

The God of Glory Thunders

Psalm 29, Romans 8:18-26

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

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There's no way I can hear that Psalm this week and not think of the tornado that tore through Hamden, where I live, 10 days ago. "The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare." Or about the eruptions of Kilauea Volcano near where my friend Eric Anderson lives in Hawaii ("the voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire"). The people who originally sang that Psalm did not have the advantage of a scientific education. They had no idea about tectonic plates or global climate patterns. When they experienced a breathtaking natural event, they ascribed it to a cosmic source; in Israel's case, to the one God. The other religious traditions around them did the same thing, but they named the God in control of nature differently.

This same sort of thinking does persist, however, even in modern America. Sometimes insurance policies exempt coverage for "acts of God." Fundamentalist preachers will talk about natural disasters as "punishments from God" for human sin.

But that's not what this Psalm does. This Psalm lifts up the power of nature as a sign or symbol of the power of God, a power which inspires us to give glory to God, to wonder at God, to respect God who created such power in our world.

Most of us here and now, I think, do not believe that God sent those tornadoes to Connecticut. Most of us do not believe that God is pushing up the lava in Hawaii. Most of us do not believe that God sent Hurricane Harvey or Irma or Maria last year. Nor do I.

And yet. I do believe that God's creative power and imagination shaped this earth in its uniqueness in our Solar System. The inner workings of the earth below us and of the climate system

that surrounds us and allows life in abundance on this planet unlike any other close to us, I believe, come from God, the creator of natural processes like evolution and physics. There is a system to our planet, which is alive itself, like a whole being of which we are a part. Even the apostle Paul, who knew little science, saw that we are part of creation, intimately linked to a world groaning under all kinds of pressures and linked tightly to God, as are we.

Here's the challenge for people of faith. We are part of this whole created being called Earth. But we do something on a large scale that other living things only do on small scales: we seek to control the creation around us and change it to suit us. We build houses on top of volcanoes, at the edges of cliffs, on top of geological faults that we know exist. We fill in natural deltas, meant in the original system of creation, to take the water that comes in excess from storms, and then we suffer the devastating effects of hurricanes where no people should be living. We change the courses of rivers to provide electric power or build roads. We dig off the tops of mountains to provide coal and other minerals. We wage wars which result in all sorts of ecological damage; those of you old enough to remember Vietnam will remember the devastation caused by Agent Orange.

And when we interfere with this delicately balanced ecosystem, stuff happens. Often bad for us. In our arrogance, in our assumption that the whole world was created for our pleasure and so we can do whatever we want with it, we forget that the whole earth reflects the glory of God and the wisdom of God. It's not about our glory and wisdom and power. We have moved from those who are in awe to those who try to be in control. And we are all in trouble because of that.

We can't go back in time. What we have learned about this earth through science is a great gift that we can use to respect and honor the earth and learn how to live in balance with the creation around us. I thank God for scientists and am appalled at the current

administration's purging of scientists because some of our leaders don't want to know the truth.

We can't undo all the damage humans have done. And I admit I like having heat in winter and cool in summer, and I need to be aware of the cost of that to the environment and do what I can to mitigate it, like the solar panels on my house. We can all do something.

But we will only do that if our mindset changes and we see once again the glory of God in the immense complexity of the created world around us. So many small systems had to be put in place on this planet to create the exact conditions for the vibrant life we experience around us. So much grandeur in big, and tiny ways; from the Himalayas to the hummingbird. What happens if we see **God's** creative power and imagination in all these things? Do we have more respect for the earth? For life of all kinds, including human life? Do we, seeing God's hands in leaf and stone and paw, touch the earth more gently with our hands?

We did not create. We do not own or control. We are called to be loving stewards, and the Spirit can help us do that. The glory and power are not ours. The Psalmist says "Give to the LORD glory and power, the glory and power due to God alone." And when we do that, everything changes. So if you are outside enjoying creation this weekend, give God glory and do your part as a steward to respect and love what God has made! amen