

Psalm 8
August 12, '18

“WONDERFUL WORLD”

FEBRUARY 1, 1964, WAS AN HISTORIC DAY IN POPULAR MUSIC HISTORY.

ON THAT DAY, FOR THE FIRST TIME, A BEATLES RECORD WAS NUMBER 1 ON BILLBOARD’S TOP 100 CHARTS.

IT WAS “*I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND.*”

IT STAYED IN THAT TOP SPOT FOR 7 WEEKS UNTIL IT WAS REPLACED BY ANOTHER BEATLES’ SONG – “*SHE LOVES YOU.*”

IT WAS ANOTHER THREE WEEKS BEFORE YET ANOTHER BEATLES’ RECORDING TOOK ITS PLACE – “*CAN’T BUY ME LOVE.*”

THAT SONG STAYED THERE FOR SIX WEEKS.

THAT MEANT THAT FROM THE FIRST WEEK OF FEBRUARY UNTIL THE SECOND WEEK OF MAY IN 1964, THE RECORD CHARTS WERE DOMINATED BY THE BEATLES.

FINALLY, ON MAY 9TH, THAT STRING OF CONSECUTIVE WEEKS AT NUMBER 1, ENDED FOR THE BEATLES.

THE RECORD THAT TOOK ITS PLACE, THOUGH, WAS RATHER STUNNING.

IT WAS BY AN ENTERTAINER WHO – IN HIS MID-SIXTIES – BECAME THE OLDEST MUSICIAN TO REACH THAT TOP SPOT.

IT WAS LOUIS ARMSTRONG, BUT HIS SONG THAT SUPPLANTED THE BEATLES WASN’T THE SONG THAT SERVES AS OUR FOCUS THIS MORNING.

IT WAS “*HELLO, DOLLY!*”

IT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT, THOUGH, TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SONG THAT IS TODAY’S FOCUS.

THREE YEARS LATER, A SONG BY BOB THIELE & GEORGE WEISS CAME TO THE ATTENTION OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG.

THE LYRICIST & THE COMPOSER WERE DISTURBED BY THINGS THEY SAW GOING ON IN OUR NATION.

THEY SAW SOCIAL CHAOS EVERYWHERE & WROTE “WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD” IN HOPES OF BRINGING ABOUT SOME KIND OF RECONCILIATION.

I’M GUESSING EVERYONE HERE KNOWS THE SONG & I’M ALSO GUESSING EVERYONE HERE LOVES IT.

HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE THIS SONG?

WELL, THERE WAS AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO *DIDN’T* LOVE IT & EVEN TRIED TO PREVENT IT FROM BEING RECORDED.

IT WAS EXACTLY 51 YEARS AGO IN LAS VEGAS – AUGUST, 1967.

ARMSTRONG HAD FINISHED A PERFORMANCE & LARRY NEWTON, THE PRESIDENT OF ABC RECORDS WAS THERE TO GET SOME PUBLICITY PHOTOS.

HE HEARD THAT ARMSTRONG WAS GOING TO BE RECORDING A SONG & HE WAS EXCITED ABOUT A FOLLOW-UP TO “HELLO, DOLLY!” BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL.

WHEN HE LEARNED WHAT KIND OF SONG IT WAS, THOUGH – A SLOW BALLAD – THAT DIDN’T FIT WITH WHAT HE’D ENVISIONED & HE WENT TO THE RECORDING STUDIO WITH THE INTENT OF PUTTING A STOP TO IT.

SOMEONE LEARNED OF NEWTON’S DISPLEASURE & WHAT HE INTENDED TO DO & LOCKED HIM OUT OF THE STUDIO.

THERE WERE TRAINS PASSING NEARBY & SEVERAL TAKES WERE INTERRUPTED.

NEWTON WAS YELLING IN THE BACKGROUND & THERE WAS ABSOLUTE CHAOS THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE RECORDING SESSION.

IN THE MIDST OF THE TENSION, ARMSTRONG STARTED LAUGHING & BEFORE LONG ALL THE OTHER MUSICIANS DID TOO.

