

Psalm 19: Creation and Word

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I am one of the pastors on staff here at North Shore Alliance Church. It's been a number of weeks since I last taught, and I've been looking forward to this morning. But to be honest, I have quite enjoyed sitting in the congregation and being taught over the last 4 weeks...those of us who teach regularly need to regularly sit under the authority of God's word...when we don't, we become dangerous.

As I begin this morning, I want to do so with two stories; the first took place four weeks ago, and the second took place this past week.

illus: Four weeks ago, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon, I drove out to Tsawwassen with a group of pastors, to catch a ferry to Pender Island. Have any of you ever been to Pender Island before? Pender is one of the Southern Gulf Islands, nestled in among Mayne, Galiano, and Saltspring.

We got onto the ferry and found some seats near the back of the boat; it's only a short ride and we were all looking forward to our three-day retreat. I'm told that the water surrounding the Gulf Islands is teeming with marine life; as a result Orca whales tend to gather and feast on the all-you-can-eat buffet.

As we were sitting in our seats, the captain came on over the loud speaker and made the following announcement: *We have a treat for all of our passengers today...we have spotted a pod of Orca whales just off the bow of the boat. If you would like to see the Orcas, please make your way...*

I'm sure there was more to the announcement, but I don't think anyone heard the rest...once the passengers heard "pod of orcas" and

"bow of the boat," a mad rush began. I kid you not...all at once, people jumped out of their seats and began to run towards the bow of boat. It was insane...people who looked like they hadn't even thought about exercise for 20 years started to run. Fortunately for me, most people slowed to a crawl after about 20 meters, which left me zipping past them right to the front.

There were a few hundred of us, hanging over the rails, scanning the horizon, looking for massive, black, dorsal fins...and then we saw them. Someone shouted, pointing to the starboard side of the boat. Then someone else shouted, pointing to the port side of the boat. Before long the pod gathered together, there were six in total: four adults and two children.

The young ones were frolicking--there is really no other word for it--they were jumping, splashing, and slapping the water with their tails...it was wildly entertaining. People were so captivated by these orcas that I'm not sure most people were conscious of what I was observing: a group of complete strangers, laughing, pointing, and talking excitedly...*did you see that?*

I couldn't get over what I was seeing...these monstrous, black, beauties...pure poetry in motion...like everyone else I was mesmerized by what I was seeing. Creation does that doesn't it? There are times when the beauty of creation catches us off guard and takes our breath away. The beauty we see in the created order is a sign and witness to beauty of our Creator; God has revealed Himself through creation.

illus: now a second story, this one involving God's Word. For the last six months, I have been praying through the Psalms. Sometimes I

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read and pray through a couple psalms at a time, at other times, I need three to four days just to make my way through one.

This past week, I've been praying through and meditating on the first two verses of Psalm 46. *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea"*.

I grew up in a household of men, one mom, and four guys. Dinner time was the worst...we would grab, gulp, and swallow. Mom would plead with us, *"Boys...slow down! How can you taste your food if you don't take time to chew it?"* It's a great question, both when it comes to feasting around a kitchen table, and when it comes to feasting on God's Word: *how can you taste your food if you don't take time to chew it?*

I've been chewing on these verses, and praying them through for the better part of a week. I've been asking myself, asking God, *why is there so much fear in me? Why am I afraid to risk, to live boldly, share my heart, to lead courageously, to love extravagantly? God why have I allowed my fears to rule me?*

God is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. God is my strong tower, my shield and defender, my hiding place, my resting place. God is strong, strong enough, stronger than anything...and He is for me, He is with me, He lives in me...*therefore, I will not allow fear to rule my life.*

God has given us His Word, that we might know Him; not that we might know things about Him...we can have a firsthand knowledge, a

personal experience of who He is...God delights to reveal Himself to us.

I've told you two stories this morning, the first about Creation, and the second about the Word; both speak and reveal the glory of God. In Psalm 19, King David was inspired to compose a song, a prayer of praise to God. In a marvelous way, David brings together these twin themes of Creation and Word, praising the God who can be seen through both; David concludes this psalm pledging his life to God and His ways.

As we continue through our preaching series on the psalms, it is my hope that you will find your own voice in Psalm 19 this morning, words you can bring with you to chew on, to take hold of...words you can pray.

As we consider this psalm together, it's important to remember what we are reading--this is a poem, a song, a prayer--we are not reading a science textbook. Poets don't write, primarily, to convey information; they write to evoke emotion, to stimulate a response...poets connect us with our hearts, they help us to feel. May the Holy Spirit stir you this morning, may He speak to your heart, and help you to feel something of the glory of God.

Please take a moment to grab a Bible--the one you brought with you, the Blue Bible in front of you (page 858), or the Bible app on your electronic device. I'm going to begin by reading vs. 1-4.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night

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they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

We’re not told anything about the occasion that prompted this Psalm¹, but I can imagine how it might have happened. Long before David became King, he was a shepherd. The youngest of eight sons, David was frequently sent out with the sheep, in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but time on his hands.

