

# II Discovering Delight in the Wonder of Creation

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## *Introduction:*

Picture the sky at night in Judea. Before electricity. Before smog. Before our cars and our industry separated us from the heavens, surrounding us with a polluted haze. Before all of that, picture yourself looking at the stars at night in Judea. The dark sky is darker somehow without a city's glow. And the bright stars shine brighter somehow without a city's haze. You see something wonderful. More stars than you knew. Shining brighter than you thought stars could shine. You see something wonderful, but then God makes it something more wonderful still. For those shepherds watching their flocks outside of Bethlehem, God revealed his angels. A choir of angels singing praise. As Luke tells us in his gospel, God peeled back the thin veil of our world that hides the invisible from the visible and he opened up the nighttime sky. The shepherds saw an army of angels, shining brighter than any star. "The glory of the Lord shone around them" (Luke 2:9). And these angels lifted their voices rather than their swords, singing praise to God: "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth" (2:14).

While we stretch our imaginations just to conceive what that must have been like, this morning our reading from Psalm 148 stretches your imagination further still. This morning, the psalmist opens our eyes to see not just an army of angels but all of creation giving praise to God. Let's meditate on Psalm 148 this morning with the goal that we, God's creatures, might join all of creation in giving praise to God.

*Text:[1]*

Sometimes, we look at things with a limited view. What we are seeing is wonderful but our vision is simply too small. Take for example the child in Karl Fay's drawing. She is immersed in a world filled with life. Bright flowers. Green grass. Even her necklace, a butterfly, is somehow coming to life as it interacts with the world. You can't really tell what is part of her clothing and what is part of the world. So immersed is she in a world filled with life. Yet, her delight arises only from looking through a very narrow window she has created with her hands. She has created a small window and allows that window to shape her vision of the world. The vision gives her delight. It is good in that way. But it is not all that God has created for her to see.

Something like that is happening this morning when you consider Psalm 148 in relation to our reading from the gospel of Luke. When you heard the gospel reading this morning, you probably wondered, "why are we reading a Christmas text when it isn't even Christmas?" That text from the gospel of Luke is familiar to us.

We bring it out at Christmas and we remember, through those words, one small moment when God revealed his angels singing praise. Our hymnody at Christmas tries to capture that moment. It invites us to join the angels in their everlasting song, "Gloria in excelsis Deo." But if that is the only window we have, our delight in the wonder of creation is going to be too small. Once a year, near the end of December, when we are overwhelmed by the celebration of Christmas, we will gather to join the angels in praise. And yet, we will miss out on a chorus of praise that is happening all of the time.

That's what is so beautiful about our psalm this morning. Psalm 148 is a chorus of praise. You know how in the hymn "Angels We Have Heard on High" there is that line, "and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains"? That's what this psalmist is trying to do this morning. The psalmist is asking us to hear not only the angels who sing on high but also to hear mountains singing in reply. If you look at the psalm, you will notice that it is structured into two parts. A call and a response. The psalmist, by the power of the Spirit, is the choir director for all of creation, and seeks to orchestrate their praise. The first part is sung in the heavens ("Praise the Lord from the heavens" v. 1) and the second part is sung on the earth ("Praise the Lord from the earth" v. 7).

In the first part, the psalmist pulls back the thin veil of our world to reveal the angels in heaven. Praising God. We see them as clearly as we can see the stars. All his host. Giving him praise. Then the sun and the moon, the stars and the

waters they swim in are suddenly given voice. All of them are caught up in a moment of everlasting praise. As the angels and the heavens sing, the psalmist tells us why they praise God. Because "they were created" (Psalm 148:5). Consider what that means. God has not only created all things but he has given all things the experience of joy in him. So often we remove God from the world. We place God and his act of creation in the distant past. It's something that happened ages ago and has very little relevance for us today. People will debate the Big Bang and Evolution and we will hold faithfully to the story of creation but it is still stuck there in the past. An act that God did a long time ago that has very little bearing on the world today. Not for the psalmist! The psalmist rejoices in God's act of continuous creation. He created the world and he keeps that world in his care. As the psalmist says, "he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree and it shall not pass away" (148:6). Even now, all of creation rejoices in the work of God. Not just at Christmas. Not just in Genesis. But now. Today. Why? Because "they were created," they continue to give God praise.

