

“All the Earth”

Do you know what “big picture” thinking is all about? When we say, “Let’s look at the big picture,” we’re saying we aren’t going to get bogged down in details or wrapped up in minutia. A big picture approach considers the long term outcome. The view is wider and deeper. The big picture can help us avoid what otherwise is a preoccupation or even numbing paralysis with the negative. You know what I mean. When we go close in the flaws of a particular situation or a particular person are right in front of us. Zooming in makes the imperfections huge. Seeing only the gritty detail can leave us unsettled and that brings on the negative feelings. Yesterday was our men’s mission day at Good Works in Athens, Ohio. Good Works is a faith based, community centered outreach to individuals and families dealing with poverty or loneliness. Our congregation has had a long-standing partnership there. By the way, if you’d like to experience serving at Good Works another mission day is planned for November 10. When we go to Good Works we don’t know exactly the kind of projects we’ll be doing but the onsite leaders send us a list of potential projects before we go. The job list sent to us this past week included helping neighbors prepare their gardens for the winter. We have enough experience going to Good Works this time of year to know what preparing gardens means and it’s not glamorous work. Sometimes this is described in an almost romantic way as “bedding down” the garden. Well, there’s nothing romantic about it. Mostly, we dig up weeds and spread manure, which we do with rakes and pitchforks. I was on manure spreading detail again this year. The county fairgrounds isn’t far away and a sizable pile of the stuff collects there, taken from the horse barns. We loaded up the old pickup, drove to a home with a modest sized garden and spent a couple of hours slinging the stuff around. A person looking at that up close could easily ask the question, “What’s spreading manure have to do with mission?” When you focus just on the task itself it’s hard to see the presence of Christ. Where’s Jesus when you’re holding a pitchfork and your standing ankle deep in the stuff? But consider the big picture. Yesterday the big picture was all about Aileen. Her husband died a number of years ago. She has health problems. She doesn’t have much of a social network. The garden isn’t a hobby for her. The garden is life is a source for healthy food and good meals, and it connects her to people like our team who care. The folks at Good Works encourage us to see the big picture. In the big picture fertilizing Aileen’s garden represents hope. Working with a pitchfork connects to the larger mission that connects neighbors with one another and that connects to the larger mission of our congregation to respond to the reality of God by sharing Christ’s love with everyone. Sure, we could choose to see a pile of natural fertilizer laying in the bed of an old pickup truck but God wants us to see the big picture. The work of our hands and the willingness of our hearts bring hope in the midst of a hard way of life.

“O, Lord,” says the psalmist, “how majestic is your name in all the earth.” That’s a beautiful big picture. God’s glory, presence, and creative power is in all of creation. Often in our faith we focus on the truth that God is with us. We speak in very personal and intimate terms. Now, this is important. We need to know God cares about us. Faith depends upon our certainty that God is approachable and available. God can’t be distant and out of touch, especially when we need God’s presence in whatever is impacting our lives. But the scope of our faith is wider than just my need or yours. God is bigger than me and you and all of us put together. The message of the scripture is that God isn’t just connected to our corner of the world. Our individual lives are not the limit of what matters to God. God’s majesty and power is in all the earth. This is very relevant message in a time when we have a tendency to see the world as “us and them” or “our side and their side.” We too easily fall into ways of thinking that see others in terms of what makes them different from us. The words of the psalm help us see the big picture. The God who made us, made them. The God who cares about our side cares about all sides. The wideness of God’s mercy broadens our mercy and love. Whether we’ve got a pitchfork in our hands or a bible in our laps, the faith Christ makes possible connects the one to the many. The majesty of God is in you and in me and in all the earth. We are all part of God’s big picture in a beautiful way.

The psalmist was inspired by this truth every time he looked at the world. He’d gaze up at the vastness of the night sky or take in the wonder of the earth’s creatures or reflect on the expanse of sea and the living things that swam in the water, and the truth was undeniable. God is over and under, and in and through, and present in all people and all places. We’re inspired by nature, too. If you’ve ever taken a moment to look at the stars on clear night you know what the bible means when it says, “the heavens are telling the glory of God.” (psalm 19:1) If you’ve ever hiked a mountain or stood at the edge of the ocean or watched the sunrise you’ve most likely felt rather small in this vast universe God has created. The psalm shares that inspiration with us but not so we will feel insignificant in God’s plan. We are created to be partners with God in caring for the earth and being connected to each other. Our

inspiration isn't just the beauty of nature. We are inspired by the love of Christ and today we are in communion with our Lord and with all of Christ followers in the world. God's majesty is in all the earth and it makes us one.

To know God is to know that Christ is the peace and light of the world. Our celebration of communion on this World Communion Sunday affirms God's majesty in all the earth. Because of Jesus we see the big picture. Because of Jesus we decide not to focus on the differences between us but to make a difference in the world because of Christ's love. Be inspired this week to be part of that difference making reality. Maybe you'll work in a garden somewhere but, more likely, you'll do some other kind of work or connect with family and friends where you have the opportunity to reflect the big picture, the picture that you and they and all of us belong to God.

O Lord, our lord, how majestic is your name in this sanctuary, in this communion, in all the earth. Amen.