

We Need Rain!

Gathering

I will teach and lead the *I'm Gonna Sing* medley

One of the reasons I love that medley is that it reminds us that no matter what gifts we have, no matter what role we play in God's church, we can work together to create something amazing. God's diversity can bring about something we could not have imagined, if we are willing to let the uniqueness of each of us be valued.

Prayer

VT 915

Hymns

VT 495 – Morning Has Broken

VT 120 – For the Beauty of the Earth

Scripture

Before reading the scripture, let me show you how to create and hear a thunderstorm arriving and receding. Maybe some of you've done it before. If so, let's review it so others can learn to do it with us.

We create the sound of rain by rubbing our hands together; the raindrops get bigger as we snap our fingers, larger still as we clap our hands, then stomp our feet. The storm recedes as we move back from stomping to clapping to snapping to rubbing. Eventually, we return to silence.

Were you able to imagine the storm coming through? I want you to keep that image in your mind as we read the text for today, because I truly believe the author of this Psalm was writing it during a storm. He looked out and saw bolts of lightning flickering and the sounds of thunder booming.

[I will read it through twice, once without sound effects, the second with.]

¹ Since there are no bulletins, this "manuscript" will also serve as my worship service notes.

You, divine beings! Give to the LORD—
give to the LORD glory and power!

(rub hands)

Give to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bow down to the LORD in holy splendor!

(snap fingers)

The LORD's voice is over the waters;
the glorious God thunders;
the LORD is over the mighty waters.

(clap hands)

The LORD's voice is strong;
the LORD's voice is majestic.

(stomp feet)

The LORD's voice breaks cedar trees—
yes, the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon.

(clap hands)

He makes Lebanon jump around like a young bull,
makes Sirion jump around like a young wild ox.

(snap fingers)

The LORD's voice unleashes fiery flames;
the LORD's voice shakes the wilderness—
yes, the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

(rub hands)

The LORD's voice convulses the oaks,
strips the forests bare,
but in his temple everyone shouts, "Glory!"

(silence)

The LORD sits enthroned over the floodwaters;
the LORD sits enthroned—king forever!

Let the LORD give strength to his people!
Let the LORD bless his people with peace!

Ps. 29 (C.E.B.)

Hymn

VT 514 – I Saw a Tree by the Riverside

Reflection

In his book, *Fight Like Jesus*, Jason Porterfield tells a story he learned while on a sailboat with one of his professors.² I don't know if any of you have ever been on a sailboat. As Jason describes it, when you are sailing with the wind at your back, things go smoothly. It's part of why there is an Irish blessing that includes the line, "May the wind be always at your back."

He was having a great time on the water as they headed out to Catalina Island, with the wind at his back on the way out. But, as Jason went on to explain, when they turned to go back home, it was another story. They were fighting the wind and the waves all the way home. It was a strenuous and tiring journey.

The point he was making is that as long as our actions are aligned with the Spirit of God, the Wind of God, the Breath of God, we will find easy sailing. But once we try to work against the God of creation, all we will find are hardships. (Personally, I'm not sure that explains all the difficulties in life, but I think it is a point worth considering.)

As I look at the world around us, as I find myself participating in the noxious misuse of our earth's resources, I think we are beginning to see what it looks like when we are working against God. Not everyone agrees with the scientists, but I believe our actions have contributed to a crisis. We often refer to the crisis as Global Warming, but I am convinced it is much larger than that.

We have forgotten our first calling, our first task as human beings, to care for the earth and all that is in it (Gen. 1:26; 2:7). And as a result, a storm is coming.

I wish I had a more hopeful word today. I wish I could see a different outcome. But I look around and I see a land in need of water. The rains we received this week were not enough. And while I can imagine the sound of a storm being described in the scriptures, it has been a long time since we've seen one. And at the same time, there are places where too much water has been falling, bringing floods and devastation.

Maybe the equilibrium God created for the universe has been tipped too far.

<big sigh>

But we are Hope Mennonite Church.
We believe in Hope.
So where is a word of hope to be found?

² p. 82 (He expands the story in a video on his website)

One place is in Psalm 29 where the storm is described. In that Psalm we are invited to witness God's power on display. We are invited to stand in awe as we hear the thunder and see the lightning light up the sky. We are reminded to trust in the God who is with us during the storm.

It's easy for us to forget the cultural context in which this Psalm was written. Their non-Jewish neighbors believed Baal was the god of the water, the one who brought the chaos of the storms. As a result, Baal was a god to be feared.

In contrast to Baal, the Psalmist proclaims a faith in the God who is bigger than the storm, the God who is stronger than the wind, the God who reigns over the land and the sky and the sea. And because of God's grace, we can rest in the knowledge that the storm is not the final answer, nor is it to be feared.

We don't need to cower in fear because of Global Warming. We can also reclaim our role of earth's caretakers and begin to work with God to create a new and better place to live, to alleviate some of the potential harm coming our way.

One way we do that is to stand in awe of creation, to appreciate the gifts we have received. Another way is to find ways to reduce the effects we are having on Global Warming and finding ways to help the earth survive.

I'm not a scientist, but I know we can make a difference. We can do that by planting trees. We can do that by caring for the waterways. We can do that by reducing our carbon footprint and by limiting our use of plastics.

We do those things in response to the God who created us and our world; it is an expression of gratitude and a witness to our faith.

We need water. There is no question about that.

The good news is we can trust God to provide what we need.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers

Loving God, even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she places her young near Your altar. You are attentive to all you have made.

God, who listens to every living thing,
Help us listen as you do.

Loving God, help us provide refuge to every animal and plant with whom we live. Help us be attentive to all you have made.

God, in whom all creation subsists,
Help us listen as you do.
Loving God, when Jesus cried out and gave up his Spirit, the earth shook and
the rocks split. You are known by the whole of creation that listens to
you.
God, to whom all creation responds,
Help us respond to you.
Loving God, help us hear and know you just as the earth and rocks do. Help us
to learn from the way in which we see creation recognize your glorious
beauty.
God, to whom all creation responds,
Help us respond to you.
Loving God, you are present in your creation and seek to heal her wounds. You
can be found walking in the garden. Open our eyes to see you, the
gardener.
God, who is present with your creation,
Help us be present too.
Loving God, we often abandon your creation and cause its wounds. Help us to
follow in your footsteps and learn to walk in the garden like you.
God, who is present with your creation,
Help us be present too.
Loving God, who hears every voice, knows each cry of injustice, and is
attentive to the suffering of the earth: teach us to listen. Bring healing to
our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may
listen to the world you have created and not close ourselves off from it.
Reveal to us the ways in which we have failed to hear your voice in how
we treat the earth.
God, who listens to every living thing,
Help us listen as you do. Amen.

Hymn

VT 617 – When Peace Like a River

Benediction

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Selected Bibliography

Mays, James L. *Psalms (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Louisville: John Knox, 1994.