

Still Creating
Proverbs 8:22-36

Care of Creation Sunday/ Fourth Sunday of Easter/ 25th April 2021

Today's sermon is an echo of what we proclaim in our hymns this morning: "All Creatures of Our God and King," a setting of Francis of Assisi's (d.1226) marvelous "Canticle of the Sun" (1225), calling all of creation to sing forth in praise and adoration, "Brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam, sing praises! Alleluia."¹ A setting of Psalm 148, calling forth for more praise from creation, stars and planets, mountains, valleys, oceans, animals, plants, people. "Sing the whole creation; a cosmic chorus raise: 'To God alone be glory and everlasting praise!'"² And we sing "God of the Sparrow," which invites us to consider our role in creation and the work before us to love and care and take delight in this place that we call home.³ They each speak to the living, dynamic relationship between creature and creation and Creator, themes that we find throughout scripture, especially here in Proverbs 8. And it's fitting to lift up this text and these themes in light of last week's celebration of Earth Day (April 22), President Biden's [Leaders Summit on Climate](#) on Thursday, and our own Care of Creation of Sunday.

The care of creation, indeed ensuring that we have a creation to care for, is a pressing global issue impacting all of us. Climate change should concern all of us. Yes, it's a political issue and an economic issue and a healthcare issue. It's a human issue. It's also important for the church to remember that it's a theological issue, a faith issue. In fact, the church has something vital to offer the world here, to offer our youth, who are especially concerned about climate issues. The ancient words of scripture have much to show us about God's love for and relationship to creation, including its creatures, particularly the ones created in and who bear the image of God. These words can help us reclaim something vital that has been lost or missed or obscured: *the continual inflow of the divine Spirit in creation, continues to sustain and enliven everything and everyone.*

The Spirit (or *ruach*) of God breathed and created all things and continues to sustain and enliven, creating and recreating the creation. Psalm 104:29-30 reads, "When you hide your face [we] are dismayed; when you take away [our] breath, [we] die and return to [our] dust. When you send forth your spirit, [we] are created; and you renew the face of the ground." The animating Spirit was with God at the beginning, as we learn in Proverbs 8. Here we find Lady Wisdom, Divine Sophia, the Sacred Feminine was created at the beginning and was there from the beginning of creation, not only as a witness to creation, but as co-creator with God, "I was beside God, like a master worker" (Prov. 8:30). Not only is Lady Wisdom industrious—and this is key—God took delight in her and she rejoiced before or with God. She then rejoices in the inhabited world and delights in the human race (Prov. 8:31). Rejoicing and delighting in the work of God, the work of Wisdom, the Spirit creates and renews and sustains all things.

The language of Proverbs 8 might sound odd, but there's actually a strong connection between this understanding of the Wisdom of God and how the early church understood Jesus of Nazareth. In Colossians we hear: "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created..." (1:15). In 1 Corinthians

we hear that Christ is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:24). And the link with Lady Wisdom, the Divine Feminine even stronger in the opening verses of John’s Gospel: The Word “was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (1:2-4). The Word rejoices and delights, like Wisdom, in the inhabited world and the human race. The Word rejoices and delights in God’s Spirit creating and renewing people, bringing us to life, sustaining creation and taking enormous delight, playful delight in all of it. And to know this, then, stirs our hearts with joy and opens our eyes with delight and moves our bodies and frees our tongues to offer praise for life itself, that right now, this second, our lives, this world, creation, the universe are together being held and sustained and renewed by the Spirit of the living God who is still creating, still at work.⁴ And the Spirit invites us to join God in this work and calls us to delight and rejoice in it all. This is a theological vision that brings life and changes how we see the world.

