**A New Creation – 1. God’s Wide World**

**Psalm 104:1-9,024, 35c**

**April 7, 2024**

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The summer before I entered the seventh grade, my family moved to a very typical, middle-class suburban neighborhood of San Diego. And in the years that followed, as a military family of six, we never took fancy vacations. But what my parents did was plan vacations to places where we could come to love and appreciate all of the beauty that California has to offer, as well as develop a love and respect for nature.

One of our favorite things to do was beach camping at Carlsbad State Park, in north San Diego County. Our family of six would rent pop-up campers from the military base and my mom would single-handedly pack it full of food and other important items we’d all need for a week of beach camping. This campground is pretty unique. It is located up high on the cliff, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the perfect place for taking in a gorgeous California sunset. Right after breakfast each morning, we’d pack up our bags, grab our beach chairs and head down the long set of steps that took us down to the beach, where we would spend the day swimming, Boogie boarding, sunning, reading, throwing the frisbee around and taking long walks in search of the perfect sand dollar.

But I think my most favorite family vacation was to Yosemite National Park. It was on these trips that I first fell in love with the California redwoods. These trees live for thousands of years, some are as old as 5,000 years. That means they were around when Jesus walked this Earth. They are the tallest trees in the world, standing more than 300 feet tall. That’s as tall as the Statue of Liberty. It is because of these trips to Yosemite, as a teenager, I came to appreciate God’s amazing creation and realize that we as humans are just small part of that creation and that we are interdependent with the rest of God’s created world.

Today we are beginning a new sermon series entitled *A New Creation*. As I shared in my Easter message last Sunday, it is through the resurrection of Jesus that all things are being made new again. And that is for all of God’s creation, not just for humanity. In fact, in Mark’s telling of the resurrection, Jesus gives these final instructions to *“go into all the world and proclaim good news to the whole creation.”* (Mark 16:15)  We often hear these words as a call to share the gospel with other people and that is certainly truebecause in his resurrection, Jesus gives us hope for new life. But this hope is for *all creation*. So today we begin this series by exploring how we, as human beings, sometimes tend to think that the world revolves around us. I know I have been guilty of that more often than I care to admit. We are just one part of God’s magnificent creation. What does creation tell us if we listen?

Psalm 104 offers us a perspective of humanity as a part of God’s creation, not merely the rulers over the rest of creation. God as Creator and Sustainer is emphasized throughout this psalm. God created humankind, but as the psalm poetically declares, God also created the earth, the waters of the earth, the birds, wild goats, rabbits, young lions and all the animals of the forest, cattle, the trees of the field, the cedars of Lebanon and fir trees. Not only is God the Creator, but God cares for and provides for the needs of all of God’s creatures. God provides drink for every wild animal, trees in which the birds have their nests, grass for cattle and plants for people to cultivate, the trees of the field are watered abundantly, and even predators such as lions cry out to the Lord for sustenance. In God’s wisdom, God has created all.

We see this in other places in the Old Testament as well. In Job chapter 12:7-10, Job says to his friends, *Ask Behemoth, [one of the mightiest of animals] and he will teach you, the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or talk to earth, and it will teach you; the fish of the sea will recount it for you. Among all these, who hasn’t known that the Lord’s hand did this? In whose grasp is the life of everything, the breath of every person?*

This is a reminder to us of our place in creation, that the natural world is imagined as a teacher of human beings. So, we need to learn to turn to the natural world that reminds us that “the hand of the Lord” has created us all and that the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being are in God’s hand.

Reminders of God’s care for all created beings can also be found throughout the New Testament as well, such as here in Matthew 6:28-30 where Jesus asks:

*And why do you worry about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don’t wear themselves out with work, and they don’t spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn’t dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it’s alive today and tomorrow it’s thrown into the furnace, won’t God do much more for you?*

Jesus is present with us in all Creation. I am reminded of the hymn, “In the Garden” *“I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,” and “he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own.”* This beloved hymn, sung at many celebrations of life services, expresses what so much of us experience when we are truly present in nature. We experience the resurrected Christ! And in this season of resurrection here in Minnesota, it is spring and there are signs of new life all around us: trees beginning to flower, big fat mama birds hopping around our yards and baby birds in new nests!