Imagine David out at night, with his father’s sheep, under a cloudless night, looking up into the heavens. He sees the sun setting, the moon rising, and the stars radiating light above him...and his heart is stirred to praise...he marvels at, wonders about, he delights in what God has made: *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of **His** hands.* Wherever David looked, he saw the handiwork of God.

Now I get the fact that many people do not believe that God exists, but to be honest, I am baffled by the sentiment. I think it takes less faith to believe in a Creator, than it does to believe that the universe and everything within it sprang into being by chance. *And besides...how did life begin without life to create it?*

Scientists estimate that there are 100 billion stars in our galaxy, and 100 billion galaxies in the universe; scientists tell us that the universe is not static, it continues to expand over time...the universe is getting bigger and bigger by the second...incredible!

¹ Or for that matter Psalm 8; both are attributed to David and both contain similar themes.

² <http://nineplanets.org/sol.html>

I’ve been told that if we attempted to count the stars in the Milky Way, taking 1 second per star, it would take us 2,500 years to count them all. And yet in Isaiah 40:25-26, God says, “*To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? ... Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.*”

The Sun is so massive that 1.3 million earths could fit inside it. The Sun produces 386 billion billion megawatts of power. But as this energy travels out from the Sun, it is continuously absorbed and re-emitted at lower and lower temperatures so that by the time it reaches the surface, it is primarily visible light.²

There are over 1.4 million different species of animals that have been catalogued by scientists, with a million of that number being insects. Do you any of you get nervous just thinking about insects? There are more than a million different kinds. And, there are over 320, 000 different kinds of plants. God created long ago and yet we’re still trying to catch up; scientists are constantly discovering new species.

*The heavens declare the **glory** of God.* The Hebrew word for “glory” is kavod; literally, it means “to be heavy,” or “weighty”. When we talk about a person, or an argument, that has great weight--we’re talking about someone who has authority, a person worthy of respect and honour, someone who is impressive...someone who has something others do not. *The heavens declare the **weightiness**, the glory, of God.*

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In verses 1 and 2, there are four different verbs that describe the ongoing action of creation: it **declares**, **proclaims**, **pours forth speech**, and **reveals knowledge**. And here we come face to face with an idea that you can find all throughout the Bible: creation is not inert matter, it's alive with the breath of God, it's an organism that actively rejoices in God's work...that's why the Scriptures speak of the mountains bursting out in song, the trees of the field clapping their hands, and the waves roaring in response to the glory of God.³

Remember now, this is poetry we are reading--the mountains don't actually sing, and the trees obviously don't have hands with which to clap--but let's not miss the point. In vs. 3 and 4 we read, "*They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*"

The question is, *what is creation declaring, proclaiming, and revealing about God?*

This past week, I asked a few people to send me some of the photos they have taken of creation. I'd like to invite you to participate with me a little this morning; as I bring a few of these pictures up on the screen, call out to me what these pictures reveal to you about God the Creator.

- **mountain**: God's grandeur, majesty, strength, nobility.
- **four birds**: God is loving, invites us into family, familiar with all of our ways, not a single bird falls to the ground without God's knowledge.

- **river**: God is light...He shines in dark places, God brings life wherever He goes.
- **bird/flowers**: God is beautiful, an artist...look at all the colour.

Creation is speaking...it has no speech, it uses no words, but it's voice goes out into all the earth. I heard its voice that day on the ferry to Pender Island...but not everyone heard...many people saw without really seeing. Not everyone looks at creation and looks for a Creator; only those who look with eyes of faith really see.

I love Elizabeth Barret Browning's poem, inspired by the story of Moses and the burning bush; she writes,

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware.*

In verses vs. 7-10, David moves on from Creation to Word, and expresses his delight in what it reveals about the way of God. He writes,

*"The law of the Lord is **perfect**, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are **trustworthy**, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are **right**, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are **radiant**, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is **pure**, enduring forever.*

³ Is. 55:12; 51:15.

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*The decrees of the Lord are **firm**, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.”*

The law of the Lord is **perfect**, not in the sense of moral perfection but in the sense that it does exactly what it sets out to do: it reveals God and it restores life and vitality.

The statutes of the Lord are **trustworthy**, they are as reliable as God is...even though the world, your own personal world, may crumble around you, God is a solid foundation, He will not be moved, we can found our lives upon His Word, His character, His promises...He is faithful, He will stand when everyone else falls and fails.

His precepts are **right**--He is good, what He does is good, what He has planned for us is good--therefore, we can live from a place of joy.

His commands are **radiant**, His way is filled with light, with clarity, with purpose, meaning, and direction. You will not waste your life if you walk in His way, you will encounter life.

The fear of the Lord is **pure**--think of gold that has been refined in the fire--all of the dross, all of the impurities, the non-essentials, all of it is stripped away as we live with reverence, surrender, and obedience before God.

His decrees are **firm**--God doesn't waver, He doesn't waffle, He has set out for us a way to live, a good way, a right way, a way that leads to glory for Him and for us.

illus: Back in 2008, I went on a tour that took me through the country of Israel...I had an incredible opportunity to see many of the sites that are described in the Bible; some day I'd love to organize a tour Israel and provide an opportunity for you to see and hear all that I experienced.

