



Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
In the United States & Canada



“All Creation Joins to Sing”

A Reflection on Psalm 148

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I have to admit that while I really love Psalm 148, it is a bit odd.

Praise the Lord, waters above the heavens! Praise the Lord, sea monsters and all deeps! (What are “all deeps” anyway?). Praise the Lord, fire and hail!

Praise the Lord, wild animals and cattle (Wait -what about horses and dogs and cats?). Praise the Lord creeping things and birds. Praise the Lord!

But even though I do not necessarily understand it all – like all the deeps - or why these particular animals were named along with fire and hail; Psalm 148 is a reminder that all creation belongs to the Creator.

And of course, mountains and hills praising God is not a new image for us. At Christmas we sing, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come — and heav’n and nature sing —fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy.” All the earth and heavens join us to celebrate Christ’s birth. And in that same vein, the psalmist invites us to imagine the heart of nature, like a windy, frosty, winter storm praising God.

This reminds us, if we needed to be reminded, that nature can be powerful and dangerous, extreme and mysterious. The Old Testament generally sees nature as a force to be reckoned with and appreciated. The seas roar, mountains shake and predators are plentiful. Creation is wild and beautiful, but also dangerous and at times chaotic. And we should remember that creation operates according to the laws that God established and we, humans should respect those laws or be placed at risk.

Nature was designed by God. — God commanded and the world and all that is in it was created our psalm tells us. And Psalm 104 adds that there is a divinely established order in creation where “the sun knows the time of its setting” (v. 19). And night is when “all the animals of the forest come creeping out. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God” (v. 22).

In Job chapters 38 and 39, the Lord reminds Job and us that God is the only one who can speak creation into being. Speaking out of a storm, God said, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind door? Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?” —On and on God speaks for 2 chapters. In this, God’s longest speech, God reminded Job and us who made all this happen and who did not, who is the creator and who is part of creation, who is worthy of praise and who needs to be offering it up.

In the first creation story in Genesis, humans were created last. After the water creatures and birds, the livestock and wild animals and everything that creeps on the ground— came the creation of humankind. And here in Psalm 148, humans are the last to be invited to the praise chorus. Some people have reasoned that we were created last and brought into the song last because God saved the best for last – we were the only ones made in God’s image. But when we read Genesis 1 after reading God’s longest speech in Job, we see it all differently. Perhaps we were the last to be created and the last invited to the party because we need to be reminded over and over and over that we are not the center of the universe, that we certainly do not know everything, that we do not have all the answers, and that when we are in charge, we do not do ourselves or the rest of the world any good. God knew from the beginning that we were going to forget God and God’s will and try to do things our way, like build the tower of Babel.

And let me confess right away that I am an “in charge” kinda person. I have been known to take over meetings and projects when things were not getting done. My family and anyone who has worked with me will tell you that I often think I know best. And I know many of you, like me, also like to be in control. You want to fix things and make them right – you want to tell people in your life what they need to do in order to be successful or in order to be happy. We, control people, say, “Let me tell you what you need to do” or “Have you tried to...” or even “let me take care of this for you.” “OH how the world would be so much better off if everyone did what I said,” I often think to myself.

The choir at my home church used to have a tenor singer who had a great, strong voice. Everyone could always hear him — because he sang so loud. He sang every song as if he was singing a solo – a loud solo. He did not listen to the other tenors to blend in or for the other parts or for any other voices. He did not seem to even follow the choir director’s directions. His voice was beautiful but a choir’s sound is most beautiful when all the voices blend together. In the best choirs, everyone listens to each other and follows the direction of the conductor.

Humankind has been operating as if we are singing loudly alone in the shower. We sing praise to God as if we are the only ones offering praise. We live our comfortable lives and go from our temperature controlled homes to our garage and get in our temperature controlled cars.

We whiz down the road listening to the news or talking on the phone to wherever we are going (probably some climate controlled building that keeps us protected from the elements and all of nature).

