

October 4, 2020

Psalm 19: 1-4a, 14

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

"Proclaiming the Handiwork of God"

How wide is the family of Christ? How far do the arms of Christ extend and who is included in the embrace of divine love? As you think about your answer to these questions, consider that one of the earliest lessons we are taught when it comes to our faith is that God is everywhere. I think this is so because one of the first questions young children ask is, "Where is God?" "God is everywhere," we say. And if the child is young we may emphasize the point by saying, "God is this big!" (both arms extended wide open) Describing God like this is where most of us begin but this is not where we stay. Throughout life and along our journey in faith, we work to pull our experience of God closer in. Instead of a God who is everywhere we talk about our personal relationship with Jesus. The God of everywhere becomes the God of my individual life. Christ died for my sins and, as we also teach our children in an early Sunday School song, "Jesus love me, this I know." This is quite a shift in how we think about God. The God who is "this big" (arms extended) is now close enough and accessible enough to be involved in the particular and not-so-big reality that is my personal life. Yes, God is everywhere but my saving grace is that God is with me, and your faith depends upon this intimate relationship with God, too.

Because so much of our worship, study and thinking about God involves understanding about God in a personal way the celebration we lift up today through World Communion Sunday helps us find a better balance. World Communion helps us regain what we've always known, that God is everywhere and that the reach of Christ's love knows no boundary. Psalm 19, the scripture we've read from today, widens the picture about as far as it can go. "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the [earth] proclaims [God's] handiwork..." (Ps. 19:1) It is so clear that the love of God can't be kept small or personal. When we look upon all God has created, including every person and every thing, our experience of Christ is widened to involve way more than just our particular lives or concerns. The whole world tells the story. I've heard a number of you comment recently about how the gorgeous, early fall weather has been so marvelous. "I think it's going to be a beautiful fall," someone said to me recently. The colors of the season are one reason why we enjoy living in this part of the world. Whether it be the leaves on the trees or other inspirational settings of nature, should our faith begin to fall or grow shallow an experience of creation has the power to renew our souls.

Our celebration of the world today reminds us that the family of Christ is much wider than just the United Methodist Church. Our Christian brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic tradition are also celebrating this weekend what is known as The Feast of Saint Francis. Francis is the patron saint of Italy but is most known for his intense love of nature, animals, and every creature in God's big and wonderful world. Francis not only preached to the people, he preached to the birds and to about anything else that breathed and moved upon the earth. We don't need to be convinced of how critical it is for us to both appreciate and care for our planet. I was thinking about Saint Francis and the way Psalm 19 says the whole earth proclaims the glory of God, and it led me to reflect on something we don't hear much about and that is biodiversity. Do you know this term? Biodiversity is just what you would expect from the word itself. It is the identification of the many species on the earth, including the great diversity among creatures that make the world such an interesting and fascinating place. There isn't just one kind of bird there are nearly 10,000 different kinds of birds. How many breeds of dogs are there? The American Kennel Society identifies 195 but others whose count is not as strict name nearly 350. Let's just say it will be a long time before you run out of kinds of dogs to love. Biodiversity is wonderful but there is a growing concern about it. Because of shrinking forests, mangroves, grasslands and the compromising of wild habitats the diversity of the world's species has decreased by 68% since 1970. This is sobering but there is some good news, too. Many bio-scientists in many countries of the world have come together and working together with their governments have set new goals for the preservation and renewal of what has been lost. It's hard to know what role we can play in this but it seems that raising our awareness as Christians and seeking practices that respect the earth when added to our prayers is the least we can do.

On World Communion Sunday we are invited to the table where the welcome is wide. There isn't just one kind of Christian. The family of Christ is beautifully diverse and God has created it to be so. The earth, too, and every creature that is in it tells the powerful story of how wide and deep is the love of our God. The lesson of our childhood is just as important now as it was when we were young. God is everywhere and God is in everything. When we break the bread and drink the cup today, we are celebrating that Jesus' love on the cross is for me and you. We must not forget that God is in us and for us, but we must also remember that heaven and earth give witness to the same truth. There is room with God for everything except small thinking and short-sighted vision. There's room with God for everything because God's got the whole world in God's hands.