THE RECORDING SESSION RAN OVERTIME & ARMSTRONG TOLD THE PRODUCER TO CUT WHAT HE'D BE MAKING HIMSELF TO BE SURE THE OTHER MUSICIANS GOT PAID PROPERLY.

AFTER ALL OF THAT, THOUGH, NEWTON REFUSED TO RELEASE THE RECORD IN THE UNITED STATES.

IT BECAME A HIT ON THE BRITISH CHARTS BUT WAS BARELY KNOWN IN THIS COUNTRY.

BY THE END OF 1968, THOUGH, NEWTON WAS FORCED TO PUT IT ON AN ALBUM BUT STILL REFUSED TO PROMOTE IT & IT NEVER CLIMBED HIGHER THAN 116 ON THE BILLBOARD CHART.

50 YEARS LATER, THOUGH, VIRTUALLY EVERYONE KNOWS THIS SONG.

ITS MESSAGE IS SO UPLIFTING & SO POWERFUL.

IT'S A MESSAGE OF HOPE & LOVE – A MESSAGE THAT PROCLAIMS THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S CREATION ALL AROUND US.

IT'S A MESSAGE THAT FITS SO VERY NICELY WITH THE 8TH PSALM THAT WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.

IN HIS COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS - A. B. RHODES, THE GREAT OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLAR FROM THE LOUISVILLE PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY – LABELS THE 8TH PSALM “GENESIS 1 SET TO MUSIC.”

IT'S TRUE, ISN'T IT?

LOOK AT THE CENTER OF THIS PSALM –

“WHEN I LOOK AT YOUR HEAVENS...I SAY TO MYSELF – ‘WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!’

...THE WORK OF YOUR FINGERS...I SAY TO MYSELF – ‘WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!’

...THE MOON & THE STARS THAT YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED ...I SAY TO MYSELF – ‘WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!’”

WHEN YOU THINK OF THE PSALMIST WRITING THESE WORDS, YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER HOW DIFFERENTLY HE UNDERSTOOD THE WORLD.

THINK OF HIM LOOKING UP AT THE NIGHTTIME SKY.

WHAT HE UNDERSTOOD WAS THAT HE WAS ON A FLAT SURFACE – A SURFACE THAT WAS AT THE CENTER OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.

THERE WAS A DOME ABOVE THAT SIMPLY COVERED EVERYTHING THAT WAS.

THIS – TO HIM – WAS EXTRAORDINARY.

GOD HAD CREATED THIS FLAT SURFACE CALLED EARTH, COVERED IT WITH A DOME & FILLED THE DOME WITH THE SUN, THE MOON & THE STARS.

WITHIN THAT FLAT SURFACE, THERE WAS LAND AND THERE WAS WATER.

THERE WERE DIVINELY-CREATED BEINGS IN THE AIR, ON THE LAND & IN THE WATER.

THIS WAS ASTOUNDING TO THE PSALMIST.

WE DON’T SEE THE WORLD IN THE SAME WAY & YET – BECAUSE WE DON’T – WE HAVE EVEN MORE REASON TO BE ASTOUNDED THAN HE WAS!

LAST YEAR, DURING THIS SUMMER SERIES ON MOVIES, BOOKS & SONGS, WE LOOKED AT A BOOK BY DR. TIMOTHY JOHNSON ENTITLED FINDING GOD IN THE QUESTIONS.

JOHNSON – AS A MEDICAL DOCTOR & SOMEONE WHO LOOKS AT THE WORLD WITH A SCIENTIFIC MIND – HELPS US UNDERSTAND HOW INCREDIBLE GOD’S WORLD IS & HOW ASTOUNDING CREATION IS.

WE SIT IN WHAT SOMEONE HAS CALLED THE “GOLDBLOCKS” REGION OF THE SUN – WE’RE NOT TOO CLOSE & NOT TOO FAR.

WE’RE JUST RIGHT.

IT’S BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST 154 FACTORS NECESSARY FOR LIFE TO EXIST & EVERY ONE OF THOSE FACTORS HAS TO BE EXACTLY PRECISE.