This song that is happening in the heavens, then spills out upon the earth. Like the child in the drawing, we are looking to the heavens through our fingers and yet we are surrounded by a world that is alive with the delight of God. The psalmist startles us out of our heavenly vision. He calls out to the earth to join in this song of praise: "Praise the Lord from the earth" (148:7). And suddenly, the "great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist" are giving praise (148:7-8). The world around

us becomes a choir and, by giving praise, they are "fulfilling his word" (148:8). God has designed creation to share in his joy and when creation does that it is fulfilling his word. Then the psalmist expands his vision from the sea and the air to the earth. Mountains and fruit trees. Beasts and birds. Even the creeping things are giving God praise.

Finally, the psalmist turns toward us, the human creatures. He sees the powerful and the poor. Kings and their peoples. Young men and maidens. Old men and children. All people are created by God and God has placed them in his wonderful creation. For this reason, the psalmist cries out to you. This morning. "Praise the name of the Lord" (148:13). This time, however, notice that our praise is anchored in more than creation. The psalmist brings us on a journey as he orchestrates his praise. He takes us from heaven to earth. But he also takes us from creation to redemption. Earlier, the psalmist proclaimed that the heavens praise God because they are created. Now, the psalmist proclaims that people praise God because they are redeemed. He writes, God "has raised up a horn for his people . . . for the people of Israel who are near to him" (148:14). What does that mean? God raised up a horn for his people? Remember when John the Baptist was born and his father, Zechariah, sang a song of praise? In that song, Zechariah said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:68-69). To raise up a horn is to demonstrate your power. And God has

demonstrated his power not by destroying his people who have so often strayed from him but by coming to save them. In Jesus Christ, God came near to his people and saved them.

Think about it this way. In the drawing, the little girl looks at the world through a frame created by her fingers. In much the same way, God has looked at us. He entered a human frame. He took on flesh. The creator of all things became a creature. He saw this world through our eyes. He saw how far we have separated ourselves from the world. He tried to open our eyes to see. The birds of the air. The lilies of the field. But when people no longer see creation, it is not long before they no longer see their Creator. We turned against God. Separating ourselves from God once for all by nailing him to a cross. There, Jesus saw it all. The punishment of God for our sin. Our eternal separation from God in hell. He saw it all and he bore it all. For you. That he might rise from the dead and become the one who now orchestrates a song of praise from a new creation.

Jesus now is the eternal psalmist who has risen from the dead and invites us to sing. "Remember your creation," he says. You are one of God's creatures. "Remember your salvation," he says. God has saved you by grace through faith. "Created by God. Saved by God. Sing to God." Today, Jesus invites us through the words of this psalmist to see the world that God has created, and to join all of creation in a song of praise.

*Application:*

What does that look like in daily life? Very simply, it means taking a moment to look around. To discover God's world.

Have you ever baby-proofed your house? My brother was coming over one time and bringing his two young daughters with him. One was seven and the other was three. He asked me if I had baby-proofed my house. That is, had I gone around and removed anything that could get kicked, thrown, hit, eaten, or broken. Suddenly, cabinets in the kitchen needed fasteners. Sharp corners on the coffee table needed covering. Anything glass was put out of reach or put away. I baby-proofed my house. Meaning, I made a safe-environment where my nieces could wander and play. What I had done, however, was only half of what real parents do.

Yes, there is the art of baby-proofing your house but there is also something more than baby-proofing. It is the art of creating a world for your baby to discover. Of preparing a home. Think about it. We make every effort we can to surround our children with a world to discover. We secure a colorful mobile far above the crib. Lights. Color. Music. Movement. In the first few months, we invite our baby to discover "movement, sound, color" beauty in the world. We cover the wall in our child's room with animals peeking out from behind letters of the alphabet. As the child grows, he discovers letters and animals and begins to learn how to name the world. Our houses become a mess of little discoveries. A play set here, a fleet of cars there, a ball that goes off in a spectacle of light and sound that we still don't understand. Our

fridge is filled with so many different creamed creations. Why? To slowly introduce our kids to the different foods. To inspire their taste buds and to rock their little world.

