

The Creation's Dependence on the Creator

Scripture: Psalm 104

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Thanksgiving Day**

People of God: While Thanksgiving Day is not an explicitly Christian holy day, its roots are definitely very biblical. As God's people, we are called to give thanks to the Lord for the many blessings he has given us. In particular, on this day, we are to give thanks to God for the wonders of creation, as reflected in the harvest.

After all, Thanksgiving Day is a harvest feast. We give thanks at this time of year because of the harvest that is coming off the fields. Some of it has already come in, but much harvesting has yet to be done, as we may have to wait a while for the fields to dry out.

For most people in our society, the harvest is far removed from their daily lives. Even in this rural congregation, farmers no longer make up the majority as they once did. But at least our rural roots make us aware of the harvest. We pass by the fields on a regular basis. We noted the early start to this year's crop. We see the water standing in the fields. That's a different perspective that battling Queensway traffic every day.

And so, in a way we should be more in tune with the ebb and flow of the creation. We should realize our dependence upon the created order and therefore of the Creator. But I wonder, whether we too, in our scientific era, with GPS systems to guide the tractor, I wonder whether we really feel the daily dependence upon the Creator and to give thanks to him.

Whenever I see the sign, "farmers feed cities", I think to myself, yes, that's true. But who feeds the farmer? Who makes the fields to grow? Who ensures that the created order is sustained? That's our God. That's a key point that needs reminding, whether you live in the city or in the country. Our lives are dependent upon the Creator, our heavenly Father, who sustains this world.

The Psalmist is very much aware of this point. Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to the Creator. The psalmist reflects upon the creation and shows how it reflects the glory and greatness of God. With these words, the psalmist considers how the Lord is faithful in sustaining the works of his hand. It leads to praise and thanksgiving.

As we read this psalm, perhaps you were reminded of the opening chapter of the Bible. This Psalm clearly reflects Genesis One and the six days of creation. But his purpose is very different. Whereas Genesis One describes the created order as the kingdom where humanity is crowned with the highest position, as the image bearer of God, this Psalm is interested just in the creation itself. Humanity is mentioned in passing. The focus is on the creatures of the earth and how lush the creation is with life.

The Psalmist carefully weaves together this theme about how the creatures of the creation are fully and completely dependent upon the Creator. Between the opening verse and the closing reflections, there are five stanzas.

The two outer stanzas deal with the two extreme realms that surround the earth. On the one hand, we have the heavenly realm, meaning the skies that are above us. This is described in verses 2 through 4. Here the vast expanse of the heavens are seen as the domain of the Lord, with the light being the Lord's clothing, the skies his tent, and the clouds and winds his means of transportation.

On the other hand, we have the realm of the sea, as described in verses 24 through 26. This was an unknown realm for the Israelites, who were people of the land and left traveling by ships to other nations. For the psalmist, the Sea was vast and spacious teeming with life.

While humanity has explored these outer realms to a greater extent than the Psalmist could ever imagine, they still filled with the unknown. The reach of the Hubble telescope into the expanse of space reveal phenomena that challenges current scientific theory. Even the oceans remain largely unexplored. How the Gulf of Mexico will respond to the oil spill of this summer is anyone's guess.

From these outer extremes, the Psalmist the focuses upon the boundaries of the earth, with two inner stanzas. In verses 5 through 9, the psalmist reflects upon the division of land and water. It recalls the third day of creation when God established the dry ground. Verse nine also brings to mind the promise of God that he would never again send a flood to destroy the whole world. The boundary of land and water will be secured. That's important because it means a place for the creatures of the earth to flourish.

The other type of boundary is that between the heavenly realm and the earth. This is described in verses 19 through 23. What the heavenly realm does is bring order and rhythm to life on the earth. The sun and the moon established the pattern by which we live by. There are the seasons, and the most basic pattern of day and night. By night the wild animals prowl, while by day man does his work.

This leaves the stanza in the middle, which focuses on the earth, the land. It is surrounded by the realms of heaven and sea; whose boundaries are fixed and firm. In verses 10 through 18, the psalmist describes God as providing the water needed for the plants to grow, the animals to flourish, and man to work. These verses describe the earth as a flourishing garden of life. This is the home of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. Images of the Garden of Eden come to mind. This is the creation in its full glory. It's life for all to enjoy.

This then is the picture the psalmist paints of the creation. From the outer extremes, to the boundaries of the earth, to a special focus on life on the land—the psalmist describes the creation in order to reveal the glory and greatness of the Creator.

This whole picture that the psalmist carefully weaves must be seen in the light of the opening verse: *O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.* It is God who has established the various realms of nature: from the heavens to the seas. It is the Lord who has firmly fixed the boundaries of nature so life can exist on the earth. It is the Almighty who provides what is needed so that life is abundant upon the earth. As a result, when you look upon the creation, you should learn something of God.

As verse one states it reveals that God is very great. Despite all our advances in knowledge and science, there are things that we still marvel at--the vastness of the universe, the depths of the oceans, the variety of species, the carefully tuned balance of the world as one ecosystem. These are wonders beyond our limited grasp. Yet God made them all. How great he must be.

Not only that, the creation reveals the wisdom of God. Everything has its place. Every creature has a function within the created order--from the daily routines of the lion to the wild goats on the top of the mountains. All this shows the wisdom of God. As the psalmist says in verse 24: *How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.*

The concluding verses of this psalm teach us some additional lessons

we must learn from this portrait of the Creator and the creation. In addition to seeing the glory and wisdom of God in the creation, we must learn our dependence upon the Lord. Verse 27 expresses this dependence this way: *These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.* The whole creation is dependent upon the sustaining care of the Lord. When he sends food, the creatures flourish; when he withholds his mercy, they perish.

That's true not just of all the creatures of the earth, that's also true of humanity—God's image bearers. We too are called to look to the Lord for our daily bread, as Jesus taught us to pray. We must understand that our lives are in the hands of God. We are dependent upon him for every good thing. It's easy enough to look to our work and our efforts for the source of food. But in reality, all things are dependent upon the Lord. We too look to the Lord for our daily food.

As a result, we are called to praise God. The psalmist says: *I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.* That's why we are to give thanks to God on this day. This holiday isn't meant just to give us a day off from school or work. Its original purpose was to thank the Lord for another harvest. That's what we are doing now. Giving thanks for the harvest and so much more. For family and friends. For church and kingdom causes. And a host of other items. For all these things, the glory belongs to God.

Now as the psalmist makes this vow to praise the Lord, he adds a line that seems out of place. In verse 35 he says: *But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.* This is the only negative thought in the entire psalm. But it serves as a reminder that however great and glorious the creation may be it is marred by sin. That sin needs to be removed. Through Jesus Christ it will be removed. Then the creation will indeed be perfect.

The psalmist says: *O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.* Whether walking through a park, or sitting on the tractor harvesting the corn; whether busy at work in the classroom or getting your hands dirty at the factory; whether folding the laundry at home or driving to a sports event--all these things take place within the realm of creation. A creation that points to the glory, greatness, and wisdom of God. And so we shall say: *I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Amen.*