

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church – June 17, 2018

Hymns: 339 – He’s Got The Whole World; 358 – There Is A Redeemer;
585 - Christ, You Call Us All to Service; 328 – This Is My Father’s World;
338 – Let All Things Now Living

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31; Deuteronomy 8:10-18; 1 John 4:7-12; :20-21

Sermon Title: “This Is My Father’s World”

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

“This is my Father’s World,” we sang earlier, and the passage we just read from Genesis, the first of the Genesis creation accounts, is where we get this idea. God is the author of creation, and gives us the world not only as our home, but as a gift, to be cherished, cared for, protected, and used for the good and blessing of all.

But things haven’t worked out that way. We have forgotten that our world is a gift: rather than cherished, we have taken its bounty for granted; rather than cared for, it has been abused, and stripped of resources; rather than protected, it has been exploited; rather than used for the good and blessing of all, it’s riches have been selfishly divided among a few, while the majority barely survive. We have forgotten that it is our Father’s World. Instead, we have, toddler-like, said “Mine, mine, mine,” and the miseries which result have landed us in the precarious position we’re in today. Extremes of weather; flood and drought; rising, increasingly sterile oceans; fragile ozone and depleted atmosphere; skyrocketing cancer rates; what have we done

to our Father's World? What have we done to our Father's incredible gift of Creation?

It is Father's Day, and despite my own father having been gone these past 28 years, his voice still sounds in my head – his sayings, his warnings, his laugh. In preparing this sermon, I thought about his world, I thought about his care and provision for me and for our family, his hard work, his love for us all. I thought about the things he entrusted to me, the lessons he taught me. I thought about the things most dear to his heart. And as I think about the fatherhood of God, I think many of the same things.

For instance, in reflecting about my own father's care and provision for me, I think to myself, "I wish I had said Thank You more often." There was so much I took for granted. There was so very much I failed to appreciate. My attention was so nearsightedly focussed upon myself. If I were able to turn the clock back, if I were able to have another conversation with my father, it would begin with me saying, "Thank you." For all he did, for all he was, for all he gave me, "Thank you."

I think most of the problems in our world stem from a lack of gratitude, a failure to appreciate God's gift of creation. A failure to appreciate the Creator himself! A failure to pull the focus away from ourselves and see the glory, wonder and gift of Creation, and the Creator behind it all. The first step in receiving a gift is to truly appreciate both the gift and the giver. Only then will the gift be well used. Our world is a gift – a gift from the hand of God. And so we say thank-you in song: ("This Is My Father's World" verse 1):

*This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, God's hands the wonders wrought.*

Gratitude is Step One in the recovery of our world. Step Two is appreciating it, and looking after it. Sixteen years old, newly licensed, and I asked my dad if I could borrow his car. These were the fuel crisis years, and so we had downgraded to a four-door, bright orange, automatic transmission, Datsun B-210. Not much of a chick magnet. But nevertheless, it was my father's car, and so he told me to treat it carefully, and not drive like an idiot. The next morning, he went out to the car, which

was now covered in dirt, empty of gas, and smelling of hamburgers, the wrappers of which littered the floor.

As my father gently and lovingly dragged me out of bed and threw me outside to wash and vacuum the car, which I was not permitted to use again for an entire month, he said, “Someday you might have your own car, which you can treat as you like. But this is my car, and don’t you forget it, or you’ll never drive it again.” Or words to that effect.

God said the very same thing, to us, through Moses. Or words to that effect (Deuteronomy 8:10-18):

When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

“But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt... He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. He did all this so you would never say to yourself, ‘I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.’

Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful...

“This is my Father’s World,” we sing, and that means not forgetting it, not treating it and all we have as though we deserved it, as though we made it, as though we can do with it as we please. “Treat it that way,” said God through Moses time and again, “and you’ll lose it.” And we are losing it – one species after another. The Centre for Biological Diversity reports the following:

We're currently experiencing the worst spate of species die-offs since the dinosaurs. Although extinction is a natural phenomenon, it occurs at a natural “background” rate of about one to five species per year. Scientists estimate we're now losing species at 1,000 to 10,000 times the background rate, with literally dozens going extinct every day. It could be a scary future indeed, with

as many as 30 to 50 percent of all species possibly heading toward extinction by mid-century.

That's what comes from not taking care of our world. So we are not only to appreciate our world – to say, “Thank you” – we are to look after it, and treat it with the respect with which we treat the Giver. My father rightly interpreted my poor treatment of his car as a lack of respect for him. Surely God views our treatment of the world in exactly the same way. Before I was able to use the car again, my father said to me, “Bring it back better than you found it.” God's very instructions to us, in giving us stewardship of our good world. But are we? Are we looking after our world? Do we see this as part and parcel of our calling as the Children of God? Or have we forgotten just whose world this is? Maybe the song will remind us (This Is My Father's World – Verse 2):

*This is my Maker's World, the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Maker's world: God shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass God's footsteps pass; God speaks to me everywhere.*

We are called to appreciate our world, and to be thankful for it and for the Creator and Giver of it; we are called to treat it with respect and look after it; and we are called to look after one another.

Family was everything to my father. He was never happier than when we were all at home, gathered around the table, kids, grandkids, everyone getting along. Everyone sharing the love. “Look after each other,” he would say, time and again. “Be kind to each other.” The same goes with our church family: If we fail to appreciate one another, how can we possibly appreciate our world? If we fail to treat one another with love, how can we possibly love God? Jesus' friend John said much the same thing, or, again, words to that effect (1 John 4:7-12; 4:20-21):

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers.

Our love for God is reflected in our love for one another, in the same way that our love for God is reflected in the treatment of God's wonderful gift of creation. As the Children of God, we are called to appreciate our world, and thereby thank and honour the Creator; to look after it, care for it, improve it for the good of all; and to look after one another, sharing with our brothers and sisters the love which God has for us and for all the world; the love with which our Father's World was created, and given to us as our home. For this is our Father's World (verse 3):

*This is my Saviour's World, O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Saviour's world: the battle is not done,
Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one.*

Did you hear that? "This is our Saviour's World." Our broken and hurting world has hope, because not only has God given us the gift of creation, not only has God given us the gift of one another, but God has given us the gift of Jesus. It is in Jesus and through Jesus that we can and we are brought into relationship with God as the Children of God; it is in Jesus and through Jesus that we have the astonishing privilege of calling God "Father"; of loving and forgiving one another; of reaching out to the world with the Good News that as we come to Jesus and offer our lives to him as Saviour and Lord, we ourselves are given new hearts, new hope, new lives; we are created anew.

This is our Father's World; we are the Father's children; together, let's live in gratitude for creation, in love for one another, and in service to our world.

"And whatever we do, whether in word or deed, let's do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17)."
Amen.