J. Clinton McCann, Jr., a professor of theology at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, makes several valuable observations in his reflections on Psalm 104. He notes that “the origin and destiny of humankind is inextricably tied to the origin and destiny of the Earth.” He reminds us that the word *human is* from the Latin *humus* which means “soil.”  And the Hebrew words for human *(adam)* and fertile land *(adamah)* sound alike. This emphasizes the connection between human beings and the land. It is a good reminder that we need to remember that the land still nourishes our lives.

McCann also notes that “everything we do has an effect on God’s world and therefore on God.”  He also makes several valuable observations about the importance of “praising God” as the beginning of environmental consciousness. It begins with the words, “Bless the Lord, O my soul” and ends with the words, “Praise the Lord.” McCann contrasts this is a praise-centered approach with an environmental consciousness born of fear in which our primary concern is ourselves. Although many humans in our time think that nature is there to serve us, we are meant to serve God’s creation.

We live in a time in which thinking that we able to “save the world,” independent of our Creator, has resulted in devastating imbalances in the world that are most deeply and tragically experienced by those who cannot advocate for themselves. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, in 2023 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed 21 species due to their extinction. These include several species of birds, mussels, a Texas fish, and a tiny fruit bat. They join the list of 650 species that have been lost to extinction in the United States.

It also affects human beings, the poorest of the poor, who do not have the resources to deal with the effects of climate change, limited and impure water sources, food deserts, and polluted air. Many of these changes are the result of human greed and a lack of understanding of the consequences of our actions. According to the World Health Organization, we are experiencing humanitarian emergencies ranging from heatwaves, wildfires, floods, tropical storms and hurricanes that are increasing in scale, frequency and intensity. They say that 3.6 billion people already live in areas that are highly susceptible to climate change. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, per year, from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress alone.

How do you feel when you hear about the effects of climate change, loss of habitat and species extinction?  If you are like me, information like this can leave you feeling overwhelmed to the point where you lose hope and along with that, the will to make changes in your own life that will lessen the bad effects on our environment. In her book, Saving Us, A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World, author Katherine Hayhoe says, *“To care about climate change, you only need to be one thing, and that's a person living on planet Earth who wants a better future. Chances are, you're already that person - and so is everyone else you know.”* So if we acknowledge that creation is a gift from God and care of that creation is up to us, what can we can do to make a difference.

I know there are many of you already doing much to care for creation. Some of us are gardeners and animal lovers. Living here in Minnesota, the land of 10,000 lakes and the beautiful north woods, many of us like to fish and hunt and are allies in wanting to defend the natural habitats. And so, you spent a lot of time learning about the natural world so to protect it. I know some of you have chosen to be vegetarian or vegan for the same reasons.

Here at Messiah, we’ve already done a lot to care for creation. Inside, that includes our high efficiency HVAC, that is professionally maintained, and computer monitored & controlled. Two years ago, we switched to all LED lighting in our sanctuary and are making progress with the rest of the lighting. We in the process of are moving to Eco friendly/compostable hospitality ware. Outside, we have two rain gardens on the church property and a third is in the planning stages for this summer. Th native planting near the lake is monitored by Minnehaha Watershed District and our snow removal service uses eco-friendly chemicals. As a faith community, we are doing many things, but there is still more we can do. These are just a few highlights. You’ll find a more exhaustive list at our new creation care website: messiahchurch.org/creationcare.

If you’re wondering what you as an individual can do, a first and easy step is to find time just to appreciate and praise God for God’s creation. This might include walks in natural settings, spending time in a garden or by a lake, or visiting a nature center and having a conversation with a park naturalist. Maybe you want to hang bird feeders and plant plants that attract our native insects, moths, and butterflies.

