

## BLESS THE LORD

Pentecost 21 Year B

Job. 38:1-7,(34-41); Ps. 104:1-9,24,35c; Heb. 5:1-10; Mk10:35-45 Gladstone 17/10/2021

Global warming! Climate change! We hear about these things all the time, don't we? In 2018 a UN Commission released a disturbing report on global warming and climate change. With an array of scientific studies to back it up, the report predicted that we have about 10 years in which to sharply reduce the levels of CO<sup>2</sup> in the atmosphere or the planet will undergo such profound changes in sea level and temperature as to make life precarious for millions of people across the globe. That's seven years to go, folks! Where will you be in seven years? I know where I'll be—unless the water levels rise and my house is under water.

These changes, we are told, will have a major impact on things like increased heat, drought, insect outbreaks, and increased wildfires. Not to mention the additional concerns of declining water supplies, reduced agricultural yields, health impacts in cities due to heat; and flooding and erosion in coastal areas..

Doesn't sound like there's going to be a lot of fun times ahead if all these predictions are true, does it? Some may say they're overplaying it. Others think that it's going to be a lot worse than that. Wherever you stand on the subject of global warming or climate change—whether you think it's a natural phenomenon we all have to ride out or whether humanity is participating in or even causing the phenomenon—science is telling us that our world is changing—and not necessarily for the better.

Hearing all of this rather depressing stuff provides a fitting, and perhaps jarring context in which to read Psalm 104. There is a juxtaposition here that we need to address.

The reality, you see, is that in spite of all this doom and gloom, we still live in a beautiful world—even though much of it is constantly being ravaged by climate issues, politics, war and industry. In Psalm 19, we read these words:

*The heavens are telling the glory of God.*

The reformer John Calvin insisted that the world is the “theatre of God's glory.” When God's people were exiled in the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries before Christ—when

the power of the rulers of the time seemed to be opposed to God's plan and purpose—  
God's people still insisted in Psalm 24:

*The earth is the Lord's  
the world, and those who live in it;  
he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.*

God created the world—he created it “good”—and we accept this in faith.

If you look at both Psalm 104, which is our psalm reading for today, and the one before it, cleverly marked as Psalm 103, you can see that they are clearly linked. They are the only two Psalms that have the same unique beginning and ending, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” They're like a pigeon pair. Psalm 103 is a hymn of praise to the God who, like a father, cares for and saves people from the powers of sin and death. Psalm 104, on the other hand, praises the God who made all creatures, feeds and cares for them, and delights in them. In Psalm 104 we see the lovingkindness of God extended from humanity (as seen in Psalm 103) to all of God's creation.

Putting these two psalms together, makes it clear that we are “one” with all of God's creatures. Humanity is, of course, uniquely made in God's image, but we also need to remember our common creatureliness with the rest of creation.

In spite of the ways humans have ravaged the earth, some of the most beautiful creation in the world is all around us. And for a Christian, this should inspire our reverence, our praise and our worship. Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to God, the creator of all.

In some ways it's unfortunate that the lectionary shortens Psalm 104 to just 11 verses. This abridged version tends to cut out the most dramatically personal aspects of the Psalm—such as, the intimacy of the creator with his creatures. That is, God makes the world habitable for all his creatures—He feeds them and satisfies their thirst.

The Psalm begins by praising God as the great and powerful creator of all things who is “wrapped in light as with a garment.” It moves on then to describe how this unimaginably great Creator built the earth from its most basic sub-structures outward, and is in absolute control of all the forces that affect his earthly creatures.

Befitting its source in the Middle East, where water is so crucial, the Psalm overflows with the image of water—something ancient Israel saw as both a threat and a necessity. Too

much water, as in the tumultuous sea with its monstrous creatures like Leviathan, threatened chaos. It's only when water is channelled and contained that it can provide safe sustenance for God's creatures.

In the same way storm clouds and blowing wind can threaten God's creatures, but the Psalm pictures God riding the winds that become mere messengers, and fire that serves God's purpose. The creator not only gives life, form and being to the created universe, He also sovereignly controls it to do his bidding. The psalmist writes:

*You cover it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.  
At your rebuke they flee;  
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.  
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys  
to the place that you appointed for them.  
You set a boundary that they may not pass,  
so that they might not again cover the earth.*

Everything and every creature has its place in this world and all of it is determined by God. Finally, it's arranged so that the waters of chaos and those things, which by their nature threaten the cosmos may not do so again. You can see here an echo of the flood story (Genesis 6-9) as well as other allusions to the story of creation in Genesis 1 (see especially Ps 104:6)

This account of creation and God's work in it, is a fitting psalm to accompany the passage you heard this morning from Job 38:1-7. The power and awesome nature of God expressed in that speech from the whirlwind, matches the language of Psalm 104:1-9. However, the psalm goes on to speak of God giving water and food for the creatures of the heavens and earth, of giving them life and breath, and of ordering animal and human societies in ways that are beneficial to all.

The picture we get of God here in these verses are as awe-inspiring as when we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gaze out at the stars and planets in our night sky, knowing what immense distances and time our view takes in. But in both the language of the psalmist and in our own understanding of faith, we know that the God who lies behind all this power and vast creation has a deeply close and loving knowledge of every creature in it. That is certainly worthy of praise.

At a time when so-called “atheists” insist that the Bible is a relic that should be tossed into the garbage can of history, we need to sing this Psalm. Its poetic praise of the Creator, despite its pre-scientific language, is about the meaning of creation, not merely its processes. It addresses a deep need within us to take delight in the world around us.

The Psalm does not just praise a distant and uninvolved creator, but a creator who loves the creation and is intimately involved in it. As such, we are to work together in concert with God, not just for our productivity and well-being, but for the preservation of the world in which we live.

The world of the atheist, features an ultimately meaningless cosmos arising out of mere chance and ending in a spectacular collapse on itself. The biblical story, however, depicts a creation alive with the glory of the Creator and ends not with the death-throes of a meaningless creation, but with its glorious renewal. The Bible begins and ends with the creation and its Creator at the centre. That’s something to sing about!

The Christian story, on the other hand, declares that God made it all out of love, and has appointed us as its responsible caretakers. As such, we play a unique role of working in concert with God for the care of the world in which we live. Unfortunately many, even in the church, see salvation as only about humanity and not the whole of creation. It’s important for us to not only see the world from the perspective of its Creator but also as its Saviour and redeemer. God cares for and takes delight in all his creatures, and sent his Son to die on the cross, not just for the salvation of humanity but for all of creation.

In this psalm, we hear the echoes of Isaiah who, 800 years before Christ, wrote: *Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory!*

Let us too, glory in the One, who not only created all things but who also keeps us and all of creation in his loving care.

To him be all glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

***O LORD, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.***

O LORD my God, you are very great.

***You are clothed with honour and majesty,  
wrapped in light as with a garment.***

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,  
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,

***you make the clouds your chariot,  
you ride on the wings of the wind,  
you make the winds your messengers,  
fire and flame your ministers.***

You set the earth on its foundations,  
so that it shall never be shaken.

***You cover it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.***

At your rebuke they flee;

***at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.***

They rose up to the mountains,  
ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them.

***You set a boundary that they may not pass,  
so that they might not again cover the earth.***

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

***Praise the LORD!***