

**Psalm 104:1-25
April 22, '18
Earth Day**

“MORE PEAKS & VALLEYS”

TODAY IS EARTH DAY – NOT EARTH DAY *SUNDAY*, BUT THE ACTUAL, OFFICIAL EARTH DAY.

EVERY YEAR, APRIL 22 IS EARTH DAY.

ONE MIGHT WONDER WHY THAT DATE WAS CHOSEN.

APRIL 22ND HAPPENS TO BE THE DAY OF LENIN’S BIRTHDAY – AND I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT *JOHN LENNON* OF BEATLES FAME, BUT *VLADMIR* LENIN - ONE “N” & AN “I” – OF COMMUNIST FAME.

NO, APRIL 22 WASN’T CHOSEN AS EARTH DAY BECAUSE IT’S VLADMIR LENIN’S BIRTHDAY.

IN FACT, ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FOUNDERS OF EARTH DAY, WISCONSIN SENATOR GAYLORD NELSON, WAS ASKED ABOUT THIS & HE SAID, “*ON ANY GIVEN DAY, A LOT OF BOTH GOOD & BAD PEOPLE WERE BORN.*”

A PERSON MANY CONSIDER THE WORLD’S FIRST ENVIRONMENTALIST, SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, WAS BORN ON

APRIL 22. SO WAS QUEEN ISABELLA. MORE IMPORTANTLY, SO WAS MY AUNT TILLIE!”

NELSON WAS BEING FACETIOUS BECAUSE NOT ONLY IS THE EXACT DAY OF ST. FRANCIS’ BIRTH UNKNOWN – SO IS THE YEAR!

AND I WOULD WONDER IF SENATOR NELSON EVEN *HAD* AN AUNT NAMED TILLIE!

SO, NO –APRIL 22 AS EARTH DAY WAS NOT ESTABLISHED AS A WAY OF HONORING SOMEONE’S BIRTHDAY.

IT WAS ESTABLISHED FOR A MUCH MORE PRACTICAL REASON.

IN 1970 – THE FIRST YEAR “EARTH DAY” WAS OBSERVED – THE END OF APRIL WAS THE TIME WHEN MOST COLLEGE STUDENTS WERE OFF FOR SPRING BREAK.

THE POTENTIAL FOR LARGE CROWDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO GATHER IN MAJOR CITIES WAS ENHANCED BY CHOOSING A TIME WHEN THEY WOULD HAVE MORE FREEDOM TO TRAVEL.

**AS WE OBSERVE “EARTH DAY” AT EASTMINSTER TODAY,
I’M REMINDED OF AN EXPERIENCE I HAD WHEN I WAS DOING A
STUDENT TEACHING SEMESTER IN NEW BOSTON, MICHIGAN.**

**I WAS TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH & SOCIOLOGY
CLASSES & I OFFERED STUDENTS SOME OF MY OWN BOOKS TO
USE FOR BOOK REVIEWS.**

**THE PERMANENT TEACHER FOR THE CLASSES CAME TO
ME ONE MORNING, CLEARLY DISTRESSED.**

**HE SAID, “I’VE JUST BEEN MEETING WITH THE PRINCIPAL.
HE TOLD ME HE HAD SOME IRATE PARENTS CALLING BECAUSE
OF SOME BOOKS YOU LET STUDENTS USE FOR BOOK REVIEWS.**

DID YOU REALLY DO THAT?!”

**I TOLD HIM I DID & I SAID, “SURELY NO ONE WOULD BE
UPSET ABOUT THEIR SON OR DAUGHTER READING THOSE
BOOKS.”**

**HE LOOKED AT ME IN DISBELIEF & SAID, “ARE YOU REALLY
THAT NAÏVE?”**

YOU'D BE AMAZED AT THE THINGS THAT CAN UPSET PARENTS."

THE REASON I SAY I'M REMINDED OF THAT EXPERIENCE TODAY IS BECAUSE I SUPPOSE I'M STILL NAÏVE ENOUGH TO THINK THAT FOCUSING ON "EARTH DAY" IN CHURCH WOULD SEEM TO BE ONE THING THAT EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US COULD AGREE IS A GOOD IDEA.