Throughout this series in our daily Grow, Pray, Study Guide, a daily devotional that we email out each day, we’re including a section called *Did You Know?* Here we’ll share interesting facts and simple actions you can take to make a difference. I want to challenge us all to start doing at least ONE new thing to care for God’s creation. Jerry and I have started composting. I’ll be curious to hear what you choose to do.

Former Senior Pastor Rollie Robinson leads a Bible study here on Wednesday mornings. And over the course of the past year, several members of his class have come to me and said, we want to help do something about this! So together they have:

Provided a reusable bag that you’ll be given at the conclusion of worship today (or come by the office during the week a pick one up.) Keep it in your car and take it with you when you shop. Inside you will find a sheet that lists more information and resources. It is also a good way to start a conversation with people about creation care and Messiah Church!

They’ve provided a book display in our atrium that you can check out today or during the week. Evie Severyn has acquired and cataloged many books, including books for children, to help us understand the situation and learn more about how to help.

They’ve provided the information you’ll see on that new Creation Care webpage, beautifully designed by our very own Director of Communications, Tracy Ickes.

And they are here today (wearing teal so that they are easily identified) and ready to answer any questions you may have.

I am thankful for this dedicated group of servants and their passion to care for all of God’s creation.

A life of faith is about more than just going to church. Loving creation is a way of loving the Author of creation and appreciating the good gifts God has given. Loving creation can also motivate us to make changes in our lives to better care for our environment. As a faith community called Messiah Church, we have an incredible opportunity to come together and praise God, remembering that God asks us to be caretakers of this incredible world.

I’d like to end today with this blessing written by Sister Ruth Marlene Fox.

May God bless you with discomfort, at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in the world,
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done,
to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Amen.

**Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 7, 2024**

**Weekly Prayer**
Creating God, you envisioned and brought into being all of creation and humanity. Humanity is just one part of your incredible Word. As I read your Word today, open my mind and heart to the delicacy and interconnectedness of all that you have made. May my insight into Your wonder-filled creation grow. Amen.

**Monday, April 8**

**Scripture: Genesis 1:1-3, 24-31**
When God began to create the heavens and the earth the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters. God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared.

God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And that’s what happened. God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

God created humanity in God’s own image,
 in the divine image God created them,
 male and female God created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

**Observation**This is a portion of the first of two creation stories found in Genesis. The writer(s) wrote poetically, and Hebrew priests may well have used the story in worship. Many of Israel’s neighbors in the ancient Near Eastern world had their own creation stories, but the Bible’s account was the only one that saw creation as fundamentally good. The world came spotless and “supremely good” from God’s hand.

**Application**Professor John Goldingay, in his book, *Genesis for Everyone*, expressed the thought of Genesis 1:31 in terms we may find it easier to relate to: “At the end of the week of creation, God is in a position to stand back, survey the six days’ work as a whole, and smile in satisfaction. The project has come out very well. It looks great.” Make a list of 3-5 ways in which you still see the original goodness of the creator’s intention in our world.

**Prayer**Dear God, thank you for the miraculous gift of our beautiful, abundant earth, and for entrusting it to my care. Help me be a faithful steward of your gifts, always mindful of my choices and their impact on your world. Amen.

**Did You Know?**
Did you know that spending time in nature—even as little as 20 – 30 minutes a few days a week—may reduce stress, anxiety, and depression? Scientific studies show that almost any form of immersion in the natural world may improve your overall well-being and engagement with the larger human community. So, get outside and enjoy God’s good world!

**Tuesday, April 9**

**Scripture: Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17**On the day the Lord God made earth and sky— before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the Lord God hadn’t yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land—the Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life’s breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the Lord God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The Lord God commanded the human, “Eat your fill from all of the garden’s trees; but don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!”

