

# Humility in the Sky

Psalm 19:1-6

Philippians 2:14-18

After a long day in which we were both feeling a little tired, Michele said, how about we go out to eat. I was quickly on board. We opted for Louis's which has a nice second floor outdoor patio, part of Cossettas on West 7<sup>th</sup>. It was a gorgeous fall evening and we had a quiet corner seat, looking out at the city. Our food and drinks had arrived and we were sharing with each other about our day. I had pointed out to Michele that the sports bar across the street had a couple of large screen TVs which were clearly visible from where we sat or more precisely from where I sat. Just over Michele's left shoulder, I could see the Twins were playing, but I ignored them, listening instead to Michele.

Here's the part I hesitate to mention. But, before you judge me too harshly, ask yourself, has this ever happened to you or anything like it? I was listening to Michele, but then out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the Twins get a hit, with a couple runners on base. Michele continued to share, but then suddenly said, "your eyes are glossy". Busted. I, of course, snapped back to full attention, "No, no, I'm listening, go ahead."

If you think you are off the hook and nothing of this sort has ever happened to you, then you might wish to consider again the words of the

Psalmist. *“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.... their voice is not heard;”* You are not listening. You are not paying attention. Your eyes are glossy. Busted.

According to the Psalmist, there is no excuse. You may spend most of your time living in the City and only occasionally get to a park, but the Psalmist tell us the “voice of the heavens goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world”. Wherever you are, whoever you are, the heavens are speaking to us about the glory of God.

Before you turn back to thinking about the Minnesota Twins, the Vikings or whatever your current point of distraction happens to be, let me remind us what the “Glory of God” is all about. One of the best descriptions I have heard comes from South African Theologian, Allan Bosaak. Bosaak says the “Glory of God” is God’s longing for justice, peace, human fulfillment” and we should add fulfillment for creation itself. Creation glorifies God by being all that it is intended to be, living in relationship with all that exists. “The sun, comes out like a bridegroom from its canopy....Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hidden from its heat.” The sun is glorifying God by being all that it is called to be, as do the stars, as does the moon, as do the heavens themselves, all which live in relationship with one another and all creation.

“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiworks.” Are you listening or are your eyes glossing over? In his book, Christ of the Celts, theologian John Philip Newell reminds us, “Physicists now speak of being able to detect in the universe the sound that comes from the beginning of time. It vibrates through everything that has being. It is the sound of life’s origins.... The Celts”, he says, “were familiar with this music...They moved in an ancient harmony that spoke of the relationship of all things”.

In Newell’s book New Harmony, he notes that “In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen taught that the sound of God resonates, “in every creature.” It is “the holy sound” she says, “which echoes through the whole creation.” God’s glory is that sound of harmony, that sound of unity, that sound of relationship rooted in peace, justice, and meaning from which all life comes. Are you listening? Are we listening?

Distractions to truly listening are nothing new and pre-date big screen TVs, facebook, twitter, texts, email and the various forms of social media available to us today. I am far from the first who has been caught up short with glossy eyes. I know I will not be the last.

The Apostle Paul writing to the church in Philippi is essentially writing to people in the church who have glossy eyes when he says, “*Do all things without murmuring and arguing so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish.*” It virtually goes without saying that Paul would have no need to discourage murmuring

and arguing were it not for the fact this is precisely what is taking place in the church of Philippi.

Imagine that, a church where people murmur, talking among themselves about all the little things that make them unhappy. “Whose responsible for putting the art up in the sanctuary? What in the world were they thinking with those choices?” I know that type of thing doesn’t go on here, but it was going on in Philippi and Paul says, murmuring and arguing about these small things gets in the way of who God calls us to be. It is a distraction.

What keeps us from truly listening? What causes our eyes to gloss over, tuning out to one another, tuning out to what unites us, tuning out to the sound of creation. Someone is sharing about their lives and our minds drift to plans for later that night and the new Tom Cruise “Mission Impossible” movie we are going to see. Someone is expressing why it is they support Donald Trump and rather than listen or ask questions, we begin formulating our counter arguments even while the person is still speaking. We go for a walk in the park, but we are so preoccupied with concerns we never hear the sounds of beauty that are all around us.

