

“God crowns the year with bounty”

Psalm 65 (October 8, 2023)

Several people remarked about our service last Sunday – that the singing was great. Of course, when you have two congregations who both love music, coming together, I guess you could expect that.

It’s wonderful to have our choir back, along with musicians and instruments: piano and organ. Thank you for what you bring to our service!

Today we sing Thanksgiving hymns, hymns of gratitude – it’s a good day to be in church! But did you know ... the music we encounter in this place is *bigger* than we imagine! I’ll say more about that as we go on.



Fall is my favourite time of the year. I love the cooler weather, the colours of the leaves: the sound of walking through them, the smell of them. I love the sky, even when it’s dark and brooding, as it was earlier this week.

I love eating things from the garden. I love the sight of fields that have been cut and harvested: the patterns in the stubble and piles of grain ready to be trucked away. It’s hard not to be awed by the bounty of this land, both in the city and out of it.



Not long ago I visited someone who lives in a high-rise. She took me to her window, which looked over a collage of colour, across the river valley. “This is what I get to see everyday!” she told me. What a gift!



But this gift points beyond itself, to the *One who gives it*. Creation points us to Creator.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Ever since the creation of the world God’s eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things that God has made.” (Romans 1:20)

The creation reveals to us to the presence of God!

Creation revitalizes our spirits. Which is why something as simple as going for a walk in the park, or taking a drive in the country, or even opening the curtains of a window, can have a restorative effect. Creation points to Creator. Holy Spirit, blowing through all that is made, brings life to our spirits.

The point of coming to church on Sunday morning (at least, one of them) is to learn that we are in the presence of something bigger than ourselves. Here we are taught to worship not just things around us, but that which is *beyond* us.



Our scripture for today is Psalm 65. The opening line speaks of worship in the temple.



“Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion.” Zion being Jerusalem.
 “Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.
 We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.”

So here we are, gathered in the house of God – maybe not quite as grand a house as the Jerusalem temple. We too gather as a community of faith, with the promise that God will be among us ... to answer prayer, to forgive transgressions, to reveal something of God’s gracious being.

“Happy are those whom God chooses to bring near.” We’re glad to be here today!



When I was a child, Thanksgiving included a trip with my parents to the country church where my Dad grew up. The congregation celebrated their anniversary on Thanksgiving Sunday. Which is quite appropriate, when you think of it. And since the congregation included a good number of farmers, it was a double thanksgiving – for both harvest and faith.

There are things I remember about that church, including the windows. Which, unlike our city church, had clear glass panes. So even at night, when it was dark, you could see the branches and fall leaves on the trees, blown by the gusty wind.

There should be at least one clear window in all our churches. So we can know that God is *beyond* this building. That God is not confined to whatever group happens to be gathered within. God is so much bigger than we think!



Listen again to the words of the Psalmist, who affirms the goodness of God’s house, yet whose vision goes far *beyond* God’s house:



“You [O LORD] are the hope of all the ends of the earth ...”

The God who saved the Israelites is God of all the peoples! The God who is worshipped in that *one* place called Zion, is actually God of all places, everywhere!

The Psalmist’s temple must have clear glass (figuratively speaking) because the *whole creation* is in view!

“You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the waves, the tumult of the people.”

For the Hebrews, the wild sea was a place of chaos, the home of hidden depths and terrifying creatures. But God *calms* the waves, tames the sea.



Eugene Peterson’s translation of this Psalm includes some wonderful titles for God: “Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer, Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser, Muzzler of sea storm and wave crash, of mobs in noisy riot ...”

Noisy riot? Every night I watch the news and shake my head. The world is full of so much discord. We are a contentious race of beings.

But the Psalmist sees *more* than that: Not just the Chaos that roils around us – but God, who has authority over all.



“Those who live at earth’s farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.”

The gateway of the morning: dawn. The gateway of the evening: sunset. Every day is filled with the joy of knowing God from beginning to end.

What does the beginning and end of your day look like? How might it be different if dawn and dusk were messengers of joy?

This Psalm draws us out from the temple, to worship in all creation.



“You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it.”

God is like a cosmic farmer who *stewards* the land, caring for it, providing exactly what it needs to be fruitful and productive.

“You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.” This is good soil, well cared for, waiting to produce a bumper crop.



“You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.”



I always think it must be such a relief when harvest is completed. When the fields are clear, and the bins are full, and the machinery put away for winter. And all the worry is over.

The earth has produced its harvest for another year. How can we *help* but be thankful?



Of course some years are better than others. Ask a generation who struggled through the Great Depression. This summer too has seen its share of challenges: Days of heat and smoke.

This picture was taken by a friend of mine who was forced to evacuate his home in Kelowna. This was the night the fire jumped across the lake. Thankfully, his property was safe. Not all were so fortunate. ...

We are called to be *caretakers* for the earth. In this way we mirror God's activity. How might our actions help or hinder God?

The bitter politics surrounding climate change and carbon tax can distract us from the central truth given in scripture, in the stories of creation. Humans are placed in a garden, and called to tend and *keep* it.



What things can you think of that would support creation care?



And now, finally, we come to the last few verses of the Psalm, which are remarkable!

“The hills,” writes the Psalmist, “gird themselves with joy.”



Really? Can hills get up in the morning and dress themselves? Can the in-animate earth experience such a thing as joyfulness? Can dirt laugh? Can soil be happy?

I think this is a wonderful characteristic of scripture: It uses *poetic* language that brings nature to life!

Here, the hills gird themselves with joy, “the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain.”

It's like putting on their Sunday *best*! Dressing up to visit royalty.

Which I guess is what we do when we come to worship. Recognizing that we are in the presence of our Creator, who made the mountains, and the boreal forests, and the great lakes, the glaciers and the rivers that flow from them, the wide expanse of prairie land that we call home.

“They shout and sing together for joy!”

Yes, you heard that right. The Psalmist says creation *sings*.

I told you we'd be listening to some great music today: piano, organ, hymns and choir. It's lovely.

But we are part of something *even bigger*! Can you hear the singing of the fields? The music of the whales? The song of the trees? Listen carefully.

“This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears all nature sings, and 'round me rings the music of the spheres ...”



Have you ever sung in a mass choir? Participated in a Mennonite Songfest? Or a community rendition of Handel's Messiah? If you have, then you know how soul-stirring it can be. When voices join together, something happens. A special kind of harmony, a resonance that draw us together, and lifts us to heaven.

On this Thanksgiving Day, all creation invites us to join in the praise and worship of God. The earth bears witness to its maker. Creation to Creator. With grateful hearts, and loving hands, and generous spirits, *we ourselves* may be drawn into a chorus of praise!



God crowns the earth with beauty. In this house of God with glass windows, we look beyond ourselves to all of God's creation. And we say "thank you! Thank you, Lord, for all your blessings and your many gifts of grace." In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!