

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 7, 2017

All Creatures Great and Small

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

May 7, 2017

Isaiah 63:7-9 Psalm 148

Our readings this morning from Isaiah 63 and Psalm 148 are songs of praise to God for the wonders of his creation. Today, I have opted for these readings instead of the traditional reading for today, the story of doubting Thomas. With the beauty of God's creation showing around us I wanted to do something different today. It is spring, the Easter season. Flowers are beginning to bloom. The trees are coming into leaf and the birds are singing. How does all of this happen year after year. God gave us his Son. He gave us all of creation but how did he do it?

Science struggles to explain exactly how God did what he did but never will be able to explain it all. Where did the universe originate from? The big bang theory explains a part of the creation process but doesn't explain it all, far from it.

The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" alludes to Psalm 148. In the psalm we read, *"Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created ..."* The hymn admonishes all creatures to *"Lift up your voice and with us sing"* and *"All creatures, your Creator bless, and worship God in humbleness."* The psalm and the hymn are songs of praise to God for his creation. Both use the phrase "Praise the Lord" or "Alleluia" which has the same meaning.

After I read today's scripture selections, my mind immediately thought of the public television series, "All Creatures Great and Small" which told of a veterinarian in England who lovingly cared for animals of all kinds. The series was based on the books of a veterinary surgeon named Alf Wright. If you don't recognize that name, you should recognize James Herriott, the pseudonym Dr. Wright used in the stories.

The name of the series came from an 1848 hymn by Cecil Frances Humphreys (no relation as far as I know). The hymn began with the chorus:

*“All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.”*

The verses of the hymn parallel Psalm 148 and I suspect that Mrs. Humphreys had the psalm in mind as she was writing the hymn.

One verse is:

*“The purple headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky”*

Another verse is:

*“Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.”*

And yet another which is not in our hymnal:

*“The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
To gather every day.”*

Contrast these verses to the psalm:

*“... you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds
... Let them praise the name of the Lord.”*

The psalm and the hymn are clearly songs of praise to God for the wonders of his creation.

God created all of what we know and see in his vast universe and he created it out of nothing. Humans will never be able to explain how he did it. We try and we explain bits and pieces but not everything. That is impossible to explain and to fathom.

The psalm says, “... *kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted ...*” and well we should.

A small booklet simply called “Psalms” by Dave Brannon⁽¹⁾ says, “*Psalm 148 calls for everything in creation to praise the Lord. Included in the invitation are ‘great sea creatures, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.’ Not exactly the usual crowd in ... the congregation on Sunday morning.*

“... *count the number of different elements in God’s creation that are invited to join in praising the Lord. Among them are angels, stars, sea creatures, mountains, trees, animals, kings and princes, men and women, young and old.*

“... ‘*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.*’ *Is anyone or anything excluded from this invitation? It appears not.*

“*Let’s join all creation in celebrating the greatness of our God.*”

We can and do celebrate the greatness of our God through prayer and worship but do we really think about his creation? Go up on one of these mountains around us. Find a quiet spot away from people, roads and traffic. Sit quietly for an hour or more. Then listen and look. You may see and hear birds, insects, deer, raccoons, and more. Look at the trees and wild flowers and how varied and beautiful they are. Listen to the music of the wind through the trees and the babbling of streams as the water cascades over rocks finding its way down the mountain. Then try to explain where all of this comes from and how it was created. You can’t.

Sit quietly and observe. Think about God’s handiwork and you will be worshipping much more seriously than you could ever do sitting here on Sunday morning.

This church building is a creation of humans, using materials that God provided to us to be sure, but it still is a human creation.

Up on a mountain you are in a totally different house of worship, one created by God alone. I never feel closer to God than when I do this.

A devotion in [These Days](#) (July 3, 2015) says that “We should thank God as we observe butterflies, geological formations, the moon, fossils, our remarkable bodies, rainbows ... autumn leaves, and various environments. It draws us to our awesome Creator and triggers thanks and praise.

*“All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.”*

Let us join together in saying thanks to God. (Responsive)

Praise the Lord, Alleluia, Amen.

1. Psalms, Compiled by Dave Branon, Discovery House, Our Daily Bread Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011