One of the places we visited was a place known as Gamla. Gamla isn't mentioned in the Scriptures, but it famous for its strong defense against the Romans in the Jewish Revolt in AD 66. Near the city's entrance stood a typical Galilean synagogue, with columns, tiers of side benches, corner pillars, and an alcove where the Torah scroll (the O.T scripture) would be kept.

Our guide explained to us what a typical synagogue service would have looked like around the time of Jesus. At the appointed time, a shofar would blow, sounding the call to worship. First, people would make their way to the mikveh (a ceremonial bath) and then people would converge upon the synagogue.

Much like a church service today, upon arrival, people would visit with one another, catching up on the details of life, and they would carry on like this until the appointed person (the Hazan) would go to get the Torah scroll.

When the Hazan appeared with the scroll, he would lift it above his head, everyone would stand and then begin to sing and dance...when God's word appeared, joy would break out among the people. The Hazan would dance his way through the crowd, and as he went by, people would reach out, touch the scroll, and then put their fingers to their lips because as Psalm 19:10 tells us, *God's word is sweeter than*

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honey...as Psalm 34:8 tells us, we can taste and see that the Lord is good. Isn't that beautiful?

God's Word is real food...it is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, pure, and firm. It refreshes the soul, makes wise the simple, it gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes, it cleanses, it purifies, it guides us in the way that is right.

Psalm 119:11, *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* This is what Augustine had in mind when he said "love God and do what you like"...friends, when God's word is hidden in our hearts, we begin to desire what He desires.

God's word is something to be delighted in, in the same way that we delight in the beauty of gold, or the sweetness of honey. Francis of Assisi once said, *"For the one who has tasted God, all the sweetness of the world will be bitterness."*

What are you feasting on these days? For some of us, it has been too long since we tasted the sweetness of God...not that He has ceased to be sweet, but that we have forgotten God, we have settled, we have directed our hunger elsewhere, we have acquired a taste for other things. Maybe your tastebuds need to be reset...maybe today is the day.

David expresses his delight in the word of God, but he is no fool--he knows how prone he is to wander from God, from the path set out for him--just because he knows which way to go, doesn't mean he always takes the right path. David knows that he needs **God's help**, to stay on **God's path**, in keeping with **God's word**. And so, in verses 12-14, David launches into a prayer for help.

"But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

David began Psalm 19 speaking about God the Creator; he ends speaking about God the Redeemer. The One who has made us, made us for Himself, made us to live along a certain path, He is the only One who can Redeem us, save us, forgive us, and make us whole again.

You see, we need **God's help**, to stay on **God's path**, in keeping with **God's word**. We need the finished work of Jesus. Jesus is God's Word to us...everything was created through Him and all things must be **redeemed** through Him. What in your life needs to be redeemed? Where do you need forgiveness? Where do you find yourself trapped, stuck, enslaved? We need the finished work of Jesus.

And, we need the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. David is praying for God's help, he's praying for protection from himself, he's praying for freedom from sin and rebellion, that he might walk in God's way. We cannot live the life God calls us to in our own power...but praise God we don't have to...Jesus lives within us, by the Holy Spirit...He lives the life that we cannot.

Friends, as followers of Jesus, our lives are destined for glory. 2 Cor. 3:18 tells us that even now we *"are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."* Both Creation and Word speak of the glory of God, and

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Colossians 1:27 declares that it is Christ in us, who is the hope of glory.

Friends, remember who you are: you've been made in His image, you've been invited into His family, you are loved beyond measure, and you've been created to house and reflect the glory of God.

Baptisms

Both Creation and the Word play a sacramental role in the life of faith...do you understand what I mean when I use the word "*sacramental*"? Something that is *sacramental* points beyond itself to a greater, or deeper reality...it is like a window that we see through.

A wedding ring can be sacramental...it witnesses to the greater reality of a marriage between a man and a woman; it speaks of love, of a lifelong commitment. We can tend to be enamored by what the ring looks like...the quality of the gold, the size of the diamonds, the shape of the ring, but what the ring looks like pales in comparison to what the ring points to.

As beautiful and glorious as creation is, we do not worship it; creation points beyond itself to the Creator of all things. As wonderful as God's Word is, we were never intended to worship it...the Word points to Person who speaks.

This morning, we have a number of people who have decided to get baptized. Like both creation and word, baptism is sacramental--it points to a greater and deeper reality.

If you have never seen a baptism before, you might describe it as one person submerging another person under water...if described that way, I guess I baptized my little brother every time we went swimming. But there is a greater and deeper reality going on in baptism.

When a person is submerged under the water, it is a visible sign, a picture, pointing to the reality that when Jesus died on the cross for our sin, we died with Him...we died to sin...we were buried with Him. And when a person is raised up from the water, it points to the reality that when Jesus rose from the grave, we were raised with Him, we too have been given new life. Baptism is sacramental in that expresses the reality that Jesus lives in us, and we live in Him.