

Psalm 19 is one of the many readings suggested for a worship service known as the Easter Vigil. This is a service that takes place after sundown on the night before Easter. Fewer and fewer churches observe this vigil and as such they miss hearing psalm 19. They miss hearing this beautifully crafted hymn of praise for our creator God. They miss the last verse, which is a prayer often used before the scriptures are read on Sunday morning. Reading and considering the words and images in this psalm will provide a poetic connection to the joy and celebration of Easter Sunday.

I'm sure you have question. Why Psalm 19 on Easter Sunday. Why not one of the Gospel accounts of resurrection found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Isn't this story the reason why we gather today? In theory yes. So I pray that you will be satisfied with the choice of Psalm 19, because it describes vividly the way God is revealed. In verse 14 the Psalmist says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." May these words sit with us as we search for an Easter Sunday meaning in this Psalm.

In Psalm 19:1-6 the author expresses an understanding of how God is known in creation. In verses 7-13 it's all about the goodness of the law, the Torah. Which in Hebrew means instruction. Did you notice the description of what the heavens are doing? Telling, proclaiming, declaring knowledge, pouring forth speech. But did you notice something else? All of these descriptions of God's glory are not through actual speech, or words, or voice. In the first 2 verses we are invited to pay attention to God's "handiwork." To notice the way God is revealed in space, and time, and creation.

In the second part of the psalm we turn to how God is known in the goodness of the law. Here the law is described as perfect, sure, right, clear, pure, and true. The law is identified as something to be desired, something "sweeter also than honey."

It helps to talk for a minute about how Torah functions for those of the Jewish faith. The Torah is not just a list of laws. According to Mark Stanger, "it is a template for exodus living in

covenant as God's free and faithful people. It is a pattern of life individually embraced and communally shared as a guide and goal.

Jews remember God's first covenant with Noah and God's covenants with Abraham and Moses. The memory of those covenants and the keeping of Torah are a formative part of their every day living. When the law is kept closely, in hearts and in action. When one commits to being in close relationship with God and to love one's neighbor as oneself, souls are revived and hearts break forth in joy.

Verses 11-13 reveal a confession of failure in things like hidden faults, insolence, and proud thoughts. Then we hear a request for God's abiding presence and help. Konrad Schaefer had this to say about these verses. "The poet prays that God's torah be the guiding principle in life, that she or he finds favor with God and not stray. It provides the means by which a person may be saved from wrong-doing."

The beauty of this psalm is seen in how the psalmist weaves together seamlessly the ways God's self is revealed in nature and in law. Schaefer further notes, "the cosmic and moral orders are complementary spheres of God's design; the two can be contemplated in the visible world and with the moral fiber of the heart."

Psalm 19 concludes with a summary of the effect of Torah on the psalmist. Words of outward expression and meditations of the heart that sustain the interior soul.

Today we will look at the first four verses of Psalm 19 through two translations and two paraphrases.

From the CEB: Heaven is declaring God's glory; the sky is proclaiming his handiwork. One day gushes the news to the next, and one night informs another what needs to be known. Of course, there's no speech, no words – their voices can't be heard – but their sound extends throughout the world; their words reach the ends of the earth. God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.

From Robert Alter's *The Hebrew Bible*: The heavens tell God's glory, and His handiwork sky declares. Day to day breathes utterance and night to night pronounces knowledge. There is no utterance and there are no words, their voice is never heard. Through all the earth their voice goes out, to the world's edge, their words. For the sun He set up a tent in them.

From *The Message*: God's glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon. Madame Day holds classes each morning. Professor Night lectures each evening. Their words aren't heard, their voices aren't recorded. But their silence fills the earth: unspoken truth is spoken everywhere. God makes a huge dome for the sun – a superdome!

From *The Manhattan Psalter* by Sr Juanita Colon: The glory of God is blazoned across the heavens; everything shouts his name. Days pass on the glad tidings to one another, nights take it up and flings it joyously on to the next. Though not a word is uttered, not a sound reaches us, yet the silence of the heavens is thunderous with praise. A jubilant message incircles the earth like a golden ring.