One theologian we could learn from to help us see creation differently, who trusted in the Spirit as the “the fountain of life,” as he liked to say, giving life to everything that exists and that is alive, is—and this might sound surprising—none other than reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). Listen to what he said about the Spirit: “For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth...transfusing into all things [the Spirit’s] energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, [the Spirit] is plainly divine.”⁵ Calvin wrote, “Unless the Spirit of the Lord upholds everything, it all lapses back into nothingness.”⁶ Therefore, Calvin stood in awe and amazement before God who, like a mother, gives birth and in love labors a new creation. Calvin invites us to see the world, as he said, as the “theatre of God’s glory,” and he calls us to contemplate its beauty, which then leads to adoration and praise, to doxology. This is the Calvin that I wish more people knew about. “The contemplation of heaven and earth,” he said, “is the very school of God’s children.”⁷ In this school we learn how to delight and rejoice in the wonder of creation and the glory of God. We learn how to worship and praise. And when we see the world in this light the creation is lured back to its Maker and we come to love creation with fresh eyes. God rejoices in the world, so why shouldn’t we? Calvin even says, “The stability of the world depends on the rejoicing of God in [God’s] works.”⁸ In other words, we are sustained, right now, through God’s delight in creation. Learning, discovering, maybe even glimpsing something of God’s delight in the beauty of the world can lead us to have a similar delight and love and concern for its life.

Calvin wasn’t the only one who spoke like this. He’s in good company with many Christians who also experienced God’s relationship with the world this way—unfortunately, we have forgotten their voices too. The mystics knew these truths, but the church often ignored their voices, many of which were women.

For example, there was Mechtild of Magdeburgh (c.1210-c.1280) who said, “The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God and God in all things.”⁹

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) said, “God loves all creatures as God... God enjoys all creatures, not as creatures, but enjoys the creatures as God. In the same enjoyment in which God enjoys the self, God enjoys all things.”¹⁰

Or, consider Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) who heard God say to her, “I who am the Ancient of Days, do declare that I am the day by myself alone. I am the day that does not shine by the sun; rather by me the sun is ignited...[And] I have a voice like the thunderbolt by which I keep in motion the entire universe in the living sounds of creation.”¹¹ She believed that God is worshipped “by all creatures” because every creature has a “spiritual life.” The earth is holy, she said, and must “not be injured, must not be destroyed.”¹²

This time of year, I often think of the way Hildegard spoke of “the greening,” *viriditas* she called it, “the greening” of creation. The spring greening of everything this year, I think, has been especially striking, intense, and beautiful. “The greening” was Hildegard’s way of talking about the divine force of nature, the depth and breadth of all things, that speaks to vigor, vitality, freshness, and the verdure of creation, the creative power of life witnessed in gardens, forests, farmland—all around us. And this greenness can be cultivated within us and when we see it, experience it, feel it, it’s a cause of praise. Listen to her words of praise:

*O most honored Greening Force,
You who roots in the Sun;
You who lights up,
in shining serenity, within a wheel
that earthly excellence fails to comprehend.
You are enfolded
in the weaving of divine mysteries.
You redden like the dawn/and you burn flame of the Sun.*¹³

The good news for us today is that the Spirit is still greening, still creating, still moving our lives and this world. And by grace we get to be a part of it all, sometimes even co-creators, rejoicing along with God and taking delight in all of it. Perhaps this, then, can inform our individual lives and the life of this church in the world, for we know what is at stake, there is no planet B, the crisis is real, but so is the power of God at work in us and in the world and this is reason for praise. Maybe you can feel that doxology within you, sitting just below the surface, in the depths, or caught in your throat just waiting to be released, a song of praise, “O brother sun!” “O sister moon!” Maybe, just maybe, it’s doxology that just might save us.



Hildegard von Bingen, *Scivias* I.6: Humanity and Life

¹ *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2013), Hymn 15. Text: Francis of Assisi, 1225; Music: Geistliche Kirchengesänge, 1623.

² *Glory to God*, Hymn 17. Text by Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., 1998; Music: Johann Steurlein, 1575.

³ *Glory to God*, Hymn 22. Text: Jaroslav J. Vajda, 1983; Music: Carl F. Schalk, 1983

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (HarperSanFrancisco: 1985), 9ff.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), I, 13, 14.

⁶ Cited in Belden Lane, *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.3.1-2

⁸ Cited in Lane, 66.

⁹ Cited in Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (HarperOne, 1988), 118.

¹⁰ Cited in Fox, 122-123.

¹¹ Cited in Fox, 110-111.

¹² Cited in Fox, 110-111.

¹³ Hildegard von Bingen, *Causae et Curae*.