

Thanksgiving Ecumenical Service, Year C, 2013
First Presbyterian Church, Smithtown NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley
“Echoes of creation”

Today
we come together
to give thanks to God
for the many blessings
we have been given. And I always wonder
what more can be said.

This morning at St James Episcopal Church
as we celebrated the Feast of Christ the King,
we read from the Epistle to the Colossians.
Our reading
reminded us
of the core of Christian belief - and I know that not all of us here share that belief, but stay with
me -
it reminded us of the core of Christian belief about Jesus.
And earlier this week in bible study
as we looked at that passage,
we realized
that it echoed
other places in Scripture,
from the gospel of John and the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament,
and then back into the Hebrew Scriptures, in Genesis,
and the prophet Isaiah,
and countless other places.

And that reminded me
of the way that so often
Scripture
comments on Scripture,
each text
taking us one step further
into the mind
of God.

And that means
that sometimes,
the job of preacher
is almost superfluous.

As I reflected on our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures today,
 from Psalm 148,
 in preparation for this evening,
 I was struck by the way
 that it echoes
 the creation story
 in Genesis.

Scripture
 comments on Scripture.

If that first chapter of Genesis
 is the story of creation,
 our Psalm
 is the response.

Everything
 is made to God's glory.

Bereshit bara elohim
 et ha-shamayim ve-et ha-'aretz.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Praise the Lord!
 Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!
 Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his host!

It was a glorious day today,
 one of those days that we more often see in winter,
 bitterly cold, a howling wind,
 but as I looked out my window
 late this afternoon,
 the clouds were lit
 an almost unearthly gold,
 the trees

with their last few leaves
silhouetted against
the light blue sky.

Down in Stony Brook Harbor, the normally quiet water
was whipped up into whitecaps,
the reeds bent over
almost double.

Light-gilded clouds and wind whipped waves
Let all creation
praise the Lord!

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!

The wind is sweeping the leaves around outside,
crunchy and dry
and so fun to jump in.
There are still three or four golden apples on my tree,
the salad greens seem to have survived the frost so far,
and a couple of nights ago
I was able to cut fresh parsley and sage for my dinner.

And as the sun set today
I could see the moon,
almost a perfect half,
light and dark beside each other.
In the ancient world,

the twenty-eight day cycle of the moon
 was the basis of calendars,
 its waning and waxing
 a reliable sign
 that time would continue.
 And with time,
 the possibility of a future,
 and with a future,
 hope.

Crunchy leaves and half-moon light
 Let all creation
 praise the Lord!

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
 Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for he commanded and they were created.
 He established them for ever and ever;
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

It’s been a tough few weeks in our parish.
 We’ve had the loss of jobs
 and the death of a young man.
 Illness seems to be constantly interrupting us,
 and sometimes we want to God,
 “Isn’t it enough yet?”

But at the same time,
 we’ve seen the incredible care
 of our brothers and sisters,
 meals cooked,

prayers offered,
hands held,
tears shared.

And we know
that one day, soon, eventually, if we endure,
that God's promises will also endure,
as surely
as the seasons turn
from autumn to winter to spring to summer
and new life comes
in the midst of death.

Autumn and winter and spring and summer
Let all creation
praise the Lord!

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

It's still autumn - can you believe it?
Outside
it feels like the dead of winter.
And while there's no snow on the ground,
I noticed today
on North Country Rd
one of the shopping centers
had its sprinklers on the grass.
The temperature outside
was 29 degrees,
and so every blade of grass
was coated with a brilliant
gleam
of ice.

Meanwhile, my cat is snuggled under the bed covers.
 Even with the heat on
 it's way to cold in his opinion
 to venture out.

Icicle grass and sleeping cats
 Let all creation
 praise the Lord!

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
 Wild animals and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds!

All of creation
 demonstrates God's glory.
 But not only creation,
 the earth and sky,
 plants and animals.
 We too
 are a sign of God's glory.

In 1647, the Westminster Assembly in England completed the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The first question, which the Presbyterians among us may know, is this:
 What is the chief end of man?
 A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

We are made
 to give glory to God.

People of earth, people of God,
 Let all creation
 praise the Lord!

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'
 So God created humankind in his image,

in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!