

In May Dave and I went to Hawaii, now there are a lot of reasons I would recommend it as a vacation spot, but chief among them is the pure wildness and rawness of the natural world that is on display there. Whether we were on the arid top of the volcano or wandering through a very unkempt section of the Big Island's botanical garden the thing that stood out starkly throughout our visit is the extravagant and chaotic beauty of God's creation.

What also stood out was the human response to this natural wildness, I was struck over and over again with how little modification was made to the landscape to make way for habitation. Yes, of course there are resorts and manicured hotel properties, but that seemed to be the exception rather than the rule, most houses and businesses seemed to acquiesce to whatever the lumpy terrain is doing, rather than go through the effort to make a flat expanse of earth. And the same goes for the roads, almost exclusively single lane highways that wind catawampus through the island, they seem cut to follow the contours of what was already there rather than the preference of the bulldozer.

I bring my experience of Hawaii up this morning because rightly or wrongly when I think about the glory of God's creation I tend to think about experiences like that, times when I feel overwhelmed by the sheer beauty or majesty of nature. Looking over the Grand Canyon, seeing the sunrise over the desert, watching a wave crash mightily over a sheer rock cliff, one cannot help but praise God for such extravagant and chaotic beauty.

But we live in a city, admittedly in a neighborhood that is more lush than others, but a city nevertheless, a controlled version of creation. A setting in which order is imposed on creation so that we can live in the largely orderly, predictable and efficient ways we have become accustomed to.

And to live in an environment which values order, predictability and efficiency, an environment constructed with human ideas of order in mind tends to remove us from experiencing the wildness and extravagance of God's creation, the things in the natural world that compel us to praise our creator God. And so we confine our praise of God for creation to the moments we are confronted with a truly awe inspiring scene, rather than dwell on how we might praise His creation in the midst of a setting that can seem mostly unnatural.

But even in the midst of an urban setting Psalm 104 cries out to God's people, reminding us that the world, and all that is in it has been created and ordered by God, and that what we are compelled to worship Him for both what He has created, and how He continues to sustain it, both the awe inspiring parts and the more pedestrian parts that we experience routinely.

This Psalm also calls us to consider how we praise Him by being good stewards of that creation. How do we take what we know of the world that God has created and use that knowledge to inform how we live as creatures in that creation, seeking to live in the order that He has ordained with the priorities that He has displayed.

It is my hope that this morning through this Psalm we can start considering how and why we Praise Him for both the grand beauty and the routine ordinariness that creation exhibits and how our praise might be made manifest in the ways we live our lives.

**But first let us pray.**

Psalm 104 has a lot in common with the creation account in Genesis, but while Genesis 1 is arranged temporally the Psalmist here arranges things a little differently and the result of the poetic way he writes about the world pulls out the interconnectedness of each aspect of God's creation

What is incredible about all the facets the Psalmist describes here is how deeply interconnected each component of creation is with the others. Connected and also dependent, the cycles of the moon and sun, the content of the atmosphere and the contours of the land and water provides the conditions for the growth of plants, the plants feed both man and beast, etc.

If you remove any one of these elements the whole thing collapses in some way. Without phases of the moon the tides don't happen, without water plants do not grow, without plants animals and humans don't eat, you get the idea.

And the animals living in His creation also have ordained roles within the environment, verses 19-23

*Psa. 104:19 He made the moon to mark the seasons;  
the sun knows its time for setting.*

*20 You make darkness, and it is night,  
when all the beasts of the forest creep about.*

*21 The young lions roar for their prey,  
seeking their food from God.*

*22 When the sun rises, they steal away  
and lie down in their dens.*

*23 Man goes out to his work  
and to his labor until the evening.*

At a basic level the order that God has created gives each organism a role, but that role is circumscribed in relationship to other organism. the Psalmist here emphasizes the way people live in connection to the animal world. We work the day and they claim the night. IF we think about it this is radically different than we usually think about things, this is more akin to companionship than to ownership.

God has created the world with a specific order, but it would be a mistake to think of that order as rigid or dull. Because while there **is** a definite order, within this order is a whimsy and chaos that speaks to an imaginative and creative God who desires to create a world that is not "efficient" or "predictable" or even serious.

The God that creates beautiful interconnected order is the same God who creates that order with chaos and drama and whimsy, we live in created world that overflows with things that immediately inspire awe and reverence and praise for their sheer beauty or strangeness or drama.

We see the playful side of God at all levels of His created order:

In a few weeks we will experience one of the rarest of solar events, a complete solar eclipse, a dramatic 2 and a half minutes that will no doubt inspire awe and even reverence in millions of people.

And to go back to talking about Hawaii for a moment, one of the most memorable things we did was hike down into a lava crater and walk across an expanse of rock that had been a lake of lava when the volcano had originally erupted, leaving behind formations of rock that don't look like rock should, waves and swirls and wrinkles that look much too much like water to be entirely comfortable. Volcanoes are the epitome of drama.

And to take it smaller, the whimsy of God's flora and fauna, think for a second of the duck billed platypus, or the pangolin or the saiga antelope. Not to mention all of the terrifying and unusual things that live in the depths of the ocean.

Or take the corpse plant, plant whose blooming is quite the event because it only happens every 7-10 years and then emits the stench of death. Or the Venus flytrap, a plant that eats meat. And that doesn't touch on the grandeur of the redwoods or the striking glow of the rainbow eucalyptus or the transcendent smell of a lavender bush.

