

Season of Creation: Sky

Today if I came to you and asked, “How are you? Will you tell me a little bit about your week?” how would you reply?

Would you tell me about the routine hustle and bustle of daily life? About the challenges and rigors of work, school, or the latest project you’ve started? Some of you might tell me what you did on Spring Break this week. Others of you might describe the latest ailment or sickness that has begun to manifest itself in your life...either for you or a loved one. Wherever life took you this week, I feel fairly confident, at least this week, that your reply would contain some image of spring. Spring is all around us.

It’s not just your allergies or the insanely high pollen count that indicate it’s spring. But also the vivid colors blossoming forth that catch your eye ...the white and light pink dogwood trees, the sparkling magenta from the redbud trees, the bright yellow of the yellow bell bush, and the vast array of green popping up everywhere and out of everything. Once the abundant color of spring captures your attention, then you begin to notice other signs of spring: the sweet and distinct songs of the robin, blue jay, and mockingbird. You hear the warm buzz of the bees, and you feel the gentle breeze and are thankful because it removes the sting of heat beaming forth from the sun.

It’s the Easter Season. Let’s Celebrate

Wow – It’s spring- the world around us beautiful and breathtaking. It’s also the season of Easter. Christ is Risen! Hallelujah. It is a season for celebration! A much deserved celebration, I may add. Over the past several months we have diligently plowed through the “Tough Questions” sermon series, examining and stretching our faith and theology further than we may be comfortable doing. We’ve trudged through Lent and Holy Week...not only torturing and crucifying Jesus, but staring down the dark, dreary alleys of discouragement and depression, resentment and bitterness, anxiety and worry, blame and shame. Our time of deep examination, soul wrestling, and faith stretching is a healthy and crucial part of the Christian journey, along with praise, thanksgiving and celebration. It is time to celebrate! Christ is alive! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christ has broken through and will continue to help us break through discouragement and depression, resentment and bitterness, anxiety and worry, and blame and shame. It is time to celebrate.

The Season of Creation – Introduction

The next four weeks we will be celebrating a season of creation, celebrating God as Creator and celebrating Earth as a sacred planet filled with God’s vibrant presence. We will **proclaim** the good news that the risen Jesus is the cosmic Christ who fills and renews all creation. We will **confess** our sins against creation and empathize with a groaning creation. And we will be offered the challenge to be partners with Christ in the healing of creation.

Creation is something we live in and among. We ourselves are part of creation. Creation supports and sustains us, and yet too often we take creation for granted and even abuse it.

While we want to hold all of creation in our thoughts, prayers, and praises over the next four weeks we are specifically going to engage sky, ocean, earth, and mountains. Our focus today, if you haven’t already guessed from the liturgy, is sky.

Psalm 19

Our call to worship this morning was from Psalm 19-

Where our beloved King David, the second king of Israel, prolific song writer and self-professed outdoorsman, saw the beauty and majesty of God’s Creation and exclaimed

The heavens (which also translates – the skies) **are telling the glory of God; and the firmament** (the skies again) **proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.**

God is present in and speaks through creation:

This passage reveals the theology at the heart of the season of creation: **God speaks to us through creation. God’s word is revealed to us in creation.** We can come to know God through God’s handiwork and craftsmanship displayed in creation, displayed in the nature around us. Psalm 19 reiterates the words of Isaiah, that the “Earth is *filled* with God’s living presence.” We are invited to see God’s presence shining through all of creation. The skies announce that the work of the Creator is everywhere and that God continues to create all around us.

St Augustine speaks to this notion that God reveals God’s self to us through creation. He writes, “Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! [the sky] Look below you! [land, water, vegetation] Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book [of creation] with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?”

On a similar note, Martin Luther remarks that “God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on the trees and in the flowers and the clouds and stars.”

St. Bonaventure proclaims that,

“Throughout the entire creation, the wisdom of God shines forth from Him and in Him, as in a mirror containing the beauty of all forms and lights and as in a book in which all things are written according to the deep secrets of God...Truly, whoever reads this book will find life and will draw salvation from the Lord.”

In other words this notion that **God is not only present in creation, but God speaks through creation** is not new. St. Augustine, Martin Luther, King David and many other references in Scripture and our early and modern church fathers and mothers tell us that “the world can reveal God to us in much the same way that the Bible can. **We just have to learn how to “read” it and pay attention.**

So that leads me to ask, how does one “read” the sky?

Psalm 19 says, “There is no speech, there are no words.” So how do we “read” creation in such a way that God’s word is revealed to us?

Let’s hold that question and explore our experiences with the sky.

When I say sky what images come to mind?

- ? Subtle orange skies at dawn
- ? Bold red skies at sunset
- ? Dark, ominous skies accented with sharp bolts of lightning that’s forever etched into your memory
- ? Crisp blue skies....like the ones we’ve had this week.
- ? Bright blue skies dotted with cotton ball cumulus clouds
- ? Full moon on a clear night
- ? Light blue sky painted with a colorful rainbow after a spring rain

The sky is a canvas for all kinds of images. If a picture can tell a thousand words, the sky is a multi-volume work of glorious and powerful images.

Sky Imagery

I want you to bring to mind one or two of your favorite sky images... go ahead...take a moment to retrieve your favorite sky image.

What was it that drew your attention to the sky? The color? The brightness? The beauty?

