

September 19, 2021

**“Sky Sunday”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Jeremiah 4:23-28

*I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.
For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.
Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back.*

Psalms 19:1-6

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
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 hid from its heat.*

Sermon “Sky Sunday”

So we have a new curriculum that we are trying out this year that is called “Seasons of the Spirit”. Our hope is that we will align the scriptures in Faith Formation with our worship. The way this curriculum starts though is with "Season of Creation" which uses the four Sundays in September to “celebrate Earth as a sacred planet filled with God’s vibrant presence.” This Sunday is Sky Sunday, where we celebrate the sky with all its brilliance, rainbows, storms, moods and

creatures. The three scriptures are meant to show us some moments in our collective story where sky has played a vital role. Two of them are pretty dark, literally. In ancient times the sky was seen as what lies between heaven and Earth. The concept of the cosmos or universe hadn't been conceived yet.

Creation stories like the one represented in the Psalms were very common as people tried to figure out everything without science and without some kind of manual. All humans had were stories to try and explain the Earth, the sky and heaven, and all the creatures therein. It's hard for 21st century minds to even imagine that, but we do have our own stories about the sky, about what it means to us corporately and individually.

I have some wonderful memories surrounding the sky. One of my first is how my Grandmother, Momma Fern would pull the roll away bed out on hot summer nights and we would sleep under the stars and she would teach me about the constellations and we'd watch for shooting stars so we could make a wish. I also have a beautiful memory of a chilly night in December of 1973 where my Dad and I stood out in our backyard, freezing, but determined to see the Comet Kohoutek with the amateur telescope he had just bought me to encourage my passion for astronomy. And more recently in 2017, our son and daughter came home to see the great American eclipse with us. But to the ancient mind, all these things would have been seen as either signs from God, or harbingers of doom.

The Jeremiah passage is particularly foreboding. It tells of a future of utter desolation, where the skies are black and free from birds all from the wrath of God because God's people had turned away, both from God and from justice. Anthea E. Portier-Young is the Associate Professor of Old Testament at Duke University, she wrote:

"This is a difficult passage to preach indeed. On one side is a temptation to smooth over its searing vision and minimize its harsh critique. On another side is a temptation to villainize and moralize, stoking a pseudo-apocalyptic furor that blames disaster upon its victims. I see a key middle way, in Jeremiah's fourfold repetition of the verb "I saw" and the particle "see!" The passage challenges preacher and congregation alike to see what we do not wish to see. We are challenged to behold the evil we wreak and to see the desolation of our mountains, our skies, our wildlife, our once-green spaces, our cities, and our human beings. If we have difficulty imagining that something is wrong, Jeremiah asks us to look again, more closely and more critically. We are called to sit in heaven's darkness and hear the weeping of the earth (Jeremiah 4:28). If we are willing to forsake our stubborn foolishness, we might comprehend how we have betrayed our divine commission to be custodians of God's creation, and humbly ask God and one another how to do good in the sight of God (4:22)."

That's hard stuff and not very uplifting. But it is the reality that we must reckon with. This very well could be a picture of the Earth in a hundred years if we don't deal with our climate crisis. Yet our situation isn't caused by God's wrath but rather by humans. It is my opinion that God can not undo what is caused by human sin. In Jeremiah we see a passage of the undoing of creation. So God can't fix what we break, but we certainly can break what God created.

But the upside to this is that God does empower us with creativity, courage, willingness, intelligence. We have everything we need to undo the damage we've done. But human sin, ignorance, and greed won't step aside while we fix the earth. Climate change has only recently been displaced by election fraud and the covid virus as the top targets of the plague of misinformation that runs unchecked on social media and cable news. To fix the climate crisis we have to do a better job in respecting each other and restoring some credibility to those who dedicate their lives to real life solutions.

Along with all the gifts that God has bestowed upon us we have always carried within us the seeds of our own destruction. They are greed and they are hatred. Jesus showed us a different way. A path of love, service, and sacrifice. Our faith and science holds the keys to steering ourselves away from the vision of the world Jeremiah laid out. No one individual will fix this. We will collapse under the weight of trying to fix the world on our own. Our faith is about the power of we. God may not be able to fix our world, but God can for sure give us the courage, endurance, and open minds we need to do it together.

It won't be easy. None of what we need to do is convenient and some if it can be downright burdensome. Julie and I have been trying to not use insecticides around our house. Then the ants came into our backyard and infested about a 1/4 of our acre. First we tried dusting the top of their tiny homes with cinnamon, they seemed to enjoy that. Then we hit them with insecticidal soaps and all kinds of natural remedies. By the time I called the Orkin man and asked for help, I was ready to take a flamethrower to my backyard. And don't even get me started about the Japanese beetles that destroyed our apple trees and grape vine.

You don't need me to educate you about what you can do as individuals to help with climate change, but I do want you to think about what happened a few months ago when the fires in Canada, Colorado and California turned our skies here in Wisconsin dark and full of ash. We aren't immune here, we are all connected. What is appropriate to say here in this pulpit is that our faith and our God will give us all that we need to turn things around. Not by screaming to the top of our lungs or attacking each other, but by finding the love of God, and God's creation within us so that nothing but blue skies will lie ahead. May it be so, AMEN

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- Rev. Susan Drake



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