

From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...
Sunday, March 8, 2015

Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted

Scripture:

Psalm 19

Sermon: Where Do You Find God?

I love to speak to you of the psalms, brothers and sisters. The psalms are keys that unlock our spiritual discipline and our joy in the Lord. When I say, “Joy in the Lord,” I mean natural joy that is not connected to anything in the world. It is devoid of circumstance or any “reason” to be happy. Joy in our connection with “All That Is.” This is our task together today, to unify in our joining with the All through the psalms, particularly Psalm 19. Psalm 19 is a meditation of sorts, on two different levels. In the early part of the psalm we have a meditation on nature. As we approach St. Patrick’s Day it’s interesting to recall Celtic spirituality. I have read that there are “two books” in our faith according to the Celtic way: Scripture and Nature. We are invited in this paradigm to “study” both and let both to speak to us. This reflects the UCC idea of a still speaking God, a God found in many places, never stagnant, never fully known, always beckoning and revealing to those willing to set aside what they know to be shown something completely new.

When I was a young girl my friend Carol Sue and I would lie on top of her Chevy Malibu, drink rum and “contemplate infinity.” Having grown up in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains in a very rural area much like Northfield, there was a riot of stars at night. On summer evenings, a favorite activity was to sit outdoors and “watch the stars come out.” There is the old idea of counting the stars; of course after a brief time, you realize how impossible it is and then there is the moment after you try: you see the magnitude, the beauty, the sheer, overwhelming depth of it all and you cannot respond with anything but reverence. I have often thought that the song, How Great Thou Art, must have been written after seeing such a night sky. I’m sure you all have had your moments of awe, when the presence of God was very vivid, in nature and elsewhere. But nature is something sacred, to be sure, and those who go out of their way to protect it, are agents of God’s creation, as well as part of it. There are those who are committed to protection of the stars, as they attempt to battle light pollution, pollution as a byproduct of artificial light on earth that obscures those night skies.

God is found in nature when we contemplate its vastness, its beauty, and its “turning” from season to season. Spring always puts me in remembrance of and reverence for God’s faithfulness. Spring is faithful, although not predictable in terms of time, to be sure (the same goes for God in God’s time).

[By the way, God found in nature certainly does not conflict with science. The Bible is full of poetry, myth, wisdom and parables; you can also find science reflected in the Bible and awe and beauty and wonder can be found in science. I don't recall ever being confused about the story of Adam and Eve, which shows us humanity's fickle nature, and the science of evolution, which was taught harmoniously in my school, alongside my church attendance as a child.]

Nature is wild and unpredictable. But there are laws in nature and laws among people. God's laws are the subject of the second half of this psalm. It's as though the psalmist looks at the vastness of nature, feels small somehow in relation to it ("right-sized" as has been said in 12 Steps), then turns to the world around him. The world as it relates to human relationships, to living together. I believe this is what makes the psalmist regard God's laws and "sweeter than honey from the comb."

Someday we might explore the paradox of outer space and inner space, both of which are vast. "As above, so below," is a phrase used by writers and astrologers to point to the connection of the skies and us earthlings. In our beloved Lord's Prayer we say, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Our inner reality is as vast and amazing as the night sky. Anyone who meditates can attest to that.

Have you ever thought about really telling someone off, really giving them a piece of your mind, then thought about it again and approached the matter differently? Have you ever bitten your tongue when tempted to drag someone through the mud with another brother or sister (third party)? Have you ever cheated someone or lashed out or stolen something or done something you would NOT want God to see (remember Adam and Eve), and then noticed how you shrunk somehow in the spirit? You were not quite as comfortable, not quite as confident, not nearly so present as you might have been otherwise. When we violate God's precious laws enough, we know how costly it is. We understand that, although it might appear that we have gotten away with it, somehow our light has begun to shine a little less bright, like those stars affected by light pollution. Only this is more aptly called "soul pollution." When we confess, and then the next time we are stronger, our light shines more. We are able to experience God in our lives and with one another. Consider this, my friends: that God is found in nature and in the holy temple of human relationships. But not unless and until we regard God's laws of love and integrity as serious matters, a moment by moment journey that offers us joy, peace and the possibility of spreading both of those things to those around and beyond us.

The church is a microcosm of what's possible when we do this. Honor creation; love one another. In this way finding God is (I would say) almost a sure thing.

Finding God is a strong possibility when we honor both nature and one another, a crown of nature (“Just a little under God,” as quoted in Psalm 8). We can of course find God in other places, like art, music and literature.

I will end with a few quotes from the book *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker:

- “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field and don’t notice it.”
- “I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ask. And that in wondering bout the big things and asking bout the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never know nothin’ more about the big things than you start out with. The more I wonder, though, the more I love.”
- “Celie, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did, too. They come to church to share God, not to find. God.

Find God. Share God. Catch glimpses of how we can reflect God through imitating the character of Jesus. Have a beautiful life and be stewards of God’s beautiful world, a worthy undertaking in this season and all seasons.