

Psalm 111 – Splendor and beauty!
Northminster / Newtonbrook United Church, August 16, 2009

Splendor and Beauty!

The authors of Psalm 111 refer to God's works –I believe that a part of what these works are is God's creation; the universe, the solar system that earth is a part of, and the earth itself. Of course we humans are a part of God's work, but this morning I invite us to turn our hearts and minds to the part of God's work that we refer to as planet earth – this blue-green orb floating in interstellar space, in the midst of the cosmos: – our home; the earth where Jesus walked, and was baptized in earth's life-giving water.

The writers of the Psalm refer to God's work with the words; "**honour and majesty**"¹ in the version that we read this morning. "**Splendor and beauty**" is another author's version of this text.² In the colloquial of today, younger people than I might simply use the term "**AWESOME MAN, AWESOME!**"

I was reminded of this when I heard Canadian astronaut Jullie Payette talk about the beauty of the earth below when she was aboard the space shuttle recently. We have pictures of this planet taken from space that give us a perspective on its beauty. Somewhere in each of our homes, I suspect, is a picture of either a beautiful sunrise or sunset that God has painted in the sky, and we have attempted to capture on film, or in watercolour, or pastel or oil paint.

When I ask people where they experience God, or feel closest to God, a common answer is, "in nature." In some mysterious way, we seem to have a profound connection with God when we are out in the country; on a beach; in the forest, on a mountain top, and so on. Where do you feel closest to God?

Is it possible that we humans in our everyday lives here in the city take for granted the astounding miracle that is earth? Are we so accustomed to the breathtaking beauty of this planet, and we are creatures of this planet, that we ignore the AWESOMENESS of it?

¹ Psalm 111:3

² "The Message" by Eugene Peterson

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Of course, our western, scientifically trained minds will tell us that the colour of sunsets is the result of dust in the air, etc. as an explanation. Still, I remember going to a certain place in Prince Edward Island, with many other tourists, to watch the sun set over the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Do you have a favourite spot where you watch sunsets? Do you feel close to God when you are watching a sunset – or a sunrise?

What did we humans do to paint the skies these colours. Is it not awesome? Are the unfolding roses in the garden not awesome as well?

We might remember that there is a recurring refrain in Genesis. It is written that when God stepped back and looked at God's work of creation, "**and God saw that it was good.**"³ AND, "**it was very good.**"⁴

This is the height of summer here in Toronto. We are living through the hot days of August – some say, at last! I keep reminding those who complain about the heat that this is the weather that they we praying for in February.

For many Canadians, who have sufficient wealth I should say, this is a time to travel and enjoy other parts of this beautiful country – or other parts of God's world. For Canadians who have the good fortune to own cottages, summer is a time to get closer to "nature".

For all of us, summer seems to be a special time as we enjoy flowers, fragrances that float through the air – I'm not referring to Toronto's temporary garbage depots – and we take some time to appreciate the mystery and beauty of God's creation. Not too much time, mind you, because many of us have a list of things and we feel guilty about taking time "out" to simply enjoy the exquisiteness of God's creation.

The Psalmists remind us that God's works are so great that they are worth a lifetime of study – a life filled with endless enjoyment. I had one of those experiences when I was vacationing in Newfoundland in July, 2009.

³ Genesis 1 - 3

⁴ Genesis 1:31

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Shari and I went to a place that is called Green Point. This is not much more than a rocky point on the western coast of Newfoundland. Green Point is recognized by geologists around the world as THE PLACE where the rocks record the complete sequence of changes between the Cambrian and Ordovician eras of earth history took place 192 million years ago. The Parks Canada interpreter told us that by walking about 200 meters along this rock-strewn beach, we were walking through 15 million years of earth history. 15 million years! That's awesome! That's worth studying – and we did see a film crew who was there preparing a documentary.

Walking through 15 million years of history helped me have some perspective on how awesome the earth is, and how God has been present before these rocks were formed at the bottom of an ancient seabed, AND God is with us now. I began to wonder where I had lost my sense of **AWE** for creation.

Eugene Peterson concludes his version of Psalm 111 with the words:
***“The good life begins in the fear of God –
Do that and you’ll know the blessing of God.”***

In our reading of this Psalm from Voices United we sing;
Halleluiah! Halleluiah! Halleluiah!

My prayer is that, if have lost it, we might all regain a sense for the awesomeness of creation and feel God's presence surrounding us.

Hymn # 684 – Make me a Channel of your Peace

When / where do you feel closest to God?

Is God the Creator of the Universe, or has it always existed?

Is God's "work" revealed to you in nature?

Do you have a sense of awe about God?

Proverb at time of Offering:

“The lover of money will not be satisfied with money;
nor the lover of wealth with gain.

This too is vanity.”

Ecclesiastes 5:10