In the same way, this is what the psalmist is celebrating this morning. God, like a loving parent, has created for us an amazing world. He has set angels and stars deep in the sky. He has set angelfish and starfish deep within the ocean. All for us to discover in joy. The world itself is filled with more than we could ever see in our lifetime. Which is perhaps why God has given us eternity in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God gives us life, eternal life, in a new creation and the psalmist invites us to anticipate that life now by giving God praise. In these fourteen verses, the psalmist surveys the world. He asks us to see it. Why? Because he knows that in seeing God's creation we will join in giving God praise.

I'd like for you to pause for a moment and consider what this means. When was the last time you really looked at creation? What did you see? For me, it might be the last time I went to a picnic in the park. Sat under a tree. Maybe saw a bird or a squirrel. Not too exciting. But how closely did I look? What did I really see? Annie Dillard once wrote a book called *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. In it, she chronicled her experiences for two years at Tinker Creek in Virginia, meditating upon God's creation. At one point, she describes the ground underneath a tree. "Take just the top inch of soil, the world squirming right under my palms. In the top inch of forest soil, biologists found "an average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot,



including 865 mites, 265 spring tails, 22 millipedes, 19 adult beetles and various numbers of 12 other forms . . . Had an estimate also been made of the microscopic population, it might have ranged up to two billion bacteria and many millions of fungi, protozoa and algae "" in a mere *teaspoonful* of soil.'"[2] When I first read these words, I was amazed. I did not know that such life existed underneath a tree. I could go to the park, sit under a tree, and not really see the world that God had made. But Dillard began to name the world around me and suddenly I began to see.

Consider the story of creation. In Genesis, after God creates the world and places Adam within the Garden, he brings the animal kingdom before Adam. For Adam to name. Why does God have Adam name the world? Some would argue that Adam is showing his power over all things. This is how Adam shows his dominion. He names and claims the animals of this world as his own. By naming, Adam exercises power over all living things. I think, however, that the psalmist gives us another reason. God has Adam name things so that he can see them and, by seeing them, join in their praise. Adam is not controlling creation. He is not claiming creation. He is learning creation. And, by learning creation, he learns how to join in praise toward God. After Adam names all of creation, he doesn't turn away from God to claim all of this as his own. No, he turns toward God. Recognizing that he is a creature and that God is the creator, and God then gives Adam a helpmeet to care for creation in this world. Eve. When Adam names creation, he grows in his knowledge of the goodness of God. With each creature he names, Adam sees another work of God. Another wonder. Another

being created to give God praise. In this psalm we see a small glimpse of that work of God. By naming creation, the psalmist expands our world. He invites us to a lifetime of discovery. Discovering the wonders of God's creation and joining creation in giving God praise.

What kind of tree grows in your backyard? Where do the robins build their nests in the spring? God has set you within a world that is waiting to be discovered. It may be as simple as learning about the ecosystem that surrounds your house. The world that God has created to be your home. It may be a bit more complex. You may find yourself learning of the migration habits of polar bears or the nesting places of bald eagles. You may invest in the preservation of the rain forest or the reforestation of legacy mines in Appalachia. God has surrounded you with a world to discover. In Christ, he has set you free to see, to name, to care for his creation, and to find your hearts and hands and voices tuned to give him praise.

### *Conclusion:*

As the church gathers in worship, we sing the Gloria in Excelsis. For a brief moment, we overhear the songs of angels and we offer praise to God the Father for the salvation he gave us by sending his Son. We have taken the song of the angels from Luke and placed it in our worship service. That is good and right. This morning, however, the psalmist asks us to open our hands a bit wider. To lift them in praise that encompasses all of creation. We don't lose the vision of these angels singing praise to Jesus

but we expand our vision so that we begin to see more. Not just angels. But angelfish. Stars and starfish. The way in which light from a distant star reflects from the scales of a butterfly's wing. Delighting your eye with an iridescent blue. Can you hear see it? Can you hear it? This is the world's Gloria. An everlasting song of praise.

Go out and discover that world. Learn about it. Name it. Care for it. And then return to God, as just one of his humble creatures, but one who joins all of creation in giving God praise. Amen.

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[1] One of the challenges in a text-application structure is determining the appropriate amount of time to spend on the text and on application. This sermon offers more material than is needed in both of these areas with the recognition that the preacher will revise the material depending upon what is appropriate for his preaching context.

In revising the textual section, the main ideas the preacher will want to convey are (1) the movement of the psalmist's song of praise from the heavens to the earth and (2) the movement of the psalmist's praise from creation to redemption.

[2] Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, First Perennial Classics edition (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 95.

