

Let's begin with the Credits
Psalm 104: 24-30
September 8, 2019
Rev. Dr. Marcia B. Bailey, preaching

How many of you stay for the credits when you go to the movies? I don't always but my young adult children have taught me to stay for the credits, especially when it's a Marvel film (you know, superheros!) because there is always, embedded somewhere in the credits, a clip that reveals something about the next movie in the series, a hook, something that only those who stay to see the credits get rewarded with.

Giving "credit" is important; when we've done something that's above and beyond the average "call of duty", we feel appreciated when someone gives us "credit" for it, when we are recognized publicly. Each semester I have to remind my students that they must give appropriate credit to the sources their ideas come from. We review Temple's academic honesty policy and my own: it's easy. If I catch you plagiarizing, you fail! It may seem harsh but with so much information freely accessible on the internet, the need to give credit is more important than ever before. It's a matter of integrity and honesty.

And that's where this psalm comes in. The author is "giving credit" to God for all the wonders of creation! Look again at the wording found in The Message: "What a wildly wonderful world, GOD! You made it all..." Of course, when we stop to think about it, many of us would agree but how often do we do that, *give God credit* for literally everything that has been and still is being created?! I mean, didn't *I* plant my tomatoes? Did *you* plant your flowers? And then tend and weed and water them? Maybe, but who thought up "tomatoes" to begin with? As someone who spends as much time in nature as possible, I am aware that often I am breathing

my own psalms of exaltation to God when I wake up in the forest, when I am paddling clear water, when the sky is dark and stars bright, even when it's thunderous with clouds and lightening. Which is why I love this version of the text; the excitement, the pure joy of it shines thru! It is a "wildly wonderful" world we live in...in spite of hurricanes and droughts and fires and all the other catastrophes. We created none of it and yet it nourishes and sustains us in spite of how we treat it.

This week as we watched Hurricane Dorian wreak havoc and destruction on parts of the Caribbean and eastern seaboard, it was still God who was creating. The psalmist takes these scary realities into account. But notice how: "Ships plow those waters, and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them." "Leviathan" was thought to be an ancient sea monster, whipping up storms and destroying ships and sailors alike! But the Psalmist views what others see as destruction as God's creative powers at play! Now we know much more about how and why storms form, and while some may blame God for these things, the point is that even chaos appears, in the psalm, to be within God's creative realm. God is bigger than chaos, and because of this, still in control, still the ultimate Creator and owner of all.

And that's where we often find the rub, the ownership piece. It ties back directly to the idea of giving "credit," doesn't it? The issue in academia with plagiarism is about the ownership of ideas; the issue in ecology is the ownership of the earth. Who does the creation belong to? Who "owns" the Amazon and has the right to burn it to the ground for development? Who owns the seas and has the right to dump our trash there, so we don't have to look at it? If God is the creator of all then isn't God also the "owner" of all? Of the earth? Of the seas and sky and universe and all the universes there might be? The Psalmist affirms this, noting that if God took

back God's spirit for *only a moment*, all things would die. **Die**.... we cannot exist without the power of God. Not humans, not the earth, nothing...nothing at all.

And so, we need to give credit where credit is due. We don't own anything; we can tell ourselves something is "human made" but really? Where do we think our creative juices flow from? Who and what do you think initiated those innovative sparks that lead to where we find ourselves today?

And so, if God created it all and God owns it all, then what part do *we* play? What is our responsibility—to God, to the creation, to each other—to give credit where it's due and to ride the creative chaos of God's making? Theologian J. Clinton McCann (giving credit where it is due) writes: "The theological effect [of this Psalm] is to inject an explicitly creational dimension into our thinking about the church. The birth of the church meant and means the ongoing existence of a community that *knows* that it owes its life to God, and that is called to share that good news. The church will be not just in the world, but *for* the world, including "all" that God has made." What does that mean? It means that the church's affirmation should not only be that God is creator and owner but that *our own responsibility* is to share that creation with all the world; it means valuing everything and everyone equally; it means that we should be not just *in* the world but *for* the world, actively ensuring its well-being.

And how do we do that? We do that when we respect every human being, every plant and tree, every stream and ocean, every animal, bird and insect. We do that when we affirm the image of God in each and every one we meet, not just the ones who look like us or act like us or even value what we value. We do that for the planet when we conserve, recycle, advocate for justice for the earth and all its inhabitants. We do these things not because they are popular or

politically correct but because they are *our call* as the church: to honor God's ownership and to share liberally the blessings of God's creation.

What if we actively and intentionally looked around at the created world, what if remembered and deeply believed that God initiated it all, even us and that God IS STILL creating, still transforming chaos into playful energy? What if we believed and trusted that *what we have—whatever that is—is enough, will be enough*—for whatever God wants from us, for us? What if we honored, by our lifestyles, words and actions, the “wildly wonderful” world around us, giving thanks with our whole beings and living into the promise of the abundance of God's Spirit and the abundance of God's love and mercy, and the abundance of God's will and desire for us? What if we lived into all of that?

What would we have to give to others if we did not feel the tug of “ownership”? What could be let go of if we really believed it was not ours to begin with? What could we share, of ourselves, our gifts, our resources, our very possessions and lives, if we truly believed it was all only on loan to us, that we had done nothing---not a thing---to deserve it, but had received it from God's hand? What generous hearts might we cultivate-- hearts for justice for all, hearts for preservation of the earth, hearts for abundant giving and living—if we really, truly believed that we do not own anything; that we, and everything in creation, belongs to God?

The psalmist declares that God is the Creator and Owner of everything.... we are a small but potentially influential part in the divine plan. Let's give credit where it's due and let's make a choice to live in gratitude for God's abundance. Let's use these precious, God-given resources to change our neighborhood and to change the world.

