

2021 09 19 – God’s Handiwork

Psalm 19 (The Inclusive Bible)

“The heavens herald your glory, O God,
and the skies display your handiwork.”

There are very few places in the world where that statement is more tangible than here in Saskatchewan, in the land of the living skies. The picture on the title screen in front of you, was taken one morning as I was driving to Regina. It is the sun rising over Reed Lake, near the village of Morse. Here, in Saskatchewan, we have the beauty of God’s creation above us at all times and, with our relatively flat terrain, it’s easy to see the sun as it makes its way across the sky each day.

The sky is present everywhere, but, in other locations, it is not so visible, so expansive. I’ll never forget coming out of the subway in Toronto on my first day of work at IBM’s downtown offices. I was in the midst of the bank towers, a group of high-rise office buildings that cover several blocks just north of Union Station and as I arrived above ground, I felt a sense of panic. All I could see were the walls of these towering buildings. The sky felt so far away. I couldn’t find the sun. I had no sense of direction. It felt as if my connection with the Ground of my Being, with creation itself, had been severed.

In fact, during the few years that I worked at that office, someone had the realization that there needed to be a piece of green in the midst of that sea of

concrete. So they took a little square of land, planted grass on it, and then placed seven bronze cows, created by an artist named Joe Fafard, on that grass and it became *The Pasture*. In the summer I'd see people from the towers sitting on and around the cows eating their lunches and appreciating the sun that could make it way onto this tiny patch of green.

Today we are celebrating the glory of God's creation. Not just the sun and the sky but also the land and water and plants and animals and even humankind – everything that is part of God's handiwork. We began this service of praise with our opening hymn, with the words:

This is God's wondrous world, and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings, the music of the spheres.
This is God's wondrous world, I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, God's hand the wonders wrought.

But even as we were singing(or humming) these words, I had to ask myself, how often do I do this? How often do I really listen to nature sing? How often do I rest not only in the thought, but also in the presence of rocks and trees, of skies and seas? How often do I allow myself to truly appreciate the glory of God's handiwork?

In the current edition of the *Broadview*, the cover story is called "Worship in the Wild." It is the story of a growing church movement, where the main part of worship occurs outdoors. Victoria Loorz, the founder of the Wild Church Network, describes it this way:

The core practice of Church of the Wild is a reverent beholding of others as inherently sacred. I encourage people to wander. As you set out, cross a threshold. Maybe it's your doorway or some trees that look like an archway. Before you cross that threshold, just stop for a moment and breathe. Close your eyes and make it intentional. You're stepping into the world as it actually is, which is interconnected, which is sacred. Wander slowly. Open up all of your senses. Listen to birds. Listen to the wind. Listen to human sounds. Look at the layers: how are the different beings interconnected with one another? Take deep breaths. How do the smells change?

As you slow down, you'll feel yourself drawn to a particular place or a particular being. Ask permission to be there. Then settle down. The ancients used to call nature the "first book of God." It's a practice of listening deeply and responding and engaging in an actual conversation. You might want to do that with your journal or a poem or by creating a nature mandala with pine cones and leaves. Always end with gratitude. When you head back home, cross over that same threshold with gratitude.

<https://broadview.org/outdoor-church-victoria-loorz/>

Ms. Loorz went on to explain that after about 20 minutes of this silent reflection in nature, the members of the congregation would come back and share their experience. Through this practice the participants would learn to love creation and also experience the feeling of being loved in return. Ms. Loorz believes that healing our spiritual relationship with the Earth is one of the first steps needed to resolve the crisis that our ecosystems are currently experiencing. I have to ask

you, “Is this type of worship, something that you would interested in?” If so, let me know, because I would love to create a small group with a similar practice!

The first part of today’s scripture reading spoke of the glory of God’s creation. But there was also a second part. A part that talked about the perfection, the purifying aspects and the preciousness of God’s law. At first reading, there seems to be very little connection between the two parts. In fact, I considered leaving the second part out altogether. But then I got thinking about God’s law, in particular, the one that Jesus tells us is the most important. Do you remember what that is?

You must love the Most High God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.

The second is like it: ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:37-38 (The Inclusive Bible)

This week I also watched a webinar called *Listening to the Land: A conversation on the stewardship of creation*. This was offered by an ecumenical group here in Saskatchewan. The speakers were three indigenous people: Mitchell Anderson, a United Church minister, Chris Harper, an Anglican Bishop and May Desnomie, a member of the Roman Catholic faith. All three spoke of the First Nations traditions in which they were raised, traditions that emphasize the interconnectedness of all of God’s creation. [Watch the video](#)

Our First Nations and Metis neighbours understand that loving your neighbour goes beyond humanity. When they speak of “All My Relations,” they are

including all of God's creation. All three spoke of the need for humility, the need for us to realize that we cannot control, or dominate or subjugate God's handiwork. Instead, we have to learn to love it, to respect it, and to live with it. Bishop Harper reminded us that this pandemic has taught us a lot about humility and how our place in God's creation is truly precarious. This pandemic has also taught us the importance of loving our neighbour and putting others first.

When we consider all of God's handiwork, then loving our neighbour takes on many new forms, many new actions, including climate activism. When Victoria Loorz was asked about the need for activism in the work of caring for creation. She said,

I'm so grateful for the people who do activism. We've got to shut down those coal mines. Then there are people creating new infrastructure, community gardens or energy systems. And then there's a third level, which is changing people's mindsets. That's the work that I feel called to do. <https://broadview.org/outdoor-church-victoria-loorz/>

We are all called to integrate our love of this planet, our love of the sacred and our love of humankind into everything we do. How we do that is up to each individual. I invite each of us to be the activist that we are called to be. To do what we can do to celebrate the glory of God's handiwork and to live with love and respect in creation.

And today I will end with this prayer from Psalm 19:

May the words of my mouth
and the thoughts of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, YHWH,
my rock and my redeemer. Amen.