And we are thankful. We are grateful for our nice, comfortable life. We give thanks to God in prayer and we sing a song of Praise. We sing loud praises to God as if we are the only voices and lives that matter. We forget that the birds are singing and the wild animals and the cattle and the fish and the things that creep.

Psalm 148 invites us to join with all of creation in one great chorus of praise, not as the conductor, not as a solo, not in unison and not written by us. We have been invited to be part of the choir, to join our voices in a beautiful harmonious song of Praise. We have been invited to sing a song written by God at the beginning of creation. We are invited to be part of a choir conducted and directed by God.

When we take control and do things our way - 16,306 species become endangered and their songs of pain and lament go all but ignored. When we do things our way, there is over-fishing and over-hunting, habitat destruction and climate change that all threaten the existence of one in five species.

And when a species becomes extinct, that creature's role in the ecosystem is lost and the wisdom that creature could impart is gone forever. And when a species becomes extinct the particular way it glorified God by its very existence is lost forever – its voice in the praise choir is silenced.

When we move and act in the world thinking we know best, we define dominion "over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" as the right to use, control, and destroy for our purposes. When we do things our way, when we think we know what is best, when we turn away from God, we really mess things up.

Ecclesiastes 3.19 says, "Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath." —All have the same breath. God's spirit went across the waters of chaos "in the beginning" as wind or breath and imbued all of creation with divinity. All of creation was created with the same breath—the breath of God.

How do we fix this mess we have created? How do we even begin to make things right? Scripture reminds us that God told Job to go to animals for wisdom, "Ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you" (12.7). For our wellbeing and the wellbeing of the world, we must listen to the creatures. Paul says, "All creation groans." We must stop singing so loudly as if we are alone in the shower. We must be quiet and listen to the blues of creation.

The Psalmist calls us to be mindful of all creatures and to listen and learn. Each creature of God has something to teach us. They demonstrate virtues like the teamwork of the ant, the loyalty of the elephant, and the playfulness of the dolphin. Each creature has intrinsic worth given to it by the breath of God. Each creature serves a purpose in an ecosystem, an elegant interconnected system where nothing is wasted and where diversity is necessary. God's creatures, if we pay attention, if we stop and listen have much to teach us. Animals are great spiritual teachers for us – if we will step outside our temperature controlled bubbles in order to learn from them. Something wonderful happens to our bodies and our spirits when we go outside and are quiet and still. When we empty our minds of the craziness of life and listen to the birds and feel the wind and sun on our face and the earth on our feet, we begin to notice things. We see the beauty of a spider's web. We notice the diligence of the bee. We hear birds and frogs singing praise. We feel the soft coolness of the earth. It is when our hearts are stilled that we can truly appreciate God's majesty and mystery.

The psalm's call to praise demonstrates to us God's commitment to be reconciled to creation – all of creation. God invites us to remember our interconnectedness and to learn from the beasts and the birds of the heavens – to learn humility, to learn that our position is not as creator but as part of creation. Praise is thus a liturgical action that turns us away from ourselves and toward God. Praise transforms our rebellious thoughts of "I know best and I can do it myself" to "I do not know anything and submit to your will, O God." It moves us from false control to trust in God.

Praising God acknowledges to ourselves, to others, and most importantly to God that life is a gift. Praise acknowledges and celebrates our place in creation so that as the creatures made in the image of God, we fully accept our own sacredness and acknowledge that with that comes great responsibility. We all have the same breath – the breath of God.

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

Additional Scripture on Creation Care:

- 1 Mark 12:30-31 – Greatest commandments: love God and neighbor
- 2 Genesis 1:1, 31 - All made by God and deemed very good.
- 3 Job 12:7-10 – Ask the animals and they will teach you
- 4 Psalm 24 – The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains
- 5 Colossians 1:15-16 – All things created through and for Christ
- 6 Revelation 22:1-2 - Vision of new heaven and new earth