

A theology professor once noted, “the main source of understanding God for many Christians is the hymnal.” IF you think about it... it makes sense! The hymns stick with us. Their poetry, their melody, and in some cases, we may even know the story behind the writing of our favorite hymns. I will always remember the day my mother and I were in worship, we were about to sing “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You... God of Glory, Lord of love,” she quietly mumbled, “great! This my favorite.” In its own mysterious way, the combination of text and tune seem to resonate very deeply within our being; far deeper than music or words alone.

Another reason Hymns inform our faith is the lyrics are often inspired by writings from holy scripture. If you look in the back of the Chalice Hymnal on page 834, you will find a full-page index listing of hymns whose text was directly inspired by a scripture reading.

Looking at this index we see a Hymn on page 60 was inspired by Psalm 19. I invite you to turn to page 60 and read the two English verses with me. If you prefer reading them in Spanish, feel free. The Hymn is called “Cantemos al Señor” or “Let’s Sing unto the Lord.” I invite you to read the text along with me and as we come to the end of the verse we will just say one “Alleluia...”

“Let’s sing unto the Lord, a hymn of glad rejoicing. Let’s sing a hymn of love, at the new day’s fresh beginning. God made the sky above, the stars, the sun, the oceans; and God saw it was good, for those works were filled with beauty. Alleluia!

Let’s sing unto the lord a hymn of adoration, which shows our love and faith and the hope of all creation. Through all that has been made, the Lord is praised for greatness, and so we sing to God, who bestows such lovely blessings. Alleluia!”

Psalm 19 begins telling how all of creation; the heavens, the sky, each day, the sun everything gives glory to God.

Christian Author Frederick Buechner writes, “Glory is to God what style is to an artist.” A keen eye can recognize a Monet, a keen ear can recognize a new song by one of our favorite musicians. We don’t need anyone to tell us. Last year I began a subscription to “Downbeat” magazine which covers the world of Jazz music. There is a section in each issue called “Blindfold Test.” The artist they are interviewing is blindfolded, asked to listen to a series of songs and identify the artist, then grade the song. It is amazing how often the interviewee recognizes not only the main artist, but the complementary artists on other instruments. All from their “style.” And “glory,” Beuchner suggests, is how we recognize God’s distinctive style.

One of the things I have relearned through our congregation’s participation in the Appreciative Inquiry Process is the term, “Heliotropic.” We think of this with plants as we know

how plants naturally grow toward the light, they are heliotropic. Appreciative Inquiry grounds its work with organizations in the idea humans also grow toward the light. This means Appreciative Inquiry is a positive focused process seeking to determine what an organization is doing well, what is life giving for its participants, and then helps the organization learn how to do those things better in the future.

Psalm 19 is a movement toward God's light. The Message version says, "God makes a huge dome for the sun—a superdome! The morning sun's a new husband leaping from his honeymoon bed. The day breaking sun an athlete racing to the tape. That's how God's Word vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset. Melting ice, scorching deserts, warming hearts to faith."

This might sound all well and good but you might be asking, how do we turn toward the light? Consider with me how midway through Psalm 19 the reading makes an abrupt shift. The author begins talking about God's perfect law, God's clear commandments. These verses seem disjointed from the first. This major shift has caused many who study this Psalm to conclude it two different psalms altogether. They wonder how the restrictions of law and commandment could possibly relate to the joy and glory of creation?

But what if the law, the torah, God's instruction IS the path? Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor, speaking on the 10 commandments, reflects on the role of law. "Though we may think we like other things better than law, like how much we appreciate just being loved, unconditionally, for the people preparing to enter the promised land these commandments shape their life and identity and are a force to preserve the community against threat."

UCC pastor Kate Huey writes, "If we truly want to be faithful and obedient to God's law, if we truly want to be challenged to think and live creatively and generously and generatively, why do we see God's laws... as hemming us in rather than expanding and energizing the way we organize our lives, personally and communally?" In other words, why don't we see the law, as the way to more complete expression of God's light?

Professor J. Clinton McCann goes further, "Psalm 19 teaches us that what makes life possible is relationship to God and this relationship is mediated by God's instruction, torah, law." Then he goes on to reveal some unifying aspects of the Psalm which are hard for English readers to see at first.

The author uses the term "speech" in the opening verses and the term "words," near the end... in the original Hebrew those are the same two words. This is a linguistic way the author is binding the beginning and end of the Psalm together. Then, the author uses "perfect" in verse 7, and "blameless" in vs 13, those are the same word in Hebrew, again relating the internal parts of the psalm to one another.

If that is a little more technical than some of you want to get this morning. Let me suffice to say...

Psalm 19 teaches us, no matter what the nightly news says; love is the basic reality. God is not a cosmic enforcer but a caring, loving relative pouring light on creation and creature. We learn the universe is more than an object to be studied and controlled because nature actually recognizes God, is part of the cosmic family, and without even a word all parts of nature can proclaim glory in the Reign of God over all the earth.

So often the predominant narrative in society tells us to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, make our own way in the world, glory in our autonomy, Psalm 19 challenges this narrative... teaching that we live, "Not by our ability to earn, achieve or possess, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

In other words, this human/divine relationship, grounded in love... which motivated God to create each of us and bear the burden of our inevitable disobedience, is the same love manifested in the story of Israel, in the life of this Psalmist, and as Christians, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The good news is... Love is the basic reality of the universe.

Amen