

**New St. James Presbyterian Church  
Third Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, March 3, 2024**

**“Sweeter Also than Honey”  
Psalm 19**

**The Rev. Dr. David Clark**

Our psalm begins by declaring that creation speaks of God:  
“The heavens are *telling* the glory of God,”  
the psalmist says;  
“and the firmament *proclaims* his handiwork.  
Day to day *pours forth* speech,  
and night to night *declares* knowledge” (vv. 1-2).

For the psalmist, it’s not just that creation reflects God’s glory; it’s way more than that (cf. Wiley). For the psalmist, creation itself speaks about God: the night sky is talkative, the stars are singing to us.

It’s not easy for us to grasp what the psalmist has in mind; though I’m reminded of a passage from the Book of Job that tells how, at creation, “the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy” (38:7). For the psalmist, the song that started at creation has never stopped. As one scholar puts it: “Day speaks to day” and “night gives knowledge to night” in “an unending concert sung by the universe to the glory of God” (Mays).

So, according to the psalmist, the stars are speaking to us about God: “their voice goes out through all the earth,” the psalmist says, “and their words to the end of the world” (v. 4). It’s “all very mysterious and marvellous” (Mays) as creation sings to us about the Creator...

Except there’s one problem, which is: we can’t hear it; we can’t understand it; we can’t make out a single word. The psalmist says this bluntly:  
“The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge”—  
which all sounds just wonderful, until the psalmist adds:  
“There is no speech, nor are there words;  
*their voice is not heard*” (v. 3).

As one Presbyterian minister explains it: “The whole of creation communicates God’s person, God’s character, but human beings do not have ears to hear this word, to receive this gift” (Wiley).

I do wonder if we can maybe relate to this somehow from our own experience: when you get away from the city lights, and you see the night sky—really see it—it evokes in us awe and wonder and a sense of God’s grandeur; and maybe it does feel like it’s all almost speaking to us... But like the psalmist, we can’t quite make out that cosmic song; and we can be left feeling, if anything, small and insignificant.

In any case, that wordless song is ultimately “not enough” for us (Craddock). If creation sings of God in words we cannot hear, then the cosmic song does not answer our deepest human questions—and we need another song (cf. Craddock).

And so begins the psalmist’s celebration of the “law.” When we think of the law, we may have in mind specific commandments (like we heard in our Old Testament Lesson). Yet the law is even broader and richer: in the law, God offers guidance and instruction; in the law, God reveals God’s “will and way” (Mays). In the language and interpretation of the church, we tend to speak of this more in terms of the word of God (of which the law is part)—so this psalm “has [long] been understood in Christian interpretation” to celebrate all of God’s revelation to us in Scripture (cf. Mays).

So according to the psalmist, creation sings of God, but we can’t hear it—meaning that it doesn’t impact us or help us. Yet what a contrast to God’s law, God’s word—which, as the psalmist celebrates, touches right down into our lives. The psalmist calls the law “perfect,” “sure,” “right,” “clear”—but that’s only the half of it...because the wonder of God’s word is how it reaches us. Listen to how the psalmist *pairs* the goodness of God’s word with its impact on our lives:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, *reviving the soul*;  
the decrees of the LORD are sure, *making wise the simple*;  
the precepts of the LORD are right, *rejoicing the heart*;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear, *enlightening the eyes*” (vv. 7-8).

The psalmist celebrates the law as “soul reviving, wisdom imparting, heart rejoicing, [and] eye enlightening” (McGrath). This is really a joyful reflection of how God’s word heals and helps us, encourages and uplifts us. And I think this joy is especially clear in that image of honey:

“the ordinances of the LORD  
are true and righteous altogether,”  
the psalmist says,

“More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
*sweeter also than honey,*  
*and drippings of the honeycomb*” (vv. 9-10).

Isn't that a lovely image? Once, years ago, I heard a sermon on this psalm where the preacher, to try to illustrate this image of honey, proceeded to hand around a container of honey—and invited everyone in the pews to enjoy some... It didn't quite work, though, because the preacher didn't provide spoons or cups or anything, and not many worshippers were willing to, you know, eat like Winnie the Pooh—though I suppose if we had, messy though it would've been, that really would've illustrated this image about “drippings of the honeycomb”!

But notice *why* the psalmist calls God's word “sweeter [...] than honey”: because by God's law and instruction “is [God's] servant warned,” the psalmist says, and “in keeping them there is great reward” (v. 11). That is, because God's word guides us, “a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path,” as the psalmist puts it elsewhere (119:105). Or a little like Briana preventing me from crashing into pews!

So our psalm sets up this contrast between the word of God in creation (which we cannot hear, which is silent to us), and the word of God in Scripture, in the law (which we can hear, which speaks to us). And by contrasting the word we miss and the word we hear, the psalm invites us to reflect about the *gift* of God's word. We're *not* left with some wordless, inscrutable silence—because God graciously descends to our level and speaks to us in ways we can understand: the eternal God, who is beyond all understanding, nonetheless chooses to speak guidance and comfort right into our little lives.

I mean, where would we be without God's word revealed in Scripture? In our worship life here at New St. James, everything is meant to radiate from God's word: hymns, prayers, anthems, preaching—we try to weave it all together so that the Word will resonate in every element of worship. The word is what gives our worship life its substance and structure. Whenever we're uplifted or encouraged or challenged or inspired in worship, it's because—by the working of the Holy Spirit—God is speaking God's word into our lives and circumstances.

Or where would we be in our daily lives and decisions without God's word to guide us—to challenge us when we are complacent or uncaring, and to comfort us when we are struggling and discouraged? It makes me wonder if we could offer

our own verse to this psalm... We heard the psalmist celebrate the law and guidance of God:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes” (vv. 7-8). But if we could add our own verse here, what would it be?

Maybe something like:

“The word of the Lord is comforting:  
it got me through the death of my spouse”;

or

“The word of the Lord is challenging:  
it taught me to care more deeply for others”;

or

“The word of the Lord is inspiring:  
it lifted me up out of a dark place;”

or

“The word of the Lord is empowering:  
it made me realize I’m valuable in God’s eyes.”

If you could add your own verse and voice to this psalm, what might you say?

Because notice, the psalm concludes with an invitation to respond: the psalmist spoke of God’s mysterious word in creation (which we cannot hear) and God’s word in Scripture (which we can)—but it ends with our own word *of response*. God’s word—the law, the instruction of God—has touched our lives; God has spoken to us, so how will we respond? God has spoken God’s word to heal us and restore us, to bring us joy and comfort, to guide us and challenge us; how can we reply?

The last verse of our psalm is a prayer, that our response may be faithful—that as God speaks to us lovingly and kindly in Scripture, we may learn to reply with kinder and more loving lives. “Let the words of [our] mouth[s] and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable to you, O LORD, [our] rock and [our] redeemer” (v. 14). Amen.