

I Seeing Your Savior Anew

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

Introduction:

Sometimes, a verse from a psalm becomes more than a verse from a psalm. It breaks open. It buds and blossoms and brings forth fruit.

In the twelfth century, in England, at St. Albans, a psalter was being put together.[1] Two minor artists were tasked with minor work. They were not invited to illuminate the 40 full-page illustrations of the life of Christ that precedes the psalter. They were not invited to illuminate the full-page illustrations of David the musician or the martyrdom of St. Alban that conclude the psalter. No, they were given the task drawing the first initial of each psalm. In comparison to the scope of this project, this was a minor endeavor.

Yet, in this lesser task, we see a greater glory. For what the artists did was they took one verse from each psalm, meditated on that verse, and allowed it to break open and create the world they painted in that opening initial.

Consider psalm 8. The artist chose a phrase, "out of the mouths of babes and infants" (Psalm 8:2), and out of that phrase grew a world. There is a small green vine that weaves its way onto the page in the margins. Out of that vine come buds in blue and red. And one of those buds has blossomed and turned toward the reader so that when you look at Scripture, you can look into its petals and see a new world. You see a dark sapphire blue sky with pinpricks of light. Underneath these stars, are mothers with infants on their laps. Some are nursing. Others are sitting. But all are involved in an act of praise. Their little hands are lifted in prayer as they praise God who created the world. "Out of the mouths of babes and infants," the psalm says and readers who look at the page, in the margins see a world where even infants give God praise.

Sometimes, a verse from a psalm is more than a verse from a psalm. It breaks open. It buds and blossoms and brings forth life.

This is what I believe is happening in our text from Ephesians this morning. This morning we have caught the apostle Paul in prayer. He is in prison and he is remembering the saints of God at Ephesus. He offers a prayer of thanksgiving for them. He prays that God would open the eyes of their hearts that they might know his hope, his glorious inheritance, and his power. As Paul prays, he remembers one little fragment of a verse from Psalm 8. That verse break open. It buds and it blossoms and it changes your world. This morning we will consider Paul's very brief meditation upon one small verse from Psalm 8 with the goal that the vision of Christ that he offers will change the way we live in God's world.

Our Misreading of Psalm 8:

Unfortunately, the verse that Paul chooses is not one that we are entirely comfortable with. Paul chooses the verse that reads, "You put all things under his feet" (Ephesians 1:22). That verse speaks about God, "you," who puts all things under the dominion of Adam, "under his feet." The psalmist is remembering creation and how God placed Adam in a position of authority: "You have given him dominion" the psalmist says. "You have made him Lord over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:6). And lest we should try to narrow what Adam has rule over, the psalmist elaborates: "all sheep and all oxen, and also the beasts of the field. The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea" (Psalm 8:7-8). The psalmist is amazed at what God has done. He has seen the wonder of creation, the marvelous expanse of God's work and he has seen how small the human creature is in the midst of all that God has done. Yet God has taken this human creature, Adam, and given him dominion over these things.

When the psalmist says these words, he is amazed at what *God* has done. Unfortunately, when we say these words, we are usually amazed at what we can do. We speak these words in power. "God has put all things under *our feet*." That is the problem with this verse. It has been misinterpreted. The other day, I was having dinner with a friend of mine.[2] He had grilled some steaks out on the porch. I was eating the steak and it was delicious . . . until we started talking. My friend took a bite of his steak and said that it didn't have any taste. "It's tasteless," he said, and

pushed back his chair. He asked his wife if these were frozen. She said they were fresh. She had picked them up that afternoon at the meat counter at Schnucks. They were as fresh as they could be. He sat back and looked off into the distance, took a drink, and wistfully said, "You know there will come a day when we will have perfected the art of cloning and you will be able to walk into the grocery store, go up to the meat counter, and actually see the cattle back there, eating. They'll ask you what you want "" top sirloin "" and then they'll go and slice off a piece, give it to you, and it will grow back." Yea. The conversation kind of ruined the meal. Here, we have this unbridled delight in the rule over creation.

Lest you think I just hang out with bizarre people, this has been going on for quite some time. In 1624, Francis Bacon wrote an imaginary work, *The New Atlantis*, in which he envisioned how we would develop our dominion over creation.[3] Here, Bacon foresaw a society where natural experiments were being conducted in all parts of the world. Mines were dug into the ground, some of them three miles deep, where bodies were preserved with natural refrigeration. Towers were built, some a half mile high on mountains, for learning to control the weather. Lakes were created to learn how to control the waters and generate storms. Orchards were formed where they would experiment to make some trees bear fruit out of season and the fruit would be sweeter and more succulent than natural. There was also an enclosure where beasts were dissected and they could discover what organs were vital for life and what organs the beasts could live without. They tried all

manner of drugs on them, learned to make them barren or fruitful, larger or smaller, and by mixing them with one another, they were able to create new kinds. Francis Bacon's dream in 1624 has become our nightmare in 2013. It causes us to back away from this verse. To put it back in the psalter and close the bible rather than reflect on what it really means.

Paul's Proclamation of Psalm 8:

But the apostle Paul takes this verse, today, and rather than using it in power, he gives it to God in prayer. When he does that, it breaks open. It buds and blossoms and brings forth a vision that changes our world. When Paul prays these words, did you notice about whom he was talking? Paul is not talking about the first Adam. He is talking about the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Paul helps us see how this verse from Psalm 8 has been fulfilled in Christ.

