

God enlivens the universe.

Psalm 148; Revelations 21:1-6

We heard earlier the quote that Bill Plotkin says: “Spirituality becomes a sinking back into the source of everything.” This is what the passage from Revelations is getting at. It’s about sinking back into the source of everything; sinking back into the place where God is. For far too long, we have separated heaven and earth, and separated humans from God. The vision that John had, which is expressed in Revelations, is that a new heaven will be one where things are no longer separated. He writes, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Heaven is here on earth.

We are being reminded of two things in this. Firstly, we are being reminded of what we believe and what we talked about last week, which is *panentheism*: the idea and the understanding that God is in everything, and everything is in God. Secondly, we are being reminded that we need to live not in the past, not in the future, but in the present. Right now.

I loved being a camp counselor; I loved working at camp over the summer months on a lake with cabins, and people playing games. Having a campfire. Some did crafts (I didn’t). And other moments of simply being in nature. Being out at camp was what nourished my soul and what started my ministry. One of my favourite rituals at camp, especially when I was the program coordinator, was to be the first one to get up. And when I got up, I wanted to greet the morning. I would put on a comfy sweater, with my flip-flops over top of my pajamas, and I would go sit on the steps of the main lodge. I usually had a nice, piping-hot steaming cup of coffee or tea with me, and as I sat on the steps, I would watch the sun slowly rise over the water. It was so peaceful in that moment. It was the place where I felt God’s presence, and the sound of the birds and the lapping of the water, and the smell of the dew on the grass, and in the stillness of that moment. After a while, I would go and have the responsibility of ringing the bell and waking everyone up. I hated doing that part, but it was worth it in the end. And the campers would groggily fall out of their cabins, and we would gather around the flagpole. As we raised the flag, we would recite together the salutation to the dawn. And it says:

“Look to this day, for it is life. The very life of life. In its brief chorus lie all the verities and realities of your existence. The bliss of growth. The glory of action, and the splendor of achievement. For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision, but today well-lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day.” – Attributed to Kalidasa

The ritual of reconnecting with all of Creation, followed by taking the time to say these words, invited us to live in the present – still invites me to live in the present and in the moment, undistracted by whatever life places in front of us. I had a similar experience when I was in Africa in Botswana, on a safari. I remember sitting in the silence as we drove along in the sand, rumbling around in our Jeep. As the sun started to come up, there was nothing else to do but to pay attention. To really notice what had transpired the night before. Whether it was looking in the sand for animal tracks, or just simply taking in the beauty of what God had created. It was taking a break from technology that I think made the difference. My phone didn't work there; it was great. There was no cell reception. The daily tasks didn't exist. We were simply there to watch and notice and see all of Creation at work. When distractions are gone from your life, you start to notice your own breathing. Maybe it's too fast; maybe you forgot to breathe. You notice the little things, like the monkeys making alarm noises, and you start to differentiate the sounds of a leopard and a lion. You hear the conversation between two rival hyena gangs.

In both of these cases – being on safari or being at camp – the separation from Creation no longer existed. John's vision in Revelations is that there would no longer be separation. The first heaven and the first earth passed away and the sea was no more. Now, some of you have asked me what that means: that the sea is no more. The Biblical scholars agree and recognize that “this is a reference to no ordinary sea, but to the sea of primordial chaos of Genesis, from which evil continually threatens to undo the goodness of God's Creation.”¹ We too, as a human race, continue to threaten the goodness of God's Creation when we disconnect from Creation. When we disconnect from where our food came from. Where we take for granted running water, heat or air conditioning. It's easy for us to forget that we need to care for Creation, because we are part of it, not separated from it. Creation is precious, and something we need to be mindful of. We need to reconnect in order to share all of Creation and all that it provides with and for us. The reality of our existence is tied directly to Creation, to God. As a community of faith, we need to hear the words found in *A Song of Faith* and learn to truly live them. When we proclaim “in grateful response to God's abundant love, we bear in mind the integral connection to the earth, to one another, and we

¹ Erik M. Heen, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 464.

participate in God's work of healing and mending creation."² We have a responsibility to help mend and heal Creation.

So how are we participating in that work? We start with praise, which leads to gratitude. Praising God and praising creation, as psalmist did today requires noticing "both what has occurred in the past and what is going on in the present."³ And the very act of praising God can shift our focus, for it puts the focus where it belongs: on God. When we are sinking back into the source of all that is, our hearts and souls must follow. We take the focus off ourselves and put it on God.

Sabbath, which is the practice that God gave to us in the very beginning of Creation. God created something on one day, then the next day...and on the seventh day, God rested. Entering into Sabbath practice helps us to get back into the source of all that is. To be one with the source of all that is. Like all things in life, connecting with nature is a discipline, and one that we need to be intentional about. It's like our faith. We intentionally come to worship, in order to start our week off with God at the center. You all came here today to put God at the center of your life. So what are you going to do to make sure that you don't forget that on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday? Sabbath practice is about intentionally living our life with God always at the center. Where we get into the rhythm of letting go of things that distract us, where we embrace a life of prayer, where we feast together with others, nourishing our bodies, minds and spirits, and where we take time to rest. To take a break from technology, news, driving, advertising, and all those things that separate us from the love of God. From the source of all that is. So I hope today that you will enjoy the beautiful day outside; you will let the sun soak into you; you will breathe the air that is all around, and that you will ground yourself on the earth. May the Spirit of God ignite you into being part of the healing of all Creation. Thanks be to God.

² *A Song of Faith*, The United Church of Canada Creedal Statement 2006.

³ Catherine L. Kelsey, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 2, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 456.