What time of day was it? Early morning, mid-day, dusk

Were you alone or with someone?

When you were looking at the sky, did you think of God?

Did you feel God's presence or note God's handiwork as you looked at the sky?

Did you consciously or unconsciously offer a prayer of praise or thanksgiving for the beauty or power and majesty portrayed by the sky?

Do you feel like God is speaking to you through the sky in your image? In what way?

Is God calling you to respond to God's Word revealed through the sky? If yes, How?

I encourage you to continue to hold your sky image and to explore how God is speaking to you through it. Take time this week to pay attention to the sky, to God's presence in creation.

See if you can find ways to pray and to praise God using creation as a guide.

There are many different ways to pray and to offer praise and thanksgiving to God. Sometimes we sing, sometimes we play beautiful music and clap our hands or tap our foot along with the rhythm. Other times praising God can be something as simple as "Wow, that's beautiful." Or "Hey," (punching someone in the shoulder), "check that out, did you see the moon!" Or texting a friend to say, "grab your camera, the sunset is amazing." Just the simple act of noticing and appreciating God's handiwork in creation can be a form of prayer. And telling someone else about it becomes the act of sharing the gospel and revealing God's presence to others (Talk about a different approach to evangelism...) or maybe offering gratitude to God is stopping the hustle and bustle of life to simply be, to gaze into the sky for a moment reflecting on what you see ...that's a form of being with God, resting with God in creation. ...listening to what God has to teach you, to reveal to you through the sky and through creation. Maybe your prayer takes the form of watercolor painting or chalk drawing...or taking a walk...planting and nurturing in your garden (co-creating).

How is God revealed to you through creation and how do you respond?

Astronomy – God

Throughout my childhood my dad was intrigued by astronomy. He was a high school science teacher so almost anything in the natural science world was fun and exciting and he wanted to share that with us kids. We spent many a night stargazing. He was president of the local astronomy club, so we had the privilege of not only going to all their stargazing parties, but also housing the club's telescopes, which meant we had access to the deep mysteries of the night sky every night. For several years our vacation was to the Greenbank National Radio Astronomy Observatory in West Virginia, where much time and energy were spent viewing stars, planets, nebulae, and other celestial objects. I was too young to retain much of the technical information. I mean

I recognized the Big Dipper, Ursa Major, and after about 10 years remembered that from the handle of the Big Dipper you can locate the two brightest stars of spring by arcing off to Arcturus and then spinning off to Spica. Both of which were the brightest stars in their constellation: Arcturus in Boötes constellation, representing the herdsman, and Spica in the constellation Virgo, the young maiden. But most of what my dad taught was always a fist width away from of my understanding and I mean that literally. He would always pick out a prominent star or constellation say in Orion's belt and then say "okay three fist widths away you see such and such it's in the shape of a W, that's the constellation of Cassiopeia". He'd then name the 5 prominent stars in Cassiopeia and continue on, "Now if you go two hand spreads from the end of the W...."

"Ahhihhh!" I tried, but as a child do you know how small my fist was compared to his. Even if I got lucky and started with the right star, do you know how many W shapes there are in the night sky or how many ice cream cone shaped constellations I can find? I have quite a vivid imagination.

But oh, what I learned from those experiences! It was less about the details of astronomy, and more about the mystery of God, God's love, and God's presence with us in creation. Even at a young age I could feel God's word revealed to us through the beauty and mystery of the stars, nebulae, and galaxies. Of course at the time I couldn't name it, but I could and did experience it.

Stargazing parties, much like the choir party last night are lots of fun, but threaten to keep me up way past my bedtime. As a child, we would run and play in the fields as our parents set up the telescopes, but soon the darkness set in and we couldn't see to run and play. Before long I'd become bored of waiting for specific faint hard-to-find star clusters to be located in the telescope, and although I'd be wearing warm clothing it'd be too cold to fall asleep, so I'd wrap myself up in a warm blanket and lay down on a folding chair in the middle of the field with the night sounds gently creeping into and out of my awareness and I'd stare up into the vast night sky. In that stillness of my body and mind I was able to rest in God's presence and in God's creation. While God had been present all evening speaking through creation, when peering into the depth of the night sky I was able to listen and process how I had experienced God during the day. It's also when the deep questions and conversations began. And unbeknownst to me at the time, I began to know, understand, and experience God in a new way.

St John Damascene declared that
"The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God."

Again, I encourage you to continue to hold you sky image and to explore how God is speaking to you through it. Take time this week to pay attention to the sky, to God's presence in creation.

Right now we are going to take a few minutes to write prayers for creation. You noticed at the beginning of worship today that youth carried in three streamers that represent creation – various shades of blue, green, and browns. The ushers are going to pass out ribbons that will also be made into streamers. On these ribbons, write your prayers for creation – prayers of praise and thanksgiving and prayers of concern for the health and well-being of creation. You don't need to limit your prayers to sky. We will use these prayers for the remainder of our creation season.

When you are done you can pass your ribbons to the end of pew and the ushers will come by and pick them up.

after prayers are written and collected

Fyodor Dostoyevski (1821-1881), one of our spiritual fathers, once said,

"Love all of God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light! Love the animals. Love the plants; love everything. If you love everything, you will soon perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love."

— To the glory of God. Amen