraham and Sarah that the number of their descendants will surpass the number of stars in the sky. This is a great and comforting sign, especially for two people who have no children. However the stars also became more than signs of new life for them. They also became signs of hope for Abraham and Sarah as well.

I imagine that God wanted them to see how the bright lights of the stars stood out against the night sky. I imagine that God wanted to remind Abraham and Sarah that once again, even in the midst of the chaos that they were experiencing in their lives, chaos that comes with leaving everything familiar and traveling to an unknown place, chaos that sometimes come when we are asked to follow God and leave our comfort zones, I imagine that God wanted Abraham and Sarah to look up at the night sky and see the bright shining stars and remember . . .to remember that God would always be with them, to realize that they could not travel anywhere without God being with them.

I imagine that God wanted every time that Abraham and Sarah looked at the night sky, to be a reminder that in the midst of chaos, God was making some living space for them. God was making it possible to hope. God was filling their lives with love and grace, regardless of where their unknown journey would lead them.

And the same holds true for us today. All we have to do is look up at the night sky and see the stars blazing bright against the darkness and remember that God is always here for us, guiding us and leading. Once again, creation becomes a sign for all time for the people of God to know that God was always surrounding us with God's love and grace.

Now, These are just a few stories that come to my mind when I think about how creation can be a sign of hope, a sign of new life for us, how creation can be a

way for us to hold onto the promises of God even in the midst of the chaos that we may be facing in our own lives. As people of faith, we need to realize that Creation is not here to serve us. But rather it is a way for us to remember that God is always making space for hope, making space for love, making space for new life for us in our sometimes chaotic and fear filled lives. All we have to do is to take a look at the beauty and wonder of the creation that surrounds us and we immediately know this is true. When we look at creation, we know, not just realize, not just understand but know deep in our hearts that God is in control, and know that no matter how crazy our lives may get, God will always have the last word, and that word is a word that will bring forth new life.

I honestly think that's why I like gardening so much. I know that regardless of what I do or don't do, ultimately it is God who will bring forth the new life. I can plant the seed. I can water it. I can feed it but God will be the one who brings forth life.

When I look at creation, when I dig in the dirt, when I go for walks, when I just sit and breathe in God's peace, I am constantly reminded of a very important lesson, a lesson that creation knows and celebrates but a lesson that we have forgotten. And that lesson is...As people of faith, we cannot control the events of our lives. No matter how much we plan, no matter how much we rearrange things, we cannot control the outcome. Now I know this sounds really depressing and

probably downright scary but as a person of faith, this gives me hope. Because ultimately, even though I know that I cannot control life, although I cannot prevent the chaos from finding me, although I cannot eliminate the darkness altogether, I know, I know that through the grace and love of God, there will always be opportunities for new life. There will always be hope to anchor me in the storms of life because I know that God is in control. I know that God will make a way somehow. It may not be the way I expected but it will always be a way of hope and grace for us as Beloved Children of God.

That's why with every tiny seed I put in my garden I am constantly reminded that even in the midst of darkness, even in the midst of chaos, even when I may not be able to figure out which way is up, my God, our God is there, anchoring us in love, anchoring us in hope, anchoring us in grace. With every tiny seed that I plant, I know it is our God who nourishes us and strengthens us. With every tiny seed that I plant, I am constantly reminded that is Our God who is making a way for new life to burst forth.

The signs of God's grace and love surround us each and every time. They fill our world because they are found in the midst of God's creation. Every time we see a rainbow, every time we see the stars at night, every time we experience the gift of spring after a long winter, every time we greet the morning light, we are invited to remember the promises of God, promises of hope, promises of love,

promises of grace and more importantly the promise that no matter where our journey may take us, we will always be surrounded by the presence of our God.

For the psalmist, creation serves to remind him, to remind us that life and all the resources that sustain that life are gifts, are signs, are promises given to us by our God so that we might always experience the healing and the hope that can only be found by living connected to God's Word and God's world.

As all God's creation lifts our voices in praise, we are reminded that God's love is filling the earth, that light and grace are God's gifts given to us. This song of praise reassures us, gives us hope, centers us once again in God's life-giving peace. All of Creation praising God's name is God's way of bringing joy into our lives. For the psalmist, it is not just one piece of God's creation but all of God's creation that lifts its voice. This unifying praise becomes God's sign to us as God's Beloved Children that sadness, hurt, pain, tears, chaos, will not overcome the light. All of Creation's praises tell us that there is hope, that there is grace. When all of creation, not just one piece, but when all of God's creation lifts its voice in song, we know that there is always the possibility for new life to burst forth in our lives.

That regardless of what this world tells us, through Creation's song, we know that God is filling our world with God's love. We know that God is filling our world with signs of life. We know that God, our God, is making it possible for new

life to burst forth. That even in the midst of the chaos which we may be experiencing in our own lives, creation is there, telling us through its praises, that God will never leave us alone. Ultimately, creation's song of thanksgiving serves to remind us as people of faith, that our God has been, is now, and forever will be creating opportunities for hope to bloom in our lives as God's people.

We celebrate today the fact that we are surrounded by God's creation. It serves as a reminder to us of the promises of God. Every time we experience creation, we are called to remember that in the beginning God overcame the darkness and chaos and we are invited to remember that our God is still overcoming them today.

Just look outside and know. God is still working. God is still redeeming. God is still filling our world with new life. Just feel the warmth of the sun upon our faces and know that Darkness does not have the last word. Chaos does not have the last word. God has the last word and it is a word of hope, a word of grace and a word of new life for all the people of God.

This week, I came across a fascinating article that shared how an artist is sharing creation's praises with others. She is shared this life-giving understanding of hope and new life by bringing in 28,000, yes you heard right, 28,000 potted

plants into a particular building and capturing those moments of joy through some really amazing photographs.

Now, what really caught my attention about this story, was that this building was not just any building. It was a former mental health center. And the artist observed that in psychiatric settings, there seems to be an absence of flowers. She shared that flowers are given to the sick when they are bedridden or confined to a hospital but in mental health facilities, patients receive few if any flowers.

The artist said that this building meant many things to people. It was a workplace, a refuge and a place of confinement. But I would go one step farther and say that this place may have also been a place of darkness and chaos for others as well, a type of darkness that is real in our world but no one ever talks about it in polite society.

So this artist took these 28,000 potted plants and allowed them to become ways of healing, ways of hope, and more importantly ways that life-giving and life-changing conversations could happen for many people, allowing the people to name their darkness and to celebrate the way light has come into their lives.

I would also say that these 28,000 potted plants become ways for creation to once again remind the people of God's promises: promises of hope, promises of

healing, promise of love, and more importantly promises that reassure of God's presence through all of life's varied circumstances.

I like to think that these 28,000 potted plants became ways for all of creation, for all of us to shout out to this world that no experience is too dark, no experience is too chaotic for the love and grace of God not to overcome it. Because, we know, with every look at creation, with every song of praise we hear coming from the songs of birds and angels alike, we know as people of faith that the word of God will bring forth life....just like it has always done since the beginning of time.

The praise of all creation tells us every day that we are loved more than we could ever imagine. The song of joy that fills our world tells us every day that we are immersed in God's grace. As all of creation lifts its voice in thanksgiving, as people of faith we are reminded that even in the midst of the chaos, even in the midst of the darkness which we may be facing in our lives, we know we will always be grounded in the hope and love of God.

All we have to do is listen to the praise of all creation as it fills the Earth with its joyful song to know that this is true. Amen.