

Sermon "For the Beauty of the Earth"
Kirk of St James
Sunday July 12, 2026
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I am going to be honest; on Thursday I was feeling tired and a little cranky. On Thursday's Theo plays baseball at the fields on Sleepy Hollow Road—not an insignificant place to try and get during rush hour on North River Road. Now on Thursday they had been calling for rain and I kept checking my e-mail for a cancellation notice but alas it never came so, as I was going out the door I said to Chad, "We are going to get out there, it is going to rain, they will send us home and I will have wasted an hour for no reason." So, what happened? We got there, unloaded our gear, the heavens opened in a deluge, we had to gather up everything we had just set up, throw everything (now wet) back into the car and we called it a day. On the way home, it was pouring, we were soaked to the bone, and I was not a happy camper. Theo was not saying much—until about halfway home. He looked out the window and said, "Well, I guess this is good for sunflowers that are out on the lawn." Then he started to ask why rain was important, and who controls the weather etc.

It was a moment, where I was reminded of the beauty and the importance of rain. Without it crops wither and die, forest fires can become all consuming, water tables drop, and livestock and animals are affected. In the ancient world it could quickly become a matter of life and death as failed crops and perishing livestock would lead to famine. While all three scripture readings this morning reference either water or seeds and crops, we are going to focus on our Psalm reading.

I came across a reflection by research professor in practical theology Herbert Anderson. He said, "Whenever I wonder whether or not God understands the human struggle, I read a Psalm. The description of the human condition in the Psalms is astonishingly honest and

accurate. If we think we need to keep secrets from God to be loved, the psalms remind us that God knows us better than we know ourselves and still loves us...Whenever I wonder what God is doing in the world or even if God is still active in the world, I read a psalm. In particular, the psalms of lament presume that if we can get God's attention to our suffering and pain, God will act and things will be better...Whenever I wonder how God is active in the world, I read a psalm. In Psalm 65 we are given vivid pictures of God's creative care as the one who silences the seas, waters the earth, softens it with rain, and provides grain...Whenever I wonder why I should be grateful, I read a psalm. Psalms that give thanks and praise for the abundance of God's gifts through creation remind us again and again that God's care is not limited by human need or even determined by what we request."

Each week we read a psalm, and as such it is easy to pass them over however, in many ways they are some of the most honest, gut wrenching and joy-filled things we can read. They are a window into what it is to be human, and to struggle with our faith, our love for God, and how all the pieces fit together in our lives. The psalms also speak to the relational nature of God in our lives, which is something that theologians have wrestled with throughout the years. There are a number of ways theologians have described how they believe God interacts in the world. For example, there is the deist idea that God is like a watchmaker, who creates the watch, winds it up and lets it go, and simply watches from afar. Our psalmist takes a much more personal approach, for better or worse they believe God is involved or least knowledgeable about all aspects of their lives.

In Psalm 65 the writer has no fear of approaching God honestly. Now in this case Psalm 65 is considered a communal prayer of thanksgiving, offered on behalf of not just one person but an entire community. These thirteen verses can be broken down into three sections. In the first

section the people voice their trust that the transgressions of the community will be forgiven when people come to God. This loving and merciful God is then described as the creator—so God is both creator and saviour.

In the next section God as creator is praised for the beauty of creation. “Chief among these blessings are the magnificent order and splendor of the universe, social harmony, and the fertility of the land.” It is almost like the writer zooms out and looks at the height, depth and extent of God—you established mountains, you are girded with might, you are hope to the ends of the earth, you silence roaring waves, and even those at the furthest edges of creation are within God’s reach. Then after establishing how extensive and incredible God is they zoom back in. Even if God is as big and great and mighty as all this, God still cares about even the simplest parts of creation.

This is where the Psalmist writes of how God waters and enriches the earth. This God is aware and concerned with basic human needs—all things matter to God from the smallest details to the largest imaginings. The God that can create calm out of the chaos and violence of the ocean can also cause a gentle rain on a field and both are important. In the writer’s description there is an ebb and flow in creation, and things are balanced. In fact, creation is so incredible that the pastures, the hills, meadows and valleys are subjects. “They overflow, gird themselves, clothe themselves, and deck themselves so as to shout and sing together for joy...to God their creator.”

The problem is, when we read the psalmists effusive praise and balanced descriptions, we know that life and the world do not always look like this. Rains can become floods, oceans can become tsunamis, and water can stop all together much like it did last summer here on the east coast, when the threat of forest fires loomed or burned out of control. Humanity and how we treat the earth has consequences for the global population. We do not treat creation with the

balance and care that it needs. Here is where the cyclical nature of Psalm 65 comes in. We are reminded that when we repent God will forgive us, and God locates God's presence as being among the people. Not removed, not indifferent, but very much present.

Perhaps it is easier to preach on the psalms in the summer, when we are surrounded by the beauty of God's creation, and warm summer days, yet we are reminded that even during the coldest, bitterest days of winter that God is still quietly present and at work in the world even when it is not evident. Creation reminds us of the love of God through its unlimited beauty and accessibility. To quote Herbert Anderson one more time, "When God seems hidden, creation, cries out to God in praise and thanksgiving. The images of continuing creative activity in Psalm 65 bring us back to the one who has chosen us and saved us through awesome deeds. The earth is blanketed with life. When we hear a valley "sing" or when we see a meadow "decked out" splendidly or when hills are "girded" with joy, we know that God is nearby. Creation sings before we do." The psalmist reminds us to let go of our transgressions and allow ourselves to be swept up in God's grace, during both the easier days of our lives but perhaps even more importantly during the hardest days of our lives. This in turn allows us to live more in harmony with creation and each other. Today as we eat fresh summer strawberries, on a beautiful summer day, we give thanks for the beauty of God's creation.