

Joy Embedded in Creation

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord God, you are very great.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works!

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Praise the Lord! Alleluia! - Psalm 104:1, 24, 31, 33, 35b

Slide 1 - Bison Calf

Psalm 104 is a celebration of life. It is quite long so we read responsively only a portion of it. I pulled out a few verses for the beginning of the sermon. The whole of the Psalm 104 is characterized by humility, gratitude, joy, and praise. If we were to read the entire Psalm we would come to terms with our place in creation. We as human beings share our space with a vast array of God's "works," including an earth full of God's creatures.

Like last week this psalm acknowledges that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. Last week Psalm 24 proclaimed this truth. This week Psalm 104 gives quite a list of God's works. The cataloguing of God's works includes: the heavens, the clouds, the wind, the waters, the mountains, the valleys, springs, and hills, wild animals, birds, plants, rocks, moon, sun, and finally, "People." What follows this grand list of God's creations? What follows is a celebration of them all, without lifting one part of creation over another. All are worthy of our reverence and according to the psalm, give delight to the Lord. It is noteworthy that human beings are not given a special place in this list. We are simply part of the whole created order. When we consider that this psalm keeps all of God's creation on a level plain, humility is in order.

Did you notice that animal life was part of the great list? Today we focus on God's creatures. Today is Fauna Sunday in the worship series on Creation.

Slide 2 – Yellow Bird

What is fauna? Fauna is animal life, particularly the animals that are characteristic of a region, habitat, or geological period. Animal life in western Wisconsin includes the tiniest creatures from baby caterpillars to large wildlife like black

bears. Just this week on Tuesday there was excitement at Preschool because the baby caterpillars arrived in the mail. By tomorrow morning they may have outgrown their jars. Fauna includes the animals of the sea and those that fly as well as those that creep, crawl, slither, and walk the earth. Thanks to Pastor Christine for many of the images today with the exception of a few of my own photos and the stock photos of the great spotted woodpecker and its food.

The pleasant flow of the psalm shows there is interdependence to God's creation. The valleys provide water for the wild animals. Vegetation provides food for cattle while trees provide homes for birds. Everything that God has made exists for another creature's survival, and even enjoyment. But that does not mean that everything is free of conflict or destruction.

Slide 3 – Great Spotted Woodpecker

Take the case of the great spotted woodpecker common in Europe. In his book, *"The Hidden Life of Trees,"* Peter Wohlleben who studied forests in Germany for decades calls some wildlife "tree helpers." He tells how the great spotted woodpecker can save trees, but how at the same time their innate ability to peck out a pest is destructive when it comes time for them to make their own nests. Whether they are after a pest sending chunks of bark flying or building a nest in a healthy spruce hollowing the trunk for a nest cavity, they are not actively thinking about the well-being of the tree.

Slide 4 – Bark Beetle

Nevertheless, these woodpeckers benefit the trees when a bark beetle has infested it. Bark beetles feed on the inner bark or phloem layer of trees. They reproduce in the inner bark, the living or dead phloem tissues of a tree. Adult beetles can hibernate in forest litter and host trees when environmental conditions are not favorable for reproduction. But when conditions are right, the adult beetle will travel up to a half a mile in search of a vulnerable host. In the weakened bark, beetles meet and mate and lay their eggs. After two to five weeks, they leave their host tree in search of another tree to lay their eggs.

Slide 5 - Larvae

The eggs hatch and the larvae began to feed and grow. After so many days they will undergo the transformation to adult beetles. Up to three generations can be produced in one year, unless a tree saver like the great spotted woodpecker can

get wind of a potential outbreak. With bark flying the woodpecker works quickly and greedily. Sometimes this can save the spruce from further damage. Other times the host tree does not survive the procedure but the neighboring trees are saved. Everything that God has made exists for another creature's survival, and sometime enjoyment. Interdependence is the order that God has given to the world.

Slide 6 - Iguana

The Bark Beetle can hasten the end of old trees and aid in the decomposition of dead wood. The woodpecker feeds on the beetle and its larvae. The spruce tree forest can be saved by the thorough work of the woodpecker. One species depends on the other in a chain connection. And somehow, through it all, when everything is stable, there is interdependence and joy. Interdependence is the order that God has given to the world, so that each created thing sounds a note in an ongoing harmony.

That creatures are made not only to survive but also to enjoy life underscores what is perhaps the central focus of the entire psalm. Joy is what it is all about. God delights in creation, and we, the created, delight in this world and in the God who made it. The world is made from joy and for joy.

Slide 7 - Cows

The whole created order is daily dependent on food and water which is provided by God. God sustains and nourishes all. *The eyes of all look to you (O Lord), and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.* – Psalm 145:15-16. The whole world is dependent upon God's presence, and indeed, God's breath. *When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust, when you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.* –Psalm 104:29-30.

Slide 8 - Fawn

Human beings breathe about once every five seconds. In one way, respiration can be considered as a natural process. But for the poet, the psalmist, the breath of life is primarily a divine gift. Every breath we take is a new creation! In our time gathered for worship we are being renewed! The fact that we are alive in this moment is grounded in God's commitment to life. The way in which we live as

people of faith is grounded not only in God's commitment to life but in God's enjoyment of life.

Slide 9 - Crawdad

The gospel for this day, for our focus on fauna, is a passage in Luke where Jesus is continuing to teach about the true source of our security and treasure. The context in Luke is this, two brothers are in disagreement over their inheritance and one of them asks Jesus for help. So Jesus tells a story about a man who had everything in abundance so that he needed to build more and more buildings to house his wealth. This man wasn't really interested in anything in life, he had no purpose, no meaning. One day he suddenly dies and Jesus says that is how it is with those who think only of themselves but are not rich toward God.

Slide 10 - Butterfly

This story made everyone nervous. But what Jesus wanted was for everyone to there is an abundance of what it needed for life. With God we will have enough for ourselves and more than enough so that we can distribute it with others in the world.

Life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Generosity starts with begin rich toward God, getting out of an over-focus on ourselves, and instead seeing ourselves as agent in God's service, ensuring that all have enough. I like this text because it helps us to see that humans can play a role being interdependent on one another.

Slide 11- Arctic Fox

My favorite summer time activity is standing washing dishes at the kitchen sink and watching the young sparrows learn to fly and eat on their own out of our bird feeders. For a couple of years ten to twenty of sparrows all of a sudden swoop toward our house and the bird feeder. They perch on the yard shed as their first stop, then they rise again as one and swoop to our patio fence and bird feeders. I watch as the parent bird feeds their fledglings, who are close to the bird feeder but have yet to figure out how to perch and feed on their own.

Slide 12 – Geese Family

There is this interdependency. The Great Spotted Woodpecker, the Bark Beetle and the Spruce tree.

The man with storehouses of goods, the ones who hear the call to share their resources, and God.

The parent birds, their fledglings, and our bird feeder.

There is this interdependency, and joy is the final outcome.

Video – Tree Frogs

In recent years I have learned to appreciate nature to a greater degree, paying attention to the sounds and the sights and the aromas. This spring in a walk just past sunset I came upon some tree frogs. Their sounds was deafening, and delightful.

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