BUT IF THERE'S ONE THING I'VE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS IT'S THAT THERE ARE VERY, VERY FEW THINGS ABOUT WHICH ONE MIGHT SAY *"EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US COULD AGREE THAT THIS IS A GOOD IDEA."*

SO, QUITE FRANKLY, IT'S TOO BAD IF YOU THINK OBSERVING EARTH DAY IN THE CHURCH ISN'T A GOOD IDEA.

WE'RE GOING TO DO IT ANYWAY!

AND ALSO, QUITE FRANKLY, EVEN THOUGH WE MAY HAVE A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT OPINIONS ABOUT A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT THINGS, CELEBRATING GOD'S GIFT OF CREATION SHOULDN'T BE ONE OF THEM!

YOU HEARD THAT LONG PASSAGE THAT TONY (OR SHANNON) READ THIS MORNING FROM THE 104TH PSALM.

I THOUGHT ABOUT SHORTENING IT.

ACTUALLY, I *DID* SHORTEN IT.

THE ENTIRE PSALM CONTAINS 35 VERSES SO I BASICALLY ELIMINATED THE LAST THIRD OF IT.

I READ IT & RE-READ IT & THEN READ IT AGAIN, TRYING TO DECIDE WHAT ELSE WE MIGHT TAKE OUT TO MAKE IT SHORTER.

I FINALLY GAVE UP BECAUSE ALL 25 VERSES YOU HEARD THIS MORNING ARE STUNNING IN THEIR BEAUTY & IN THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY CONVEY A SENSE OF AWE & WONDER AS WE CONSIDER THIS MAGNIFICENT WORLD IN WHICH GOD HAS PLACED US.

THE PSALMIST HAS COMPOSED A MASTERPIECE WITH THIS POETIC PRESENTATION OF THE GLORIES OF GOD'S KINGDOM.

THIS ISN'T THE ONLY PLACE IN THE BIBLE WHERE WE FIND SUCH WORDS EXTOLLING THE WONDERS OF GOD'S WORLD.

LOOK AT THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF GENESIS.

LOOK AT SO MANY OF THE OTHER PSALMS – WRITE THEM DOWN FOR LATER REFERENCE – 8, 24, 65, 96, 145-148.

AGAIN, THAT'S PSALM 8, 24, 65, 96, AND 145 THROUGH 148.

EVERY ONE OF THOSE PSALMS SPEAKS OF CREATION IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THIS ONE DOES.

BETTER YET, PERHAPS, READ JOB 38-41 WHERE GOD SPEAKS TO JOB *OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND*, CHALLENGING HIM TO DO ANY OF THE MAGNIFICENT WORKS IN CREATION THAT GOD HAS DONE.

YES, THE BIBLE IS FILLED WITH PASSAGES LIKE THESE BECAUSE THE WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE ARE SO VITALLY IMPORTANT TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHO GOD IS.

LAST WEEK, IN LOOKING AT THE LECTIONARY GOSPEL LESSON, WE TALKED ABOUT THE “PEAKS & VALLEYS” OF LIFE – THE SYMBOLIC UPS & DOWNS OF OUR EXISTENCE.

TODAY CAN REALLY BE SEEN AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THAT SERMON BECAUSE IN THIS PASSAGE, THE PSALMIST IS ALSO TALKING ABOUT “PEAKS & VALLEYS” – BUT HE’S NOT TALKING ABOUT THEM SYMBOLICALLY, BUT LITERALLY.

HE’S TALKING ABOUT EVERYTHING WE SEE AROUND US IN CREATION.

FOR THAT REASON ALONE, WE CAN SAY THAT THIS IS A FOLLOW-UP TO THAT SERMON.

BUT I THINK THERE’S ANOTHER – FAR MORE IMPORTANT - REASON IT’S A FOLLOW-UP.