YES – WE HAVE EVEN MORE REASON TO BE ASTOUNDED AT THE WONDER OF GOD’S CREATION THAN THE PSALMIST WRITING THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

BUT THE PSALMIST – LIKE THE SONG – DOESN’T JUST FOCUS ON THE WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE.

AS HE LOOKS AS THE MAGNIFICENCE OF CREATION, HE ADDRESSES GOD WITH A QUESTION - *“IN THE MIDST OF ALL OF THE GRANDEUR THAT WE SEE ALL AROUND US, WHAT ARE WE – AS HUMAN BEINGS – THAT YOU CARE FOR US?”*

HE COMES TO THE STARTLING CONCLUSION THAT GOD HAS CREATED US JUST A BIT LOWER THAN DIVINE.

GOD HAS CROWNED US WITH GLORY & HONOR.

GOD HAS GIVEN US RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL THAT GOD HAS CREATED.

THIS ISN’T JUST A BROAD, GENERAL DECLARATION OF DOMINION & GLORY, RESPONSIBILITY & POWER.

IT'S VERY SPECIFIC.

IT'S GIVEN TO EACH ONE OF US.

IT'S GIVEN TO YOU & YOU & YOU & YOU.

YOU HAVE BEEN CREATED BY THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE FOR A SPECIFIC ROLE & A SPECIFIC PURPOSE.

THIS IS EVEN MORE ASTOUNDING THAN CREATION ITSELF!

YOU SHOULD BE AS OVERWHELMED BY THE MIRACLE & MAJESTY OF YOUR OWN LIFE AS YOU ARE BY CREATION ITSELF!

THIS ISN'T SOMETHING TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY!

IN THE SAME WAY THAT GOD CREATED EVERYTHING FOR A REASON & A PURPOSE, GOD CREATED YOU.

YOU – SINGULAR – HAVE A SPECIFIC ROLE TO PLAY IN GOD'S CREATION.

OF COURSE, WE CAN'T READ THIS PSALM WITHOUT CONSIDERING HOW WE'RE FULFILLING OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN CARING FOR THIS "WONDERFUL WORLD" GOD HAS CREATED.

GOD GAVE US – AS THE PSALMIST SAYS - *DOMINION* OVER CREATION.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO TAKE IT TO MEAN THAT WE'RE FREE TO WIELD CONTROL & POWER OVER IT.

WHAT IT REALLY MEANS IS THAT WE'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR *PROTECTING* IT.

IT'S OUR JOB TO PROTECT CREATION.

INDIVIDUALLY & COLLECTIVELY, GOD HAS ENTRUSTED THE CARE OF HIS WORLD TO US.

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE HONOR & PRIVILEGE & RESPONSIBILITY GOD HAS GRANTED US!

THE WORLD THAT IS AT OUR FEET IS NOT THERE FOR US TO TRAMPLE BUT TO PROTECT.

YOU MAY REMEMBER A NEW YORK MAYOR FROM YEARS AGO WHO WOULD WALK THE STREETS OF THE CITY & CALL OUT TO PEOPLE – “*HOW AM I DOING?*”

I WONDER IF WE MIGHT ASK THAT QUESTION IN TERMS OF OUR CARE OF GOD’S CREATION.

“*PERSONALLY, HOW AM I DOING? COLLECTIVELY, HOW ARE WE DOING?*”

OR WHAT IF WE WERE ABLE TO – AND DARED TO -ASK THOSE OF PREVIOUS GENERATIONS HOW WE WERE DOING IN CARING FOR THE EARTH?

BETTER YET – WHAT IF WE ASKED THOSE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS – OUR GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN AND GREAT-GREAT GRANDCHILDREN?

WHAT IF THEY COULD SOMEHOW LOOK FROM THE FUTURE INTO TODAY?

IF THEY WERE LOOKING BACK ON US – THE GENERATIONS LONG BEFORE THEM –HOW DO YOU THINK THEY WOULD RESPOND IF WE ASKED THEM WHAT KIND OF WORLD WE LEFT FOR THEM?