**Observation**Genesis’ second creation story was folksier and less structured than the one in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It said God created a human first, before any plants or animals. (If read as literal history or science, it would contradict Genesis 1.) It used “Yahweh” (translated “LORD”) rather than the more generic “Elohim” as God’s name. Here God gave the newly created humans a “garden,” a perfect setting in which to thrive, and settled them “to take care of it.”

**Application**The Hebrew words for human (adam) and fertile land (adamah) sound alike and emphasize the connection between human beings and their land. This connection was intuitive for the largely agricultural people of Israel. In what ways have many of us in more industrialized, office-centered, technological ways of life lost that sense of connection? For what reasons do we need to remember that the land still nourishes our life?

**Prayer**Dear Jesus, make me ever more aware of the ways in which my choices affect the people, the other forms of life, and even the life-sustaining earth around me. Amen.

**Did You Know?**Up to 100 million monarch butterflies migrate every year, up to 3,000 miles each way. Minnesota is one of their summer breeding grounds, with peak migration in mid-September. Planting native plants can help sustain this butterfly population, which has suffered substantial loss of habitat due to development. Ask your local garden center for help!

**Wednesday, April 10**

**Scripture: Psalm 19:1-4, 33:6-9, 12-15**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.

The skies were made by the Lord’s word,
    all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the ocean waters into a heap;
    he put the deep seas into storerooms.
All the earth honors the Lord;
    all the earth’s inhabitants stand in awe of him.
Because when he spoke, it happened!
    When he commanded, there it was!

The nation whose God is the Lord,
    the people whom God has chosen as his possession,
    is truly happy!
The Lord looks down from heaven;
    he sees every human being.
From his dwelling place God observes
    all who live on earth.
God is the one who made all their hearts,
    the one who knows everything they do.

**Observation**Owen Gingerich, Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at Harvard, in his book, *God’s Universe*, wrote: “Rather than believe that the universe is simply meaningless, a macabre joke, I would prefer to accept a universe created with intention and purpose by a loving God, and perhaps created with just enough freedom that conscience and responsibility are part of the mix….the elements are just right, the environment is fit for life, and slowly life forms have populated the earth.” His precise teacher’s prose echoed the poetry of the ancient psalmists.

**Application**Perhaps drawing on David’s outdoor life as a shepherd, Psalm 19:1, 3-4 said “Heaven is declaring God’s glory…. of course, there’s no speech, no words—their voices can’t be heard—but their sound extends throughout the world.” When has nature spoken most powerfully to you of God’s glory, goodness, and power? When have you seen nature’s ability to “speak” spoiled by human carelessness or greed?

**Prayer**O Lord, open my eyes to the signs of your creative power and beauty that can still be seen in our world. Fill my heart with wonder at the wisdom and grace reflected in so much I can see. Amen.

**Did You Know?**The Milky Way galaxy—home to the Sun and the Earth—contains millions of stars and is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe. Even at the speed of light, it would take 100,000 years to travel across our galaxy. In the night sky, you can witness God’s glory and power.

**Thursday, April 11**

**Scripture: John 1:1-5**In the beginning was the Word
    and the Word was with God
    and the Word was God.
The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
    and without the Word
    nothing came into being.
What came into being
    through the Word was life,
    and the life was the light for all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
    and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.

**Observation**Many Greek philosophers identified “the Word” (Greek “logos”) as the great idea behind the universe. The Hebrew Bible began (like John’s gospel) with “in the beginning,” and said God spoke all that is into being. John defined what he meant by “light” more specifically. The person Jesus he had seen, heard, and known, he said, was the light who broke into the world’s darkness. In coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew.

**Application**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light” (verse 5). Both Genesis and John said God created “light,” in both the physical and spiritual senses. Have there been times when it felt to you as though darkness was trying to put out God’s light in your life? In what ways have you learned to nurture your connection with Jesus, so that God’s light can keep shining in and through you?

**Prayer**Lord Jesus, what came into being through you was life, was light. Thank you for creating new life in me as your light reaches to the dark corners of my being. Amen.

