

March 3-4, 2018

"Humility in the Face of God's Glory"

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The Third Sunday of Lent

Psalm 19

Exodus 20:1-17; I Corinthians 1:28-25; John 2:13-22

Do you hear voices? There are voices out there proclaiming the glory of God if you'll pay attention. Can you hear them?

The psalmist heard them and so will we if we still ourselves enough to hear them. In Psalm 19, the psalmist describes two ways in which he heard the glory of God proclaimed and in the end, he asked God to bless him as he reflected on their meaning: *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer"* (Psalm 19:14, NRSV).

But in order to hear the voices, we must pause in our busyness and frenetic activities and adopt a spiritual practice taught by Jesus.

There's a secret ingredient in the spirituality soup Jesus brought to nourish his followers. Jesus took the stock of his own Jewish faith but realized it still needed flavoring. Realize it had all the basics of a good soup, but something essential was missing. In fact, so vital was this missing ingredient, Jesus implied the soup itself was deficient without it. If we're successful in discovering this secret ingredient, it has the potential to make us very wise, very peaceful and very rich in the kingdom of God. *Want to know what it is?*

Jesus gave us some clues in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 5:5, NRSV). He told us later, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:29, NRSV). Jesus' ministry of teaching and living the kingdom of God was built on a foundation of personal humility allowing the power of God to challenge all the ways in which we cling to our need to be in the center of all things. Humility is not only *a posture of being*, but also *a way of seeing*.

It's *a posture of being* that is willing to not elevate the self over those around us. It's a posture of being that refuses to think only in singular, selfish terms.

It's *a way of seeing* that recognizes that everyone sees their own world from their own point of view. It's a way of seeing whenever we let go of our need to be at the core of every perception and learn there are other ways of seeing.

Let me illustrate it this way: An artist had just finished a major work and invited a famous critic to a private viewing in her studio. On the appointed day, the critic was

met at the door of the studio and ushered into a darkened room where he was asked to wait. A half-hour passed before the artist came. The artist apologized and explained the reason for his delay. *"I was afraid that in coming in directly from the bright sunlight, it might be impossible for you to see the subtle inter-workings between the colors."*¹ God invites us into the darkness of Lent so we might be free to see more clearly that which is true but unnoticed by us.

How is it you see the world? For many of us, we seldom give the creation much thought. We don't see it as a whole and we seldom see it in its parts. We don't acknowledge its grandeur nor do we let it speak to us of the magnificent Creator who brought it all into being. The world is a mirror to the glory of God. Walt Whitman, the great American poet of the 19th century observed, *"that (even) a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."*² If that's so, what does it say about us that we would pillage and destroy the earth as if it were nothing?

The psalmist looked up into the vast reaches of the stars and heard God lifted up as Creator. He was startled to faith by what he saw. He was moved like the poet to speak in the language of beauty and verse to say what had filled his heart to overflowing.

Morris West, the novelist, observed, *"Once you accept the existence of God, however you define Him, however you explain your relationship to Him – then you are caught forever with His presence in the center of all things. You are also caught with the fact that man is a creature who walks in two worlds and traces upon the walls of his cave the wonders and the nightmare experiences of his spiritual pilgrimage."*³ The poet-psalmist wrote on the walls of his cave the absolute wonder he experiences through observing nature and saw in it glory of God.

But the psalmist has a two-chambered heart and there's more. The psalmist goes on to explore a sense of wonder over the law of God. In order to appreciate what's being said here, we must leave behind our American concepts of the law as simply a judicial code. There were aspects of that in the Hebrew Scriptures to be sure because there were laws that codified how one would act and what would happen when one strayed from that teaching.

The law takes on a more elevated sense of knowing God in that they symbolized the special relationship Israel felt through the covenant. The law of God was a reminder of God's divine grace and mercy. The use of the term "law" is not meant to limit the full range of expression the psalmist utilizes here. Other terms are used to capture the depth of meaning. Such terms as *decrees, precepts, commandment*, the phrase, *'the fear of the LORD,'* and, *ordinances* are all used to speak of how the psalmist succumbs in wonder to the deep love of God he feels. It's understood that the cherishing of the law is connected to the Israelite's sense of life and blessing. Why the sense of wonder at the law? How does the law draw us to God?

¹ Cited from Mike Massar's column in FBC Clemson SC newsletter, *The Tie*, November 1994

² Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Oxford University Press, 1990

³ Morris West, *The Clowns of God*, William and Morrow Publishers, 1981

On that September morning when terrorists took over four domestic airliners and aimed them at U.S. targets, one of them crashed into the Pentagon. A federal police officer named Isaac Hoopii, a native Hawaiian, ran into the building to see if he could possibly help any survivors he might find. Dozens of people were fleeing the heat and smoke for safety and when they saw Officer Hoopii they pleaded with him to turn around to save himself. But he kept going until the smoke was so thick he could no longer see anything himself. Then he called out into the darkness, *"Is anybody there? Is there anybody in there?"*

At that same time, Wayne Sinclair and five of his co-workers were crawling through the rubble trying to find the way out. The smoke was so thick and suffocating they were disoriented and couldn't find the way to safety. When they heard Hoopii's voice, they cried out, *"Over here! We're over here!"*

"Head toward my voice!" he cried back to them. Hoopii kept hollering and they kept following his voice until they found each other and were led to safety. For his bravery, Hoopii was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.⁴

That's how many of us have come to faith. We were lost and heard the word of God and God's law came to us as a guide leading us to God. The poet-psalmist is aware of the power of God's law and has a deep reverence for it. Upon reflection, the psalmist takes it all in and feels as if the law of God is such a deep symbol of God's love and mercy, it's as if it's "sweeter than honey." It's more desired than gold to be loved by God so richly.

Two witnesses are before us speaking to us of God in the darkness, the voice of the creation and the voice of the Word of God. But it takes humility for us to sense it.

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⁴ "Surviving 911, Part 1," news story on Honolulu television station KHNL, <http://www.khnl.com/global/story.asp?s=5527327&ClientType=Printable>