“*HEY, KIDS - HOW DID WE DO? HOW WELL DID WE CARE FOR CREATION SO THAT GOD’S WONDERFUL WORLD WOULD STILL BE WONDERFUL FOR YOU?*”

I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT IT PAINS ME TO THINK OF WHAT THEIR RESPONSE WOULD BE.

WITH BOTH THE PSALM & THE SONG FOR TODAY, THEY MOVE FROM THE BEAUTY OF GOD’S CREATION TO THE BEAUTY OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.

I SEE A WARM EMBRACE BETWEEN OLD FRIENDS WHO HAVEN'T SEEN ONE ANOTHER IN YEARS AND I SAY TO MYSELF – WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD.

I SEE AN INFANT & HER FAMILY OVERCOME SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES TO FINALLY BE INTRODUCED TO HER CHURCH FAMILY AND I SAY TO MYSELF – WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD.

I SEE LOVED ONES GRACEFULLY & FAITHFULLY COME TO TERMS WITH AN UNTIMELY DEATH AND I SAY TO MYSELF – WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD.

WE HAVE – WITHIN US – THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE & ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD IT IS.

BUT THERE'S EVEN MORE THAN THAT.

WE HAVE WITHIN US – THE GOD-GIVEN POWER AS WELL AS THE PRIVILEGE & RESPONSIBILITY - TO ENABLE OTHERS TO SEE THAT AS WELL.

AS ASTOUNDING AS IT SEEMS - GOD HAS GIVEN US THE POWER TO MAKE THIS A WONDERFUL WORLD.

BOB THIELE & GEORGE WEISS WROTE THEIR SONG IN 1967 & WHEN LOUIS ARMSTRONG RECORDED IT, WE WERE IN THE MIDST OF A SUMMER OF RIOTS IN VIRTUALLY EVERY MAJOR CITY IN OUR NATION.

THE WORST OF THOSE RIOTS TOOK PLACE IN DETROIT & I REMEMBER HOW FRIGHTENING IT WAS TO LIVE WITHIN MILES OF BURNING BUILDINGS & NATIONAL GUARDSMEN ON EVERY CORNER.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, WHEN THE SONG WAS FINALLY RELEASED IN THE UNITED STATES, WE HAD JUST ENDURED THE

**AGONY OF THE ASSASSINATIONS OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND
ROBERT KENNEDY.**

**TWO YEARS AFTER THAT, OUR NATION WAS STILL IN TURMOIL
& LOUIS ARMSTRONG USED THAT TURMOIL AS A WAY OF LOOKING
AT THE WORLD IN A DIFFERENT WAY.**

**HALF A CENTURY LATER, IT MAY BE GOOD TO BE REMINDED
THAT – EVEN IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT & CHAOS, TURMOIL &
TROUBLE - WE HAVE WITHIN OUR POWER THE ABILITY TO MAKE
THIS WORLD A GASSER.**

**FOR THOSE TOO YOUNG TO KNOW, AT THE TIME, BASICALLY,
THAT MEANT “WONDERFUL.” AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

*In 1970, in the midst of turmoil in our nation, Louis Armstrong offered the following introduction to
a song he had recorded three years earlier.*

*"Some of you young folks been saying to me
'Hey Pops, what you mean 'What a wonderful world?'*

*How about all them wars all over the place?
You call them wonderful?*

*And how about hunger and pollution?
That ain't so wonderful either.'*

*Well how about listening to old Pops for a minute.
Seems to me, it ain't the world that's so bad
but what we're doin' to it.*

*And all I'm saying is see what a wonderful world
It would be if only we'd give it a chance.
Love baby, love. That's the secret, yeah.
If lots more of us loved each other
we'd solve lots more problems.
And then this world would be a gasser.*

That's wha' ol' Pops keeps saying."

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom, for me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, dark sacred night
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces, of people going by
I see friends shaking hands, sayin', "How do you do?"
They're really sayin', "I love you"

I hear babies cryin', I watch them grow
They'll learn much more, than I'll ever know
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world

Yes, I think to myself
What a wonderful world
Oh yeah!

Bob Thiele and George David Weiss