For the poet who wrote Psalm 19, God's handiwork is on display in the skies for all to see. In her paraphrase, Sr. Juanita Colon writes about how everything, everything shouts God's name. In the *Message*, Eugene Peterson describes a "God-craft" seen in the sky where "Madame Day" and "Professor Night" hold classes without words.

No words, no speech, nothing uttered. Still, "their sound extends throughout the world. God's creating work, God's crafting, God's handiwork revealing God's story and God's presence...in silence. Just like those who first heard Psalm 19, we are invited to pause and appreciate God's handiwork. Might I suggest you try to do that in silence?"

I love the liturgical seasons of the church year. In them I find welcoming rhythms to my spiritual life. These seasons offer a simple and life-sustaining way to move through the year. I would even venture to say that these seasons provide a life-challenging way.

Lent is over for this year. Whatever you gave up you can now have. Whatever you took on you can now suspend. Now it's time to move forward into the season of Easter. It's a time for joyful

celebration! Today our attention is focused on the resurrection accounts in the Gospels. Our ears perk up to the stories of the risen Christ. But maybe there are some questions mingled in there too. What comes next? What comes next for the disciples? What comes next for us?

Psalms 19 offers us a perspective as we consider the question of “What’s next?” If we look, we might see similarities between the 2 disciples walking on the Emmaus Road and us. As they revisited the events that just happened in Jerusalem, we too might be revisiting recent events in our lives. As they wondered what was to come, we too might be thinking about what’s next in our lives.

How have you been changed by the events of Holy Week? Is there consistency between the words of our mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the way we live in our world today.

Let’s look again at the description of God’s creative work from The Message’s paraphrase of verses 1-2. God’s glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.” The evidence of God’s abiding presence is all around us. It’s there for us to notice and name! Many translations use the word “handiwork”. We see God as an artist, personally fashioning with God’s own hands the beautiful, expansive sky surrounding us.

We’re also reminded here that following God’s laws are not restrictive. They are a way to know, as Shaefer says, “God’s loving, solicitous will.” Today’s focus on creation and God’s law invites us to consider how we see God as creator – as an active, personal being revealed in the created world and in the sacred story of the world around us. In the sacred story of our own lives. Both shaped by the righteousness of God and the beauty of God’s creation. God’s presence in Psalm 19 also reminds us of the justice of God. How God acts on behalf of those who have not experienced fairness.

Celebrating the risen Christ doesn’t end with our sacred story. It’s a never-ending invitation to life, to living in ways that Jesus taught, to welcoming a new chapter in our stories. A new chapter that is lived in response to Jesus’ commandment to love unconditionally. On Easter, we

join our hearts in proclaiming the risen Christ whose invitation to live differently awakens us to all the possibilities we have in front of us for using our hands.

Look around this room for a moment. Think about the fellowship hall and the rest of the rooms in the other building. For those of you who remember, think about the downtown building. It took many hands to create what today is St. John's United Methodist Church. The work of our hands are needed today more than ever. Let us be Easter People who are very much needed in our community. Who are needed in the world that God created.

On Ash Wednesday, when we started Lent and this Lenten series, we learned a spiritual called the breath prayer. This is a prayer you can say with one breath.

Today, our last day of this sermon series, we will return to the breath prayer. We will use the words from the last verse of Psalm 19 as our breath prayer. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." Repeat after me:

*Let words of my mouth...*

*And the meditation of my heart...*

*Be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Think about the words you've said today to either to yourself or in conversation. Were they comforting? Were they helpful? What words are needed to address injustice?

Listen to your heart and the things silently or not so silently waiting there. What are you contemplating or meditating?

Might any of your words or meditations need to change so they are God pleasing, helpful, and useful in the world? Are there other words besides rock and redeemer you would use to describe God's presence?

Psalm 19, a reflection of God's handiwork and the value of the law of God. A call to the way we use our hands. Today as we remember and celebrate the risen Christ, let us be vigilant to seek times and places where our own hands could continue God's care for the world and all inhabitants. If that's something you think you can do, raise your hand. Amen.