

Creation 5, Harvest, Year A

Psalm 19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Today is our Harvest service, the fifth Sunday in the new church Season of Creation. So instead of speaking on the Epistle or the Gospel this morning I am going to speak on the Psalm set for today, Psalm 19 which Carina read to us earlier.

The Book of Psalms has been described as the hymn book of the bible although others use the term the Prayer Book of the bible. I think that those of us familiar with the Psalms see them as both, both hymns and prayers.

Psalm 19 is both. A hymn of praise to begin with and a prayer, an ask, at the end. And this is a good model for our own prayers – start with praising God for who he is.

Some think that psalm 19 is in reality two psalms, one on creation and one on torah, or God's law. But other scholars think it is one, with the two elements complementing each other.

And while the two sections do have different emphases they come together as a unified whole, because both tell of how God speaks to us.

So let's look first at the hymn of praise for God's creation in verses 1-6. Note that this is a Psalm of David and that he intended for it to be set to music. Which seems only appropriate given the lyrical nature of the psalm.

In these verses David is grappling with the concept that creation, particularly the skies and the sun, speak volumes about the glory of God. David hears what they say. *They pour forth speech... their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.* That's how he describes it. Even the sun is rejoicing like a bridegroom or a marathon runner. Yet, at the same time, David writes: *They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.* And we know what David means don't we, when he says that they speak – without words?

Turn to someone near you and tell them what in creation shouts loudest to you of the glory of God.

I love to see the moon and we've had great views this past week. And Orion and the amazing wealth of stars when I do get to see them. You know, I didn't see the Milky Way until we went camping in Cornwall with our young children. And it's awesome!

But in 2016, astronomers reported that a third of the world's population no longer has the possibility of seeing the Milky Way because of light pollution. And that's only got worse since. They estimate that at the current rate of increasing light pollution most of the major constellations will be indecipherable in 20 years. And that's light! Light is supposed to be good.

What about other pollution? Do you remember the amazing photographs of the snow-covered Himalayans taken from India 100 miles away during Covid? Something that just could not be seen before due to the amount of pollution in the atmosphere. Makes you think.

The word for God in these verses about creation is 'El', a kind of generic word expressing the concept of God that non-Christians might have in mind when they tell you that they do, or they don't, believe in God.

But when we move on to verse 7 'El' is replaced by YHWH, the intimate personal name by which God revealed himself to Moses.

Incidentally, if in your bible, such as in the church bibles, you see the word 'Lord' written in capitals (LORD) then it indicates that it translates YHWH in the original, the sacred, awesome, covenant name for God.

Now David is thinking about the more personal way that God's word comes to him, revealed through God's written word, an expression of a covenant relationship. For David God's word would have been the Torah, the first five books of our Old Testament, together with oral tradition.

We have all that too but especially we have Jesus the Word made flesh teaching and demonstrating God's laws. He taught us that they are all encompassed by two overarching commandments: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:30-31)

And as we move from the voice of creation to the voice of the Word of God we move from awesome wonder at what we see in creation to intimate knowledge and appreciation of YHWH's covenant word in Jesus.

The first half of this psalm declares God's glory, the work of his hands and his exuberance. All the world can hear it.

The second half becomes personal. It requires a personal search for God's word. But for those who seek David talks about God's words as perfect, as refreshment for the soul, as imparting wisdom, joy, radiance, warning and potential reward. He says that they are more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

I can't help but feel that David had a much greater appreciation of God than I do. He kind of runs out of superlatives. He has a relationship with God's words that goes beyond reading, learning and inwardly ingesting. It's intimate.

But if I think of Jesus as the Word made flesh and rewrite this psalm like this:

Jesus is perfect,

refreshing the soul.

His words are trustworthy,

making wise the simple.

⁸The teachings of Jesus are right,

giving joy to the heart.

Jesus is radiant,

giving light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the Lord is pure,

enduring for ever.

The decrees of Jesus are firm,

and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰Jesus is more precious than gold,

than much pure gold;

he is sweeter than honey,

than honey from the honeycomb.

then I kind of get it. Although I still think that David had a closer relationship with the Lord than I do.

And if we think of God and his word like that then we won't want to fall foul of him. We will want to remain in the covenant relationship with him.

Confession keeps the channels clear and we know from other psalms that David does confess his sins to God. He writes: *But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.* David is concerned about sins that are hidden from his own awareness. And I guess we could all pray as David does.

So David's praise for God's glory in creation and his meditation on the excellence of God's word leads to prayer.

Prayer for forgiveness for what is past and prayer for protection against what he could possibly do in the present. *Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me.*

And the final prayer in this psalm is one that we often hear repeated on the lips of preachers: *May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

But David is not talking about a sermon. He is speaking about his praise for an awesome communicating God and his meditation on how well he responds. May these, LORD, be pleasing to you. Amen

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