



4 March 2018

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; 4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. 7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. 12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Ps. 19 NRSV)

1

"We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord." "In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north...but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth."

When I sing these words I usually cross my fingers behind my back. As I look around at the state of things across the globe, in our own nation's capital, in our community and communities across the land, within families, even within the church...I don't see that we are "one in the Spirit" or one in much of anything. I sure don't see "one great fellowship of love."

We are not one, are we? Can we be one? I tend to have the same reaction Ezekiel had when God pointed to a pile of human bones and asked if those dry bones would live again.¹ To quote the prophet Ezekiel, "Lord only knows."

But at the heart of our hope as people of faith is the conviction that the Lord knows. The lack of empirical evidence from our perspective does not preclude the patient work of the Holy Spirit to make us one. Unity and wholeness and peace and salvation are not ours to construct. Abundant life is God's gift. Something we **receive**...before it is ever something we can even in the most modest sense **achieve**.

Not for one minute am I saying we should throw up our hands and do nothing. But I am saying that if we are ever "one in the Spirit," if we are ever "one great fellowship of love," our part is to get out of the way and let God's Spirit work through us. We prove over and over and over and over again that on our own we are too selfish... that our perspective is too limited...that our fears are too great...and that our faith is too small. We

continually prove that we are incapable of being what God's wants us to be - i.e., "one in the Spirit."

Even in the church. You would think that in the church of all places we could be one in him whom we call Lord. But, as the old saying goes..."It ain't necessarily so."

2

The psalmist writes: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, the sky proclaims His handiwork. Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out. There is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard. Their voice carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world."²

Did the Psalmist know that two hundred and fifty million light years from where he wrote those words a song was emanating from a supermassive black hole in the Perseus cluster - a low B-flat - 57 octaves below middle C?³

Did he know that scientists would one day identified more than 100 billion galaxies in our universe? With access to the most recent space telescopes, physicists estimate we'll soon find more than 100 billion more galaxies...so, not merely 200 billion stars, but 200 billion galaxies each bursting with stars. But if that isn't enough, many renowned physicists now speculate that even our universe is not alone...and hypothesize that ours might be one of innumerable more universes each distinct, but not completely independent of our own.⁴ Do you suppose each of those gazillion universes hum at a low B-flat, too? Or does each universe hum at a distinct note creating a perfect and harmonious scale that at this point God alone can hear?

The heavens, the sky, the day, and the night...they all have a voice that echoes to the end of the world. And get this. Their voice does not say, "Look at me." Their hum says, "Look at God." Their voices in some sense "declare" God's glory.

The psalmist is telling us that all creation praises God...that creation exists to draw attention to God...that ever blade of grass, every fish in the sea, every mountain peak, and every shooting star points to God. Praise is creation's purpose. The heavens by being "the heavens" declare God's glory.

3

The psalmist's point is doxological...but it is also didactic, educational, and instructive. An awareness of God's voice is woven into us. Christ's song of new life is ringing and pinging in us. The Holy Spirit's whispering hum is always in our ears calling us to new songs, new thoughts, new creations, new possibilities, new life...calling us out of falsehood, out of preconceptions, out from behind walls...calling us to hear God's voice most distinctly through the voice of his Son. God is always calling us to newness, to abundance, to freedom, to extravagance...to join our voices to God's creative and loving voice.⁵ God is always calling us to be one in him.

My health insurance plan requires that I annually take a Wellness Assessment which asks all sorts of questions that indicate whether or not I am living a healthy lifestyle. When you and I are truly and fully human, when we are who and what God made us to be, we declare God's glory...through the words of our mouths, the prayers of our hearts, the works of our hands...through the causes we engage, the ways we vote and spend our money, the lies we confront, and the truths for which we stand. When we have a healthy spiritual wellness assessment, it is as though we join all creation singing: Alleluia.⁶

2

Jean Vanier is founder of the L'Arche community...a network of homes where people with developmental disabilities, volunteers, and a sprinkling of staff live together in community. Vanier tells the story of Claude, a man Vanier says has the most illogical mind he ever encountered. Claude may ask such questions as "What time is orange?" or "Who was tomorrow?" But Claude has a profound wisdom about him we could all learn from.

One day Claude was at the beach with several members of the L'Arche community. The ocean was at low tide so there was an immense stretch of flat, sandy beach. They began making designs in the sand. Claude drew a big circle with a couple of marks inside. "What's that?" asked one of the staff. With a big smile Claude replied, "It's Madame Sun." "Very nice," the staff member said, "Now let's see you draw joy." Claude took a look around him at the wide beach that stretched out in both directions as far as the eye could see, then turned to the staff person and said with a huge smile, "There's not enough room!"⁷

Would that we were all as wise and illogical as Claude. Would that we all heard the heavens telling the glory of God inviting us to join in.

4

Do you hear creation murmuring and buzzing and humming all around you? Do you hear the "music of the spheres" - that ethereal music supposed by Pythagoras and other early mathematicians produced by the movements of the heavenly bodies? Do you hear that music calling you to wake up and see...to wake up and hear creation's endless song praising God?⁸

I see you looking at me like I'm bonkers. I know that look because I've seen it before...that supercilious look that asks, "What's the preacher been smoking this week? If creation is making some cosmic noise, I sure don't hear it. What's he talking about?"

I'm talking about something it seems as though you and I have managed to take too little notice of. We have managed to relegate the deep song of creation and the Holy Spirit's continuous whispering hum to back-ground noise...to ambient or white noise.

Even in the church. We fill our worship with words and music...both of which can be beautiful and insightful and awesome and praising. But I sometimes wonder if the noise of worship keeps us from hearing the music of creation...the subtle harmonies produced by the movement of the stars...the beating of angel wings...the sound of Jesus' voice coming through the pages of holy texts?

We seem to go to great lengths to avoid paying attention to the voice of the Spirit of God moving and singing around us and within us...calling us to unity, to oneness... calling us to be one in the Spirit, one in the Lord. We seem far more willing to hear the siren call of rabid individualism,⁹ the sort of rabid individualism that insists upon doing "it my way" to doing what the Spirit is urging us to do in order that we may become one great fellowship of love.

The psalmist's bold and challenging claim is that creation speaks in one voice...and that that one voice sings to the glory of God. Are we listening? Are you listening?



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Endnotes:

¹ See Ezekiel 37:3.

² Berlin, Adele and Brettler, Marc Zvi. ed. 2004. The Jewish Study Bible. NY: Oxford University Press, 1302.

³ See: http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2003/09sep_blackholesounds/ Also see: Cherwien, Susan P. 2009. From Glory into Glory: Reflection for Worship. St. Louis: Morning Star Music Publishers, 16.

⁴ Thanks to mathematician, Sir Paul Humke, for this perspicacious synopsis.

⁵ Cherwien, 235.

⁶ See the hymn, *When in Our Music God Is Glorified*, text by Fred Pratt Green, music by Charles Villiers Stanford.

⁷ Ward & Wild, 158. Citing Bill Clark, Enough Room for Joy: Jean Vanier's L'Arche. A Message for Our Time (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1974)

⁸ Cherwien, Susan P. 2003. Crossings: Meditations for Worship. Fenton, MO: Morning Star Music Publishers, 15.

⁹ A *Siren Call* is an expression that comes from Greek mythology – i.e., a group of female and partly human creatures lured mariners to destruction by their beautiful and seductive singing. The expression has come to mean something that is very appealing and makes a person want to go somewhere or do something that is apt to have bad results.