The first Adam was given rule over the world and he fell into sin. His sin brought God's curse upon all creation. The second Adam, however, lived in righteousness and his life brings God's blessing upon a new creation. All of us suffer in the first Adam's fall. All of us struggle with the power that God has put into our hands. Left to ourselves, our rule will lead to death and destruction. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, came into our world. He lived a perfect life and yet he died a sinner's death. He suffered the punishment of God for all sin and he did that for you. After his death and burial, however, the grave broke open. Christ rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and God has seated him at his right

hand. God has placed all things under his feet. And, the apostle says, "God gave him as head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22). That is, God has given Christ to you as the one who now rules over all things. Christ rules over his new creation and he does it through you.

Paul is asking us this morning to see our Savior anew. We are accustomed to seeing Jesus as Lord of our lives. We come before him in confession of our sins and we receive from him forgiveness. We are accustomed to seeing Jesus as Lord of the church. We gather once a week on Sunday and come together in community where the word is preached and the sacraments are administered and we see how Jesus comes among his people distributing his gifts of grace. We are accustomed to seeing Jesus as Lord of our lives, and Lord of our Church, but Paul wants us to see Jesus as Lord of all. He is the second Adam. God has raised Christ up from the dead, seated him in the heavenly realms, put all things under his feet and given him as head over all things to the church.

Karl Fay, a Lutheran pastor and artist, has captured a vision of this rule. He created a triptych from recycled materials. A triptych is a traditional form of art, often used on altars. It is a painting that unfolds to reveal vision after vision. Here, we see the first panel of the painting. The rule of Christ is only sketched in. Faintly visible. It lies beyond our imagination. Left to ourselves, we would not understand that rule. We might see it as politics. Or pure power. But God has not left us to ourselves. Underneath the robe of God's mystery, we see the certainty of his presence. God the Father sends Jesus Christ to

take on flesh. He enters our world so that we can know the presence of God in him. When he rises from the dead, Jesus does not leave his body behind. No, he brings his body with him. He raises our humanity to the heights of heaven and God has now placed everything under his feet. This Jesus who forgives your sin, this Jesus who comes to you in his word and sacrament, this Jesus is the same Jesus who rules over all and he rules over all things through you.

In the weeks to come, we will unfold this image and see how God rules through us in the care of creation. At this point, I simply want you to see your Savior anew. For Paul, Christ is more than Lord of your life. Christ is more than Lord of the Church. Christ is Lord of all things. And caring for creation is part of what it means to be alive in him. It is part of discipleship.

Discipleship is about more than confessing your sins and being forgiven. Discipleship is about more than coming to church on Sunday. In Jesus Christ, discipleship breaks open, it buds, and it blossoms and it grows out there in the world. As God's people care for creation as God has cared for them.

How then do we use the power that God has given us? We use it in what could be called the mastery of ministry. For too long, mastery over creation has been thought of in terms of control rather than care. When you master something by control, you rise above it to rule by power. You conquer. You control. You subject creation to your plans and delight in what you have done. Jesus, however, teaches us a different kind of rule. His mastery is in ministry. He rules over creation by entering into it, coming to

know his creatures intimately, and caring for them in love. Christ enters into our world and saves it by experiencing it. He suffers the punishment of our sin and rises to bring us life. He is the first fruits of a new creation. A mastery that happens in ministry to the world.

When you hear the word master, don't think of power. That is, masters and slaves. Instead, think of performance. A master artist. Master artists enter into something so deeply and intimately that they are able to bring about that which is beautiful, and true, and good. The mastery of painting leads to the Sistine chapel ceiling. The mastery of the violin leads to a symphony performance. Mastery occurs in ministry. Entering into something so deeply, so fully, that you are able to care for it and help it flourish. One does not master golf by divine fiat and power but by play. By knowing the game so well you can feel a good swing in your body. One does not master cooking by force but by finesse. Knowing the tastes of various ingredients and how one combines them to flourish together in a meal. This is the mastery of ministry in Christ. The care for creation that Christ brings about through you.

Conclusion:

What does that look like? I would say that it's kind of like the work of those minor artists. It's nothing momentous. You aren't going to go out there tomorrow and by your work prevent all ecological disasters. No, but you are going to go out there and be alive in Christ Jesus. You meditate on God's word and it buds and

it blossoms. Slowly. Simply. It bears fruit in the world. In the morning, it's an eye that sees plants that need water. In the evening, it's an ear that delights in the song of the whippoorwill. And during the day, it's a hand that touches the earth as God has touched you. Intimately. Compassionately. With care. Causing it to break open. To bud. To blossom. To flourish. Bringing about something that is beautiful. Good. And true.

When that happens, your life becomes part of God's answer to Paul's prayer. You are just a little vine in the margins of this epistle text that buds and blossoms and turns its flower toward the world. Those who look can see the rule of Christ in this world through you. This is not something we do to celebrate our power. No. We celebrate our Savior. For this world is a world where even the infants give God praise. Amen.

[1] For an overview of this psalter and illustrations of the illuminations, see "The Saint Albans Psalter" at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/> (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/>). Accessed July 24, 2013.

[2] At this point, the preacher can substitute for my personal story any story or news report that highlights the ability humans have to manipulate and control the created world. The story should

have shocking connotations of humans abusing the power that God has given us.

[3] In Francis Bacon's work, *The Great Instauration* (1620), he argues that Adam's fall had resulted in two falls: one from innocence and the other from dominion over creation. Faith and religion repaired the fall from innocence; the arts and natural sciences, when developed, would repair the fall from dominion over creation.

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