

All of creation praises God, including us!

Message for Sunday, September 10, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Psalm 98, 148

Children's Message:

Psalm 98 says,

Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the Lord.

That's quite a picture: rivers clapping hands, and mountains singing, worshipping God! Let's play with this a bit. Let's imagine that we're rivers or mountains. How could we worship God? How would a river worship God? Or a mountain?

I really have no idea what the children may come up with! The idea here is to set free our imagination to go places it's never been before. Children are much better at this than adults, I think.

Conclusion: It's not just rivers and mountains that worship God. So do we! That's the greatest thing we can do in life: worship God.

Message: All of creation praises God, including us!

Earlier this year, highway workers found over 200 dead crows beside highway 401 between Napanee and Belleville. That stretch of highway is notorious for accidents, but this was something new. There was concern that the crows may have died from the Avian Flu virus. If so, that would be a disaster for chicken farms in the area; they might have to get rid of all their birds. The dead birds were sent to the College of Agriculture in Guelph to be examined. The autopsies showed the problem was definitely NOT Avian Flu, to everyone's relief.

Instead the autopsies showed that they were killed by being struck by a large object moving at high speed. Further examination of the paint residue on the feathers, plus the type of tissue damage, showed that 98% of the crows had been killed by impact with trucks, and only 2% were killed by car impact. Their mystery deepened.

The Ministry of Transportation hired a Biological Behaviour Specialist to study why so many crows were being killed by trucks. Less than a week later, the Behaviour Specialist had determined the cause: when crows eat road kill, they always set-up a look-out crow in a nearby tree to warn of impending danger. All the birds which took turns as the look-out could shout "Caw, caw!", but not a single one could shout "Truck, truck!" I read that on the internet, so it must be true. ☺

With that bird story as an introduction, I'm beginning today a series of three messages on nature: the beauty and wonder of creation—which includes us—and our relationship with the Creator and with the other creatures.

Have you ever looked up at the night sky, and tried counting all the lights up there? I have. Just one little area might contain twenty or thirty dots of light, and I soon give up. The truth is, that's just the beginning.

Astronomer Peter Edwards describes the majesty of the universe:

You will never, ever, get your head around how big the universe is. It is just enormous. There is no way, I think, that the human mind can comprehend the true immensity of the universe. We are happy with the size of an elephant, or the size of a tree, or maybe even the size of [a] cathedral. But if we go beyond that our brains just start to run out of gas.

We pointed the Hubble telescope at what appeared to be a very dark and ordinary patch of the night sky. If you imagine holding up your finger with a grain of sand on it and looking at the patch of sky that grain of sand blocks out, that's the field that the telescope zoomed in to.

What the telescope saw was incredible. There are 10,000 galaxies in a patch of sky the size of a grain of sand held at arm's length. If this tiny patch of sky is like every other, then we can calculate how many galaxies are out there.

The visible universe contains around 100 billion galaxies. Each one of those galaxies contains around about 100 billion stars. That means the visible universe contains something like 10,000 million million million stars. That means there

are more stars in the visible universe than there are grains of sand on the earth. ¹

And remember: he's using the phrase "the visible universe." This is just what we've discovered so far. Who knows what else might be beyond that?

Louie Giglio picks up this idea, and carries it down the field:

I read a lot of astronomy, and a lot of astronomers are perplexed, asking "Why is the universe so big? There's got to be more people in this place, there's got to be more habitable planets in this thing. It's just way too big if it's just a place for you and me."

To which I say, "I totally agree with that. If the universe was created just to house humanity, it's oversized in a lot of ways."

But if they knew the right reason for the existence of the universe, they wouldn't struggle. If they knew the universe's primary function wasn't to house humanity, but its primary function was to magnify the Creator, then they would know it's not too big at all; it's just about the right size to give praise to God. ²

I got the idea for this message a couple of weeks ago when I was on my study leave. One Sunday I visited The Gathering for Sunday worship. One of the songs we sang had the phrase "mountains bow down before you." That's similar to the language of the Psalms, so it's nothing new. But right at that moment, I was struck by the image of a mountain of granite, eight kilometers high, picking itself up and bowing down before God. I was overwhelmed by the idea of creation itself worshipping and praising God. So it's not just us here; it's not even all the churches around the world. The whole universe praises God!

We heard Psalm 98 earlier in the service, with these wonderful lines in verses 6-9:

Shout for joy before the Lord, the King.
Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,

let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the Lord.

In some belief systems, people worship nature. They see God in all the plants and animals, and even in the earth itself. The Bible tells us the very opposite: the plants and animals, and even the earth itself are *not* God; instead they *praise* God.

We read together from Psalm 148 a few minutes ago. It starts out with the inhabitants of heaven, plus all the objects in the heavens praising God:

Psalm 148:1-4, New Revised Standard Version:

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!

Then it includes the world and all plants and animals, even fire and frost!

Psalm 148:7-10, New Revised Standard Version:

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!

Finally it expands that to include people:

Psalm 148:11-13, New Revised Standard Version:

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike, old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.

This is where Louie Giglio, the speaker I quoted from earlier, gets the idea that the primary function of the universe is not to give us a nice place to live. No, the primary function of the universe is to give glory to God.

Now get this: we are part of the universe. So that means that our primary purpose in life is also to give glory to God: to worship God, to love God, to

¹ See Edwards' talk on YouTube:
youtube.com/watch?v=AC7yFDb1z

² See Giglio's talk on YouTube:
youtube.com/watch?v=LaAiCdRHV4k

serve God, to follow God. It's much *much* more than singing praise, or even gathering as the church on Sundays. It's all of life, all that we do, all that we are.

Next Steps:

-) The forecast for tonight is a clear sky. Go outside after it gets dark, and take some time to be awestruck by the universe.
-) Think about how God loves you—puny, insignificant, utterly unimportant you. Yet God calls you his child, and loves you dearly.
-) How do you respond to that love?

For a real treat: on a computer or smartphone, watch Louie Giglio's presentation. It's really, *really* good! Just do an internet search for <"The creation praises God" Giglio>. It's about 20 minutes, and is breathtaking!