And I could go on and on obviously, the point is that the God who created order in the world also created a world which is surprising and chaotic and beautiful and peculiar, a world that we could not have imagined or created in all its myriad weirdness and splendor.

God didn't **have** to create a world in which we experience things like eclipses or volcanoes or animals that seem to be a cross between a duck and wombat, but He did, and in the face of that how could we not give Him praise?

We also give Him praise because He has created a world that His creatures are meant to experience joy from. It is not just that he gives us plants to cultivate so we don't die, He wants us to experience pleasure through that process reading again 14-15

*Psa. 104:14 You cause the grass to grow for the livestock  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
that he may bring forth food from the earth  
15 and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
oil to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man's heart.*

And further God's creatures are meant to experience joy in the world together, in verse 26 he gives us the image of fish playfully swimming alongside the boats that humans have made and in verse 11 he speaks of birds singing from the branches, bringing their joyous melody into the world.

We praise God for what He has created, for its interconnectedness and whimsy and the joy He wants us to take in what He has made. But we also praise Him because He continues to work in and sustain His creation, when the Psalmist sings praises of creation it is not just the world that has been created, it is the world that God continues to work in.

We are also called to praise God for the way He sustains the world. While the routine ways that we experience creation we might not consciously think about very much, praising God for the patterns we experience regularly is just as important as praising Him for the things we are awestruck by.

Theologian John Goldingay says this about God's role in sustaining creation, "the nearness of God is immediately experienced, each day, each hour, in createdness itself."

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We continually experience the sustaining work of God in the world. We experience His work in the seasons, in the cycle of birth and death and rebirth that we experience each year. And in the patterns of the moon and the stars. In the migration of birds and insects. In the tides and currents of the seas and rivers. In all of the patterns that we are so accustomed to we don't even think about them consciously.

But I also think we see the continuous work of God in creation in creation's resistance to destruction. What I mean by this is the way that even in harsh conditions, in changing habits, or after natural disasters life prevails.

Walking across the crater that had once been molten rock Dave and I were both struck by how many plants there were, creeping up in the cracks determinedly. These may not have been the species of plants that were there pre eruption, but that isn't really the point. The order that God has created still stands because God sustains His creation whether or not the species of life that fits into a given slot remains the same.

And we praise Him for this too, for the durability and adaptability He has endowed His creation with and how He sustains the order He has created using that durability and adaptability. But at the same time we praise God and are thankful that He sustains the world we also have to recognize that what must flow out of that praise is a responsibility to come alongside His sustaining work. Our role is one of stewardship, but stewardship placed in the context of praise and worship and humility regarding God's order.

Theologian J. C. McCann puts it this way "*...we would have to conclude that concern for the environment begins with praising God. To be sure, this sounds hopelessly simplistic,*

*scientifically and technologically naïve. But such a starting point-and its underlying conviction that the world belongs to God-is the only thing that will dislodge our arrogant assumption that we can save the world, as if it were ours to save! In biblical terms, salvation means life, and in biblical terms, the world does not need to be saved. God has already done that! Psalm 104 affirms that God has made every arrangement and provision for the life of the world...The environmental crisis will be addressed by nothing short of praising God, exalting God, and humbling ourselves."*

What this Psalm invites us into is a life of stewardship that recognizes God's order and control and seeks to live lives of care that have that as their starting point. Just like everything else that we do in the world we must not act as if we alone will fix everything by our own power, but rather that we as Christians must come alongside the work that God is doing in creation, caring for it the way that He does.

That stewardship starts where we started this morning with this Psalm, in reveling in the beauty that God has created in the world and that He continues to sustain. This means that we are called to look for beauty each day in both the grand ways God reveals Himself, but also in the small and routine examples we see, the blooming of a flower, the ripening of a tomato, the courtship of cardinals, even the playfulness of the squirrels.

I'd also encourage you to seek to praise God through the strength we see in creation. I don't know about you, but I get great joy each time see a tree trunk consuming a fence, or roots upending a sidewalk. And as much as we may hate them, the fact that pigeons survive in this city eating nothing that a pigeon has been created to eat speaks to the durability and strength of God's creation.

So we start with praise, with opening our eyes, even in an urban setting to the beauty and weirdness and awesomeness of the created world. And from there, from eyes opened and directed toward praise comes the activity of stewardship.

I'm not going to espouse a particular environmental action this morning, but I would entreat each of you to seek ways to express that you value what God has created, whether that is picking up trash you see in grass around the neighborhood, putting out a feeder to draw birds in, bringing reusable produce bags to HPP to reduce waste, or whatever, there are a million different ways we can cultivate and care for God's creation, both things we can do or things we can stop doing. As long as we seek to value God's creation, exalt Him and humble ourselves He will give us opportunities to care for it.

Brothers and sisters, God has created something ordered yet wild, beautiful yet peculiar and we are part of it, and so we praise Him. We praise him that all facets of his creation are connected to all the others, that the world is whimsical and dramatic and that He wants us to take joy in it. We praise Him that He sustains His creation still, that grass grows, and rivers flow and the sun rises and sets each day, that the nearness of God is immediately experienced, each day, each hour, in createdness itself.

So as we depart today let us seek with all our hearts and soul and strength to love, honor and praise the God who created the world and put order to it, sustains it with His power and calls us into that sustaining work today and in all of the tomorrows we each have.