

Creation's Choir

Naturalist John Muir was a believer. He described being in the forest or looking at a flower as “touching the hem of God’s garment.” Don’t you just love that phrase? You and I touch the hem of God’s garment here in the Jemez everyday.

John Muir also believed the natural world is a love letter from God. In his book, *Our National Parks*, he writes, “All Nature’s wildness tells the same story. Storms of every sort, torrents, earthquakes, cataclysms, ‘convulsions of nature,’ etc., however mysterious and lawless at first sight they may seem, are only harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied expressions of God’s love.”

Our reading from God’s Word is Psalm 148 or “the joyful song of Creation” Join me in reading it by saying “praise God” whenever I hold up my hand. Let’s practice... Listen to what the Spirit and creation is singing:

Praise God from the heavens; Praise god in the heights; praise God all you angels; praise God, all you heavenly hosts.

Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars. Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens.

Let them praise God, who commanded and they were created. God established them forever and ever and gave a decree that shall not pass away.

Praise God all the earth, you sea monsters and all depths, (praise God) fire and hail, snow and mist, storm winds that fulfill God’s word. (praise God) You mountains and all you hills, you fruit trees and all you cedars, (praise God) you wild beasts and all tame animals, you creeping things and flying birds.

Let the rulers of the earth and all peoples and all the judges of the earth (praise God) – young men too, and maidens, old men and women – praise God whose name alone is exalted; whose majesty is above earth and heaven, and who has raised the fortunes of the people.

Be this God praised by all the faithful ones, by the children of Israel, the people close to God. Alleluia.

One of my favorite novels is Mountain Man by Vardis Fisher. It tells the story of Sam Minard a 27-year-old free trapper who lives and works in the Bitterroot and Bighorn mountains of the 1840s. The movie *Jeremiah Johnson* starring Robert Redford was based on the novel.

Sam, whose father was a musician, plays Bach and Beethoven on his mouth harp. He also has a deep and abiding appreciation for the song of creation that he hears in the mountains.

In the book, Sam experiences a violent rain storm as “...one of the Almighty’s finest thunder symphonies...with the first large raindrops...Sam begins to sing, howling into the storm his admiration of the Creator, whose genius had wrought such marvels... He shouts his head off,

knowing that once the conductor got the hand of things, he would open with a prelude that would shake the earth... He strove to improvise his mood, pouring forth wild baritone harmonies that dissolved into the winds.

“As the lightning’s voice roared in the awful grandeur, like a gigantic orchestra of drums and percussion, the sheets of fire set whole areas of sky aflame, and Sam became intent on trying to become a part of it... his arms gesturing to the horns to come in, or the strings, as he herded the harmonies into overwhelming crescendo. Bushes and trees along the way were in such convulsions of frenzied joy that now and then one tore its roots free of the earth and went off into the sky...”

This mountain man’s musical experience of the storm reminds me of the song of creation in Psalm 148. “Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens... Praise God all the earth... fire and hail, snow and midst, storm winds that fulfill God’s word.”

The Psalmist, like Sam, is pictured as great maestro who joyfully conducts this grand anthem of the universe. First, she brings in the angels, then the quarks and quasars. To add some bass, she brings in a clap of thunder.

She goes on bringing in mountains, lightning and fruit trees, fire, hail, snow and mist. She doesn't stop until every flower of the field, every fiber of every plant, every creature from the deepest whale to the soaring eagle, every species of every insect joins in and the whole wide universe is praising God the maker of heaven and earth.

I can’t imagine of a better scripture for us to be listening to as we worship on this beautiful summer day surrounded by the grandeur of God’s good creation. We call this our Outdoor Worship, but the reality is that we’re joining in creation’s choir of praise.

Our voices, our prayers, our thoughts, our feelings are a part of a greater symphony. You and I are participating with the trees, the mesas, the river, the plants, the animals, the birds, the wind, the clouds, the earth and the sun to praise God.

During COVID this past year, creation’s choir got louder and stronger. As the documentary, *The Year the Earth Changed* showed our living in lockdown opened the door for nature to bounce back and thrive. Across seas, skies and lands, Earth found its rhythm again. As narrator David Attenborough “As we stop, remarkable things happen in the natural world.”

Within days of lockdown, Los Angeles experienced its best air quality in 40 years. Toxic gases in China were reduced by half. Earth’s atmosphere saw the greatest drop in carbon dioxide in modern, industrial history.

After just 12 days, air pollution in Jalandhar, India was so greatly reduced that people suddenly had a view of the Himalayan mountains for the first time in decades. The mountains had been completely hidden by thick smog for more than 30 years.

Loggerhead sea turtles in Juno Beach, Florida greatly benefited from a break in tourism. They were able to lay eggs in greater number without having to worry about humans frolicking on the beach. Penguins had a record-breaking mating season too. And no rhinos were killed for their horns for the first time since 1999.

Striking changes happened beneath the Earth's surface too. As Sir Attenborough said: "With the vibrations from travel and industry halved, it has been the quietest period underground in recorded history."

Whales were able to "talk" longer and for greater distances without having to deal with loud ships. Songbirds could be heard singing in deserted cities for the first time. Deer in Japan that were fed at temples adapted to the human-less environs by heading into town to graze.

Our natural world thrived with "clearer air, cleaner waters, and animals starting to flourish in ways we haven't seen for decades." I encouraged you to watch this love letter to planet Earth. You will be amazed and hopeful about nature's resiliency and ability to bounce back.

Creation's choir got louder and stronger this past year without us. But we're still part of this on-going song of praise. We're still members of the choir and have a duty to keep singing with creation. We have a responsibility to care for Mother Earth so that the rest of the choir can thrive. Our church's Directory for Worship describes this duty and responsibility:

"God calls the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit to participate in God's work of creation and preservation. God has given humankind awesome power and perilous responsibility to rule and tame the earth, to sustain and reshape it, to replenish and renew it... As stewards of God's creation who hold the earth in trust, the people of God are called to:

- a. use the earth's resources responsibly without plundering, polluting, or destroying,
- b. develop technological methods and processes that work together with the earth's environment to preserve and enhance life,
- c. produce and consume in ways that make available to all people what is sufficient for life,
- d. work for responsible attitudes and practices in procreation and reproduction,
- e. use and shape earth's goods to create beauty, order, health, and peace in ways that reflect God's love for all creatures." (W-7.5001, W-7.5003)

Brothers and sister, we are called to take our place in the choir. And it doesn't matter if we can carry a tune or not. As biblical scholar Terence Fretheim said: "Praise occurs when the creature fulfills the task for which it was created."

As critters who can Twitter, I want to challenge you to make creation care a part of your life and faith. Let us join the world around us and sing "Praise God! Praise God! Praise God!" Amen.

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