

“Let’s Celebrate”
Genesis 1:31-2:3; Colossians 1:11-20;
Matthew 6:25-34; Psalm 104

July 6, 2014
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

Some things happened this last week, one of which was that we had a celebration—the 4th of July. We celebrate the birth of our nation. So we think back on a lot of different events, things going on at that time. We think about Paul Revere’s ride, Washington crossing the Delaware, Valley Forge—we could go on talking about the different events of the Revolution.

It was also a time when incredible statements were made. We think of Thomas Payne saying, “Give me liberty, or give me death.” Another one would be attributed to Nathan Hale, “I regret that I have but one life to lose for my country,” just as he is about to be executed. It was an incredible time that we think back on and celebrate—the birth of a nation.

Of course there was the Declaration of Independence. In fact, July 4 is the day that we declared our independence and we think of that as the birthday of our nation, a time when things really began. We know some of those words from that document:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

And then, it concludes:

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

There were a number of people who signed that Declaration of Independence. One of those people was a guy named Jonathan Witherspoon, and he was actually a Presbyterian minister. He became president of what eventually became Princeton University, the College of New Jersey at the time. So Presbyterians have a long history of getting involved in the nation’s politics, what’s going on.

As we look back at all the events of that time, we celebrate the birth of a nation. Even as they were founding a nation, the founders recognized that the Creator gave us certain unalienable rights, reliance on divine protection. They realized that they were building on something much grander, something that had been given to them.

As we begin to think about that, we can begin to look at Psalm 104, for it helps us begin to look at what undergirded, what gave them confidence that they could build the nation, the creation that had been given.

As we begin to think about and celebrate the one that gave birth to everything, remember, these Psalms aren’t going to give it to us in a formulaic way. They’re not

going to set out a set of premises and invite us into logical reasoning. They are going to paint a picture. They are poetry. So I'm going to invite you into a time when maybe you sat by a lake at dawn or dusk, where the light is coming or going. So you sit there and you watch, and that's the way this Psalm is. It starts to paint a picture for us. We can sit and watch the wonder of who God is. So it starts out:

*Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.*

It starts out with this incredible vision. It's very evocative. It makes me begin to think about what it would look like to have somebody wrapped in light, a garment of light. And yet, you can't quite get your hands around it, either. You can't really quite envision what he's talking about. We can begin to experience the wonder of who God is. And then, the winds as messengers and the flame and fire as ministers—there's something that sounds a little dangerous about that, mysterious. And yet God is messaging us and ministering to us. The Psalm begins to invite us into the wonder of who God is:

*You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.*

Again, we are invited in to see the nature of creation. As we begin to follow the image of the water flowing between the hills, we are invited into the water cycle. We are invited to recognize that God has made a world in which things work. So there's this water cycle that we get to experience more as a vision. And then, the birds making their habitation. God is making the earth a place where we can live. Creation is a place we

can thrive in. Not only can we live there, there is food, so there is a nutrient cycle as well. But this is poetry, so it's beautiful rather than just dry. Isn't it wonderful how he draws us through and in to creation?

*You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.*

God has given us all the things of creation: given us water and places to live, and food, the cycle of night and day, the way of going and coming, working and resting, the systems of life. It's wonderful.

*O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.*

This is the moment in this poem where he is saying, "God, you created it all, and even in the midst of the sea, that chaotic thing we often think of, it is teeming with life." There's a sense of a dynamic and wonderful world that God has created. Life is just teeming forth all over. Sometimes I narrow the world to my daily walk – the things I do daily – and I forget about all of the variety, all the things that are going on. Sometimes the flowers get into my consciousness—something beautiful. If we look, the fields are growing, the trees, the animals. Think about all that God has done and the dynamic nature of it, all the living things, all the movement, the changing world, the cycles that go on. It's all here. It's wonderful.

So the Psalmist has taken us from the incredible, almost indescribable God, who is beyond our experience, to what God has done to give us life and the wonder of that. Then it goes on to say:

*These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.*

Here, we are shifting back. The Psalmist started with God, described creation, and now we are beginning to recognize again that God is not only the creator, the one who got all

of this going and made sure that it works, but there's a way God continues to sustain, as well. God has created in a way to provide food. God continues to encourage our lives, the breath we're given, the life that is a gift. It's pointing to the incredible nature of God and how God is still with us moving, sustaining. And now we finish:

*May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works--
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!*

It's wonderful. We've gone from the greatness of God, we've seen the creation, we've seen God as sustainer, and now we go to the response. What is our response? We have the birth of a nation and we celebrate it because we think it's wonderful. We have a God who gives birth to everything. It's worth celebrating, singing God's praises, wondering at all God has done, noticing God's cosmic reign.

It's amazing to me, when I get into a Psalm like this, and think about the wonder of who God is, but it is Jesus who has to tell us not to worry. God is great. God is good. We can give our attention to God, we can celebrate that God. Palm 1 invited us to notice that God wants to show us the way. We have an incredible God. We can remember, we can notice, we can appreciate, and we can attend to who our God is and to God's ways.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise God. Amen.