ONE OF THE IDEAS WE TOUCHED ON LIGHTLY WAS THE IDEA THAT THE PROCLAMATION & ASSURANCE OF THE LITERAL RESURRECTION OF JESUS WAS ESSENTIAL IS BECAUSE IT WAS A WAY OF HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE

**& THE VALUE OF THE REAL WORLD – THE MATERIAL WORLD
IN WHICH WE LIVE.**

**THE RESURRECTED BODY OF JESUS WAS A PHYSICAL
BODY – A BODY THAT COULD BE SEEN & TOUCHED.**

**WHEN HE ASKED THE DISCIPLES FOR SOMETHING TO EAT,
IT WAS YET ANOTHER SIGN THAT THE MATERIAL WORLD –
THE PHYSICAL WORLD – THE REAL WORLD - IS OF UTMOST
IMPORTANCE IN UNDERSTANDING & APPRECIATING & FULLY
ABIDING IN GOD’S KINGDOM.**

**THIS PASSAGE WE’VE READ THIS MORNING HIGHLIGHTS
THAT IMPORTANCE.**

**ONE WRITER PUTS IT LIKE THIS – *“PSALM 104 IS LIKE THE
POETRY OF GENESIS 1 SET TO MUSIC, SINGING THE WONDROUS
ORDER THAT GOD HAS BROUGHT FORTH.”***

**THE GREAT 16TH CENTURY REFORMER, JOHN CALVIN,
PUTS IT LIKE THIS: *“EARTH IS THE THEATER OF GOD’S GLORY,
THE PLAYGROUND OF GOD’S DELIGHT & THE GARDEN OF GOD’S
ENCOUNTER WITH US.”***

SIGNS OF GOD'S GOODNESS, GOD'S POWER, GOD'S MAJESTY & GOD'S PRESENCE ARE ALL AROUND US EVERY SINGLE MOMENT OF EVERY SINGLE DAY.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS TRUE FOR ANYONE ELSE, BUT I FIND THAT AS I GROW OLDER, I BECOME MORE AND MORE AMAZED AT CREATION.

I REMEMBER, WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I WOULD NOTICE OLDER PEOPLE WHO SPENT, WHAT SEEMED TO ME, AN INORDINATE AMOUNT OF TIME WATCHING NATURE & BEING CAUGHT UP IN OBSERVING THINGS THAT I NEVER EVEN NOTICED OR DIDN'T TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT.

I ALWAYS ASSUMED IT WAS PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY WERE BORED & DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO DO.

I'VE NOW LEARNED THAT IT'S MORE BECAUSE THOSE FOLKS HAVE GROWN UP – NOT JUST IN YEARS – BUT IN THEIR APPRECIATION OF CREATION.

THEY'RE SIMPLY MARVELING AT THE DIVINE PRESENCE ALL AROUND THEM.

AS WE CONSIDER THE BEAUTY OF THESE WORDS OF THE PSALMIST, WE HAVE TO REALIZE THAT WE'RE IN AN EVEN BETTER PLACE TO MARVEL AT CREATION THAN *HE* WAS.

WE KNOW SO MUCH MORE ABOUT THE WORLD THAN HE COULD POSSIBLY HAVE KNOWN!

HE DIDN'T HAVE MICROSCOPES WITH WHICH TO PEER INTO THE TINIEST CORNERS OF GOD'S CREATION.

THE PSALMIST DIDN'T HAVE A HUBBLE TELESCOPE WITH WHICH TO STARE INTO THE FARTHEST REACHES OF OUTER SPACE.

HE DIDN'T HAVE UNDERSEA APPARATUS THAT ENABLED HIM TO PEEK INTO THE OCEAN'S DEEPEST DEPTHS.

WITH ALL THAT IN MIND, I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT WE HAVE EVEN MORE REASON THAN THE PSALMIST TO SAY, RIGHT ALONG WITH HIM, "*BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL!*"

ONE OF THE MOST MOVING & BEAUTIFUL ASPECTS OF THIS PSALM IS THE WAY IN WHICH IT PROCLAIMS THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF EVERY ASPECT OF GOD'S CREATION.

HE TELLS US OF SPRINGS THAT GUSH FORTH IN THE VALLEYS TO PROVIDE WATER FOR THE WILD ANIMALS.

VEGETATION GROWS TO BECOME FOOD FOR ANIMALS & HUMANS.

MOUNTAINS ARE CREATED TO PROVIDE HOMES FOR GOATS & TREES PROVIDE HOMES FOR BIRDS.

EVERY PART OF GOD'S CREATION IS DEPENDENT UPON ANOTHER PART OF IT.