**Did You Know?**
You can find comprehensive recycling information for Hennepin County Recycling here: <https://www.hennepin.us/recycling>.This is one way we can help renew the Earth and care for God’s creation. If you want to know if something can be recycled and where, visit their web site for more information.

**Friday, April 12**

**Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20**
The Son is the image of the invisible God,
 the one who is first over all creation,

Because all things were created by him:
 both in the heavens and on the earth,
 the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.
 Whether they are thrones or powers,
 or rulers or authorities,
 all things were created through him and for him.

He existed before all things,
 and all things are held together in him.

He is the head of the body, the church,
who is the beginning,
 the one who is firstborn from among the dead
 so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,
 and he reconciled all things to himself through him—
 whether things on earth or in the heavens.
 He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

**Observation**
Scholar N. T. Wright noted that today’s passage made a striking claim: “Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation. The ‘salvation’ or ‘redemption’ on offer in Christianity is sometimes described as if it meant that the old world, the ordinary world of creation we all live in, was worthless…. Jesus Christ, says the poem boldly, is the one through whom and for whom the whole creation was made in the first place.”

**Application**
Today’s passage held an even bigger truth: The world is also full of ugliness and evil, summed up in death itself. That wasn’t the original intention, and the living God has now acted to heal the world of the wickedness and corruption that have so radically infected it. The Jesus through whom the world was made in the first place is the same Jesus through whom the world has now been redeemed. Have you ever realized that Easter is not only about saving people, but about Jesus acting to redeem our entire planet?

**Prayer**
Lord Jesus, I am ultimately your creation, and you love me. But you redeemed and love the whole creation. Keep teaching me how to love and value what you made. Amen.

**Did You Know?**
In the United States, the wind energy potential of just three states—Kansas, North Dakota, and Texas— would be sufficient to meet electricity demand from coast to coast.

**Saturday, April 13**

**Scripture: Revelation 11:15-18, 22:1-5**
Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying,

“The kingdom of the world has become
    the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ,
        and he will rule forever and always.”

Then the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God. They said,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
    who is and was,
        for you have taken your great power and enforced your rule.
        The nations were enraged, but your wrath came.
The time came for the dead to be judged.
The time came to reward your servants, the prophets and saints,
            and those who fear your name, both small and great,
            and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+11%3A15-18%2C+22%3A1-5&version=CEB#fen-CEB-31063a)] shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree’s leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They won’t need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always.

**Observation**Scholar N. T. Wright wrote that for too many Christians, “the aim of Christianity as a whole, and of conversion, justification, sanctification, and salvation, is seen in terms of leaving earth behind and going home to a place called heaven.” Instead, he said, “For the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus launched God’s new creation upon the world, beginning to fulfill the prayer Jesus taught his followers, that God’s kingdom would come “on earth as in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), and anticipating the “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) promised by Isaiah and again in the New Testament.” That was why Revelation said judgment awaits those who “destroy the earth”—the earth is not temporary and disposable. Rather, God’s goal (in which we can join) is to recreate and restore the world to the beauty and harmony for which it was always intended.

**Application**
Where is “heaven,” anyway? Had you ever before noticed how consistently the Biblical prophets said our eternal hope is in a “new heaven and a new earth”? How does it shift the way(s) you think about this planet if God’s plan is that God’s people spend eternity on this earth restored, redeemed, and made new—if this may be “heaven”? In what ways have you, your community and your country cared well for the earth? Can you identify areas in which you want to alter your lifestyle to more actively join in God’s work of restoring and caring for creation (including, of course, yourself and your well-being)?

**Prayer**
Lord Jesus, I can observe ways in which your creative power works in this vast universe, yet much remains mysterious. I not only believe, but count on, your promise that I can be with you for all eternity. Amen.

**Did You Know?**
When food goes to the landfill, the nutrients in the food never return to the soil and the rotting food produces the potent greenhouse gas methane. Preventing food waste or composting helps reduce methane emissions and creates healthy soil. Learn more at: [https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics#what](https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics%23what)