I am reasonably confident that if Erik felt the basses in our choir were too loud and beginning to drown out the sopranos, altos or tenors, Erik would signal to the basses that they need to lower their voices so others might be heard. Although, I do not attend choir practice, I do

know that one of the charges Erik gives to the choir is to listen to each other. Each voice, each part is encouraged to listen to one another. Harmony is never one note unity. Harmony requires and reflects differences, diversity, listening carefully to the sounds around us?

The Psalmist says “day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge....their voice is not heard.” What does it mean for us to truly listen? Whose voices are dominating, making it difficult for others to hear or be heard? Whose voices have been silenced? Do we hear the voices of children? Do we hear the voices of our Elders? Do we hear the voices of the homeless? Do we hear the voices of the hungry? Do we hear the voices of the water, the air, the heavens? This coming week Pope Francis will be speaking to the Congress. One of the messages the Pope has been strongly voicing and can be expected to voice this week, is that we must as a human race begin listening to the voice of creation. We can no longer treat creation as if we have no need to live together in harmony with brother sun and sister moon.

For a long time, human beings thought the sun revolved around us. It was a huge shock when in 1632 Galileo published a book demonstrating the earth revolved around the sun. It made people in the church so angry that Galileo was put on trial for heresy, confined to prison and forced to recant. Few wanted to entertain the possibility that we were anything other than at the very center of the universe. Even

though we now know that we are anything but the center of the universe, we often continue to operate as if we were and the sun revolves around us. Listening to the earth, listening to each other requires, demands humility.

One of the terms that I have learned through antiracism study is the notion of de-centering. When applied to race, decentering is an invitation to quit making “whiteness” the center, defining characteristic of what it means to be human and instead move whiteness to the side so that we might encounter the power and rich harmony of many races and cultures. When applied to creation, de-centering means that we no longer measure the value of creation by how much benefit and profit it generates for us as humans, but rather creation has its own voice which must be heard and respected. When Galileo offered the decentering suggestion that the earth revolved around the sun, people reacted with anger. People still react with anger today.

The Psalmist invites us to consider the sun, look up at the heavens, because it is the heavens that speak to us about humility, reminding us of our place in this harmony of creation. To be honest, some of us feel burdened by the notion that we are the sun, we are the ones who must bring warmth to the world, solve all the problems in our families, our church, our world. How would they ever possibly get along without me? The world would go cold. All life would cease. It is a tough burden to shoulder, one that the Psalmist invites us to let go, by looking

up into the heavens and with humility, listening to the chorus of God's creation. To be sure we must act, we must respond in faithfulness to the needs in our lives and in our world, but our actions begin with listening.

The Apostle Paul knows that listening, true listening, begins where we are, in our families, in our community and most importantly in our congregations. Never one to go light on descriptive adjectives Paul says, we live in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation, which is really to say, we live in a world full of noise, unable to hear or listen to the rich harmony with which we are blessed. We will never be the sun, nor should we aspire to be the sun at the center of all that is. But, in the heavens above and in the world below there is plenty of room and need for stars, which is precisely what Paul says we should be as individuals and as a community, giving witness to justice and peace. "Shine like stars in the world".

We face many distractions, many challenges in being present to one another, being present to creation. Sometimes our eyes gloss over and we fail to listen as we should. But, the assurance we are given is the one in whom the sound of creation first began, revealed in the life and presence of Christ continues to sing the song of God's love for us and all creation.

**Psalm 19:1-6**

*On this Sunday when we are encouraged to consider our relationship with the sky, we are invited by the Psalmist to look up at the sky, the heavens and the firmament, and there discover the creative presence of God. The heavens are a part of a chorus giving Glory to God, but according to the Psalmist, it is a song that is ignored. Undeterred by the neglect of human beings, the song of praise continues reaching all places on the earth, just as nothing is hidden from the heat of the sun.*

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hidden from its heat.

**Philippians 2:14-18**

*The Apostle Paul also connects us with the heavens in this letter to Philippi. Paul firmly believes that if we are to be a witness for a different type of world, one that shines forth with true, love, justice and harmony, it must begin with congregations of faith. Paul discourages those things that get in the way of becoming a witness to God's Realm. Paul encourages us to let our lives and common life be an example to all, shining like stars in the world.*

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.