

# EEN

## Sermon Starter: August 2017

### **Tending to the Garden**

Scripture Passages: Genesis 2 and 3, Job 12:7-10, Psalm 19, Romans 1:19-20

What is your favorite place to be outside? Do you like the beach or the lake? Do you relish in sitting under the stars? Perhaps, like me, you enjoy time spent in the mountains the most. Perhaps you don't enjoy being outside. In fact, many people don't. But, no matter who you are, you cannot deny the beauty and grace of places like the Grand Canyon. My hope today is that we can connect the dots between the calmness of nature and our knowledge of the Creator God, the one who blessed the earth with serene views and intended for us to steward them with great care.

Perhaps a good way to highlight the impact creation can bring to our relationship with God is the old hymn, "This is my Father's World," by Maltbie D. Babcock. Rev. Babcock lived in upstate New York, and he took frequent walks along the Niagara Escarpment to enjoy the overlook's panoramic vista, telling his wife he was "going out to see the Father's world."

1. This is my Father's world,  
And to my list'ning ears  
All nature sings, and round me rings  
The music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world:  
I rest me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas—  
His hand the wonders wrought.
2. This is my Father's world:  
The birds their carols raise,  
The morning light, the lily white,  
Declare their Maker's praise.  
This is my Father's world:  
He shines in all that's fair;  
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,  
He speaks to me everywhere.
3. This is my Father's world:  
Oh, let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world,  
The battle is not done:

Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and Heav'n be one.

Multiple places in scripture, especially the Psalms, testify to the awe-inspiring power of creation and how we can discern the powerful nature of God through it. The combination of God's Word and God's creation is a gift that helps us learn about our Creator and His divine nature. Today's lesson has two simple points: We can learn about God in creation, and we have to keep tending to the Garden.

In Romans 1:19-20 (ESV) we read *"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."* In this letter to the Romans, Paul is writing about God's righteousness in judgement and salvation through the Gospel message. In this opening chapter, he tells the Romans that there is no excuse to deny God's divinity, or even existence, when creation consistently bears witness to his nature. In verse 20, he says God's invisible attributes can be "clearly perceived." When you are in your favorite outdoors place, are you focusing on how clearly you can see God's character displayed in the inner working of creation?

The idea of God being seen in nature is a consistent theme throughout scripture, and I think the passage in Job 12:7-10 (NIV) speaks to the clearly perceivable way nature speaks:

*<sup>7</sup> "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;  
<sup>8</sup> or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,  
or let the fish in the sea inform you.  
<sup>9</sup> Which of all these does not know  
that the hand of the LORD has done this?  
<sup>10</sup> In his hand is the life of every creature  
and the breath of all mankind.*

Stop and think about verse 10. *Every creature* is in his hand. How comforting is that? You can also find the same phrase in Isaiah 41:20. I can't help but notice how this is parallel to the lesson is Romans that God's presence is so ubiquitous throughout creation that we are left without excuse. The passage in Job, however, is even more specific, calling out the birds and fish as creatures that speak to God's creative power. In a way, this section adds further examples to the ways creation leaves us without excuse, and it shows how we simply need to open our eyes in new ways. Perhaps even *"to ask the animals" and "speak to the earth."*

In Psalm 19 you will find a words meant to serve as a celebration song, celebrating both God's Law, the Torah, as supreme revelation, and creation as further revelation of God's inner life. The chapter starts off in verse 1 (NIV) saying

*<sup>4</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*<sup>2</sup>Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.”*

The chapter continues to focus on creation until verse 7, where the focus switches to the law. This Psalm is beautiful in its attention to the importance of both scripture and the created world as necessary and complementary sources of divine revelation.

Not only are we to find God in his creation, we are meant to tend to it. Genesis 2 speaks very strongly to this call to “tend the garden.” In verse 5 (NIV) we learn that after the Garden was created, there were as yet no plants because God had not caused rain *and because* humans were not around to work the ground. Later in verse 15, we read that God put humankind in the garden to work and keep it. This was not intended to be a punishment, but a good thing. Man and a garden to keep was gift- just like creation. Personally, I find that we all too often act as if the Scriptures begin at Genesis 3 and forget completely about the original call in Genesis 1-2 to tend to the garden. We need to remember both parts of the beginning of scripture.

In chapter 3, we read about the impacts of the fall on man and the garden. God says to Adam at the end of verse 17 (NIV) “...cursed is the ground because of you.” Sin literally made way for a cursed ground. Back in verse 14 you can read specifics of the cursed ground, mainly that the land would be dust and food would be scarce. Sin messed up the garden and our call to tend to it. After the fall, Adam and Eve found shame and left the garden. Our call to care for creation started in the garden, but it did not end there.

**Sample Discussion Questions:**

- Have you ignored/passed over the call to tend to the garden, and why?
- If we find God in His creation, and are called to tend to the garden, are we making the best effort to continue to be stewards today?
- Why do you think others hesitate to care for creation?
- How is our sin “cursing the ground” today?
- Does tending to the garden apply to issues like climate change? Why or why not?
- Could creation be a tool to spread the good news? Why?