WHAT A WONDERFULLY SYMBOLIC MESSAGE THAT PROCLAIMS TO US REGARDING OUR OWN INTERDEPENDENCE ON ONE ANOTHER.

SOMEONE GAVE ME A MAGAZINE ARTICLE LAST WEEK ABOUT THE WAY TREES ARE DEPENDENT UPON ONE ANOTHER.

ONE RESEARCHER TALKED ABOUT THE FASCINATING IDEA OF FORESTS HAVING "MOTHER TREES" – TREES THAT ARE OLDER & LARGER & PLAY A NURTURING, SUPPORTIVE & MATERNAL ROLE FOR THE OTHER TREES AROUND IT.

WITH THEIR DEEP ROOTS, THESE MOTHER TREES DRAW UP WATER & MAKE IT AVAILABLE FOR SHALLOW-ROOTED SEEDLINGS.

THEY HELP NEIGHBORING TREES BY SENDING THEM NUTRIENTS, AND WHEN THEIR NEIGHBORS ARE STRUGGLING, THESE MOTHER TREES DETECT THEIR DISTRESS SIGNALS & INCREASE THE FLOW OF NUTRIENTS ACCORDINGLY.

THIS IS ALL PART OF THE MIND-NUMBING MAGNIFICENCE OF GOD'S GLORIOUS CREATION.

WE, ALONG WITH EVERY OTHER PART OF THE REAL, PHYSICAL, MATERIAL WORLD THAT GOD HAS CREATED, HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY.

I THINK WE ALL KNOW THAT WE HAVEN'T PLAYED THAT ROLE VERY WELL.

FAR TOO OFTEN, WE DON'T ACT AS IF WE MARVEL AT GOD'S CREATION.

**FAR TOO OFTEN, WE DON'T RECOGNIZE OUR
INTERDEPENDENCE WITH EVERYTHING ELSE IN THIS
MAGNIFICENT WORLD.**

**WE STRIVE TO LIVE OUR LIVES SO THAT WE MIGHT BE
WORTHY OF ENTERING GOD'S ETERNAL REALM WHEN OUR
DAYS HERE HAVE COME TO AN END.**

**AND YET, HOW CAN WE EXPECT TO BE WELCOMED INTO
GOD'S *HEAVENLY* REALM IF WE AREN'T WILLING TO SHOW
RESPECT FOR HIS *EARTHLY* REALM?**

**WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE CAN'T BE IN A RIGHT
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD UNLESS WE'RE IN A RIGHT
RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS CREATION.**

**BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION, OF
COURSE, CAN TAKE MANY FORMS.**

**INDIVIDUALLY, WE ALL MUST DECIDE FOR OURSELVES
WHAT THAT MEANS.**

BUT I THINK IT'S VITAL FOR US TO RECOGNIZE THAT WE DO HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN SOCIETY'S RESPECT FOR CREATION.

WE CAN'T DO EVERYTHING – BUT WE CAN DO SOME THINGS.

WE CAN – AND MUST – PLAY OUR PART.

REMEMBER - JESUS DIDN'T HEAL EVERY BLIND PERSON IN ISRAEL – ONLY THOSE WHO STOOD RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM.

WE CAN'T SOLVE EVERY PROBLEM OF HUMANITY'S ABUSE & MISUSE OF CREATION – BUT WE CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEMS THAT ARE STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.

THE MAGNIFICENT WORLD IN WHICH GOD HAS PLACED US SURELY IS WORTHY OF OUR LOVE, OUR RESPECT, OUR PROTECTION.

EACH FLOWER THAT GROWS, EACH BIRD THAT SINGS, THE MOUNTAINS, THE RIVERS, THE SUN THAT RISES IN THE MORNING & SETS IN THE EVENING, THE COLD OF WINTER, THE

**WARMTH OF SUMMER & ALL THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH ARE
WORTHY OF OUR LOVE, OUR RESPECT & OUR PROTECTION.**

***“GOD GAVE US EYES TO SEE THEM & LIPS THAT WE MIGHT
TELL HOW GREAT IS GOD ALMIGHTY, WHO HAS MADE ALL
THINGS WELL.” AMEN.***

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