

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino
Psalm 148
June 30, 2019

All Creatures of our God and King

What a fun week we've had around here, traveling to Mars and Beyond! We went Beyond with Faith as we learned about Daniel in the Lions Den. We went Beyond with Boldness as we heard about how Queen Esther took a stand to save her people. We went Beyond with Kindness through the story of the Good Samaritan. We went Beyond with Thankfulness like the Lepers healed by Jesus. And finally we went Beyond with Hope like the friends who met Jesus on the way to Emmaus.

Thank you again to everyone who worked so hard to make our time especially meaningful. It truly has been "out of this world!" Can we give our volunteers a universal round of applause? I'd like to especially thank Heather Hartrim-Lowe, our Vacation Bible School Coordinator, for all the energy and creativity that she put into the everything that went on. We could not have done this without her leadership.

The song that we sang at the beginning of worship this morning, *All Creatures of Our God and King*, stems from a hymn written by St. Francis of Assisi in 1225 AD, almost 900 years ago. It was reset to the music that we know today somewhere between 1889 and 1919.

The words come directly from Psalm 148.

Last week, we heard from Psalm 42 which asked us to peer deep within ourselves and ask "How is our soul?" It's an important question to ask, but only one you can do for so long before you become too self absorbed.

Psalm 148, however, thrusts us from our navel gazing and into the cosmos beyond.

It is a Psalm of Praise not just for humans. But for the earth and the entire universe.

Join me as we read together from Psalm 148 and listen for the echos from *All Creatures of our God and King*.

Let us pray. Prayer or Illumination.

There are five kinds of psalms that we'll find in the collection of Psalms that we call the Psalter. Wisdom psalms. Royal psalms. Thanksgiving psalms. Psalms of Lament. And Psalms of Praise. Psalm 148 happens to be a Psalm of Praise that has echoes of the creation story in Genesis. It has three main sections. The first part concerns itself with praise from the heavens. The second part with praise from

the earth. And the final part points us to Jesus who is the creator and sustainer of all things seen and unseen.

“Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above.”

Angels. Sun. Moon. Shining stars. Even the atmosphere is commanded to praise God! This is the heavenly chorus. Like the video that Heather just showed us, each planet has its own sound signature. Could they be praising God in their own way? Their own language?

There is something about gazing up at the sky on a summer night. Especially on a clear night when we can see all sorts of stars, planets, and galaxies far far away. It makes us feel so small, almost insignificant. It makes us wonder if we are alone in the galaxy or if there is other intelligent life forms on other planets. It makes us believe that there had to be something, someone behind the creation of it all.

Could it really have happened by chance as some are led to believe? I don't think so.

The Apostle Paul told the people in Rome, “God is made plain to us through the creation of the world. God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, are clearly seen from what has been made, so that we are without excuse.”¹

I think that when we look up at the stars we are being invited into a dance, a heavenly chorus as the celestial beings worship God the creator in their unique way.

Some years ago when our kids were smaller we went on a camping trip to Lake Wenatchee near Leavenworth. On a moonless night, the sky gets really dark and the stars come out in full force. It was early August.

We had gone to the restrooms to get ready for bed when we started hearing these people... and not just few...but multitudes of people in unison... “Oooh! Ahhh!” With our curiosity sparked, we headed out toward the lake to see what was going on.

People were spread out, laying on the beach and picnic tables, looking up at the skies watching a meteor shower take place. One shooting star immediately after another. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. I think we stopped counting at over 100. It was spectacular.

“Oooh! Ahhh!”

It was as if we were invited into the heavenly chorus as the stars worshiped God in their own way.

There were no words to fully describe it.

¹ Romans 1:19-20

If this first part of the psalm describes how the cosmos worships God, then the second part describes the earthly chorus. Weather. Geography. Trees. Animals. Sea creatures. Birds. And humans.

Have you ever seen a swarm of birds dancing in unison in the wind? Or have you been hiking and heard the song the wind whistling in the trees up on a mountainside?

Madeline D'elia writes, "Think for a moment about the mysteries of just one of God's creatures—a whale. These big, beautiful creatures spend 95 percent of their lives in the ocean, one of the deepest and darkest places we know about. And without warning, they pull 30,000 pounds of blubber against gravity and leap out of the water for unexplainable reasons.

Some baby whales gain 100 pounds an hour while nursing.

The song of a humpback whale, lasting for 10-20 minutes and being repeated for hours at a time, is produced for no apparent reason. Biologists speculate it may be related to mating, but truthfully no one is quite sure.

Behold them for a second and you feel helpless, out of control; not the terrible kind of helplessness, but the beautiful kind where we feel small and God feels big, and the mysteries of the world are acceptable to be unexplained."²

But let's bring this earthly song down to an even smaller scale.

Author Mark Batterson in *All In* talks about "Research in the field of bioacoustics and how we are surrounded by millions of ultrasonic songs. Did you know, for instance, that the electron shell of the carbon atom produces the same harmonic scale as the Gregorian chant? Or that whale songs can travel thousands of miles underwater? Or that meadowlarks have a range of three hundred notes? Supersensitive sound instruments have discovered that even earthworms make faint staccato sounds! Arnold Summerfield, the German physicist and pianist, observed that a single hydrogen atom, which emits one hundred frequencies, is more musical than a grand piano, which only emits eighty-eight frequencies.

Science writer Lewis Thomas summed it up in this way: "If we had better hearing, and could discern the [singing] of sea birds, the rhythmic [drumming] of schools of mollusks, or even the distant harmonics of [flies] hanging over meadows in the sun, the combined sound might lift us off our feet."³

Notice that in Psalm 148 and the list of creation that we humans are the last among creation commanded to praise the Lord! We humans are no less obligated than everything else in the cosmos to worship the Lord.

And finally the psalmist points us toward who we are to worship.

² Adapted from Madeline D'elia, "A Love Letter to Whales: On Feeling Small and Full of Wonder," Mockingbird blog (6-28-17 from Preaching Today Website.

³ Adapted from Mark Batterson, *All In* (Zondervan, 2013), pp. 118-119 from Preaching Today

The One “who God exalted to the highest place and gave the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁴

Again the Apostle Paul describes Jesus in this way, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Jesus... all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Jesus and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

All things! Even the atoms that make up this pulpit. Without the power of Jesus holding them together, it would come apart in billions or trillions of tiny pieces.

Jesus is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything Jesus might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him...how much of God’s fullness? ALL of God’s fullness lives in Jesus. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven...sun, moon, stars, galaxies, birds, whales, kangaroos, humans...All Things...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”⁵

“Let them praise the name the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.”⁶

But what might it sound like if the cosmos, the earth, and us humans could worship God in synch with one another? What song might we sing?

I want to show a video clip from a sermon of Louis Giglio, pastor of Passion City Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Louis introduces the sound profiles of two pulsars which are highly magnetized rotating stars and several stars put in synch with each other. Then we hear the unedited song signature of some whales. The he overlays them on a song that we know well.

Listen to this. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hd_iK6IMHCE)

The cosmos, the earth, and us humans worshiping God together.

Now, “How Great is Our God!”

“Praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the heavens and the earth.” Praise the Lord! Amen.

⁴ Philippians 2:9-11

⁵ Colossians 1:15-20

⁶ Psalm 148:13