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Discovering Delight in the Wonder of Creation: Sermon Study





Enfolded (Interior 1)
Artist: Karl Fay, 2013

[\(assets/images/EnfoldedInteriorPanel1Print.jpg\)](#)

Biblical Theology and Ecology:

"In Sheol, who will give you praise?" (Psalm 6:5). The question is haunting. In Psalm 6, David is offering an individual lament. He is pouring out his complaint before God, begging for mercy from the God of steadfast love. As David pours out his complaint, he imagines death ("For in death there is no remembrance of you") and then, he imagines the realm of Sheol. As he describes Sheol, David does not fear painful punishment, the fire and brimstone of our familiar imagination. No, David fears the absence of praise. "In Sheol," David says, "who will give you praise?"

One might read this complaint as David bargaining with a selfish God. Since God needs praise from his creatures, he would be willing to spare David's life in exchange for an "Hallelujah" now and then. One might read it this way, but one would be wrong. God does not need anything from us "" indeed, God clarifies that repeatedly in Scripture. He is the Creator and we are his creatures. All that we are and have is already his.

Why, then, does David say this? Perhaps David is remembering what lies at the heart of all of God's creation. The sheer joy of existence "" as God declares everything he made "good." And that joy, experienced in relationship to God, is praise. God delights in the delight of his creatures not because he needs their delight but because he created them for it. God created all things to rejoice in life, in and with him. For David, Sheol is a terrifying place because it is so far away from God's original design. When imagining that distance, a life so utterly separated from God that he does not give God praise, David laments and cries out for mercy. A mercy that God, in Christ, has freely given to us today.

This biblical view of life is important in ecological conversations. God has created all things to participate in his goodness and to give praise to him. Yet, technological achievements, economic materialism, industrialization, urbanization, and the goal of isolated individual success rather than interdependent communal flourishing have separated people more and more from the created world. In his book, *The Paradise of God*, Norman Wirzba traces "the steady erosion of the practical and theoretical conditions necessary for the experience of the world as creation." 1 For many today, the natural world merely supplies the material that human beings use to create their social spaces and to satisfy their desires (which are often quite a distance from their needs). We have learned to live off creation rather than with it. We see ourselves separate from all other creatures rather than bound together in a world of praise. Technological development and urbanization have so distanced people from creation that they neither fully see nor compassionately care about the created world. And, yet, whether they acknowledge it or not, they are bound in relationship with creation everyday. Lack of this awareness by some could threaten the joy of life for all.

Biblical theology offers Christians a way to engage in this ecological conversation. Rather than call us away from creation, God calls us more deeply into it. His word repeatedly opens our eyes: to see the world around us; to appreciate it as his creation; and to care for it as his handiwork and the community of creatures that he has made our home. When we truly see the world God created, we hear its song of delight "the joy of existence" and are drawn more deeply into creation's praise. 2

Psalm 148 is but one example of the Scriptural witness that calls God's people to see and to hear creation's praise. Here, the psalmist orchestrates the choir of creation. He calls for praise from the heavens (v. 1) and praise from the earth (v. 7). The choir of heaven sings and the choir of earth responds. As the psalmist moves from heaven to earth, he also moves from creation to redemption.

In addressing the heavens, the psalmist notes that they sing praise because "God commanded and they were created . . . he gave a decree and it shall not pass away" (vv. 5-6). Here, we see the continuous creation of God. Creation, itself, leads into praise for God created all things and pronounced them good. To praise is simply to live in the joy of God's continuous creation.

In addressing the earth, the psalmist turns his attention from creation to redemption. After focusing upon humanity, the psalmist notes that they sing praise because God "has raised up a horn for his people . . . for the people of Israel who are near to him" (v. 14). To raise up a horn is to display strength and God has indeed displayed his saving strength when he "raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:69). In that moment, God came near to his people (Psalm 148:14). Jesus Christ suffered the depths of Sheol for us and rose that he might be the first fruits of a new creation, joining all creatures in the joy of life and an act of praise.

This robust theology of creation's praise is present throughout Scripture. Yet, over the years, the church's awareness of this song of creation has grown quieter. We may praise God for providing us food through creation (at a harvest festival or Thanksgiving) but we rarely gather simply to join in praise with all creation at the goodness of our God. This sermon, like

this psalm, seeks to awaken God's people to the wonder of creation once again. It desires to help people see the world anew, to discover delight in the wonder of creation, and through that discovery to join in a robust expression of caring praise.

Sermon Formation:

Focus	God has prepared a world for us to discover in delight.
Function	that the hearers, as God's creatures, join all of all creation in giving God praise.
Malady	<p>sometimes, we limit the language of praise to worship in the congregational setting and we do not see how the world around us fulfills God's creative work by giving him praise.</p> <p>Separated in this way from the world, it is easy to move through the world without seeing it, to limit creation to a doctrinal teaching that is located in the past, and ultimately to overlook the deep wonder God has prepared for us by making us his creatures and surrounding us with a created world that continues to give him praise.</p>
Means	the psalmist moves our thoughts from creation (vv. 5-6) to redemption, declaring that God has "raised up a horn for his people" (v. 14). Jesus Christ is the "horn of salvation" that God raised up for us (Luke 1:69). In him, God has taken on human flesh, that he might see the world through our eyes, suffer the punishment for our sinful isolation from the world he created, and rise to become the first fruits of a new creation, that joins together to give God praise.
Structure	<p>the sermon is structured on the basis of a movement from text to application.</p> <p>3 The sermon opens by contrasting the reading from Luke with the psalm. This contrast reveals how the psalmist expands our vision. Rather than only seeing angels praising God the Father for Jesus Christ (Luke 2:13-14), we now see all of creation giving God praise for both creation and redemption.</p> <p>The sermon then walks through the text, noting how the text is divided into a call to the heavens and then a call to the earth for praise. As one moves from heaven to earth, one also moves theological from creation to redemption as the cause of our praise.</p> <p>After walking through the flow of the text, the sermon applies this experience to our daily lives, inviting the hearers to discover the wonder of creation and join in creation's praise.</p>

SECTION FOOTNOTES

1. Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61-62. For the full richness of his argument, read "Chapter 2: Culture as the Denial of Creation," 61-92.
2. For a theological elaboration on creation's praise in the context of Sabbath rest, see Charles Arand's work in *Together with All Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth. A Report of the Commission of Theology and Church Relations. The Lutheran Church "Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: CPH, 2010), 106-113.
3. For a description of this structure, see the information posted on this sermon structure located at *The Pulpit* on concordiatheology.org. See <http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/textual/text-application/> (<http://concordiatheology.org/sermon-structs/textual/text-application/>).