

On this harvest Festival I want us to turn to this great Psalm of praise for God as the God of creation.

The old hymn said “count your blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done”. It is the same when we come to praise God. We say well what have I to praise God for and perhaps for a moment as we stop and think we may struggle. We might come up with things like, I don't feel as bad as I did yesterday. I'm a day closer to my holiday or retirement. Or perhaps you have more specific things in terms of answers to prayer or real blessings you've seen. There are over 30 Psalms of praise and of the last 50 Psalms about ½ of them are praise Psalms. Indeed Psalm 104 is in a series of Psalms of praise as the Psalmist praised God for his benefits, his miracles, his justice, his love and mercy, his redemption and so on. The Psalmist didn't seem to struggle with finding something to praise God for. Today, as we celebrate the faithfulness of God in his provision of another harvest, we take this one, a Psalm praising God as the creator.

Paul writing to the Christians in Rome centuries later would point out to them that, “since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” The same was apparent to the Psalmist. He looked around at the world in which he lived and he saw the nature and power of God and that brought a song of praise to his lips.

I remember some years back being in Sorrento and walking round a Museum. There were lots of paintings by Teodoro Duclere. We came away talking about him and his eye for detail. The paintings caused us to praise the painter. How much more was that so for the Psalmist as he looked at creation? It caused a great song of praise for what it told him about his God.

Creation spoke to him of what God had done.

V5.... the whole earth, however the Psalmist understood it in his day, had been established by God. All that he saw in his world, and the very much more that we see and are aware of in our world was made by God. How great and powerful is God!

As we look around the world we see some pretty amazing things, buildings such as St Paul's Cathedral and we think of Sir Christopher Wren. We see great works of art like the Hay wain and think of John Constable or read books like Harry Potter and think of JK Rowling and so on.

So with the natural world it speaks to us of God and his greatness. It has, as it were, the fingerprints of the creator in it and especially, as the Psalmist points out in v2, it speaks of God's

splendour and majesty. It tells us how great and powerful God is. The Psalmist didn't look at the world and say how great is the world, he looked at the world and said how great is God! He is the one who made and inhabits the pure light v2. He is the one who created the sky. V6 speaks of the waters covering the whole earth as in Gen 1.2 and then in v7-9 God shows more of his power in that he sets boundaries for those seas. King Canute couldn't stop the water but God could.

But creation didn't just speak to the Psalmist about what God had done but also about what God continues to do. For he could see that God was still active in the world. He had made it but he also maintains it. It is that thought which is relevant to our Harvest thanksgiving. God has made the world and he continues to be at work in it providing for all he has made. Just a quick glance over vs10-23 make that clear.

V10 He makes, notice the present tense, springs pour out and v11 they water the animals, v12 they benefit the birds and v14 they benefit man. V19 God continues the seasons and v21 the animals look to God for food – shades of Matt6.25-34 – your heavenly father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the field.

In the regular return of day and night and the changing of the seasons the Psalmist saw the hand of God at work in and maintaining creation. As Spurgeon put it “watch but a blade of grass with a devout eye and you may see God at work within it. The herb is for man and he must till the soil or it will not be produced. Yet it is God that causeth it to grow.”

The Psalmist saw that God was still concerned for what he had made. The waters, which had covered the earth and which God by his power had put in the place continue to flow under God's hand to bless the earth and everything that lives on it.

But why? Why has God made the earth and why does he continue to maintain it?

I don't think the Psalmist was in any doubt over this. The section v14-23 puts humanity at the centre of creation as the word man provides the bookends to the passage v14, “plants for man to cultivate”, v23, “Then man goes out to his work “. Why has God made this world? Why does he keep it going? For us and for our benefit.

V13 he waters the ground to provide for beasts and humans alike and it is that regular provision, culminating in the harvest which we recognise and thank God for today. God has ordered the world for our blessing and benefit.

The vine, the olive tree and the grain stalk, three fundamental plants in the middle east, are there for the benefit of humanity v15, “wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face

shine, and bread that sustains his heart.” This ties in with the rest of Scripture doesn’t it of Genesis telling us we are made in the image and likeness of God and Psalm 8 showing us as the crown of creation. Creation is for our benefit and if we take time to think about it that is exactly what happens and why the Psalmist praises God.

Creation assaults and blesses all of our senses doesn’t it? Mountains assault – autumn colours bless the sight; the roar of thunder assaults, the purring of a cat blesses the ear; the smell of the cow byre assaults but the smell of the rose blesses the nose; what about the lemon and the peach; sharp rock and soft fur? Can you see what I’m saying? Creation touches and affects us at every level and in many ways. This was why the Psalmist praised the God of creation and why we do today. Creation, as we noted from Paul earlier, reveals the nature of our God but it does more than that. Because it is of God and bears his finger prints as it were it also brings something of God into our lives. So it gives us 3 reasons to praise God.

Creation stimulates us. That’s what we’ve just been noticing with our senses but then it does more than that doesn’t it. It creates in us a sense of awe and wonder. Awe in terms fear because of the size and power be it the huge mountain the thunderstorm, such as the one we had about ten days ago, the vast ocean or forest. But also awe and wonder because we see the power behind those same things and sigh with the Psalmist “O Lord my God you are very great.” We’ve all been there on top of a mountain, or watching waves crash against the sea wall of the sun slowly slipping below the horizon and been moved in wonder at the splendour and majesty of God. Creation touches us because we are made in the image of the creator.

Creation satisfies v27-30 remind us that all life is in the hand of the creator and as we have seen he sustains his creation. He satisfies us with good things. Harvest is a recognition of that as we stop to think of God’s provision and see how the harvest speaks to us of the nature of our God in that he is a God of goodness and he is generous. We see that echoed in another Psalm which I often think of as the harvest Psalm, Ps 65.11, “You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.”

However we have to recognise that while creation and harvest may satisfy us in the wealthy west there are many for whom creation does not satisfy and with the effect humanity is having on the created world are increasingly unlikely to be satisfied without some action by people like us both in providing aid but also in a change of lifestyle to protect our planet.

Creation secures. This isn’t just finding another s but reminding us that in the light of a God of awesome power who is caring and generous towards his creation we can therefore be secure.

Yes some things may scare us but in God we can be secure. Secure when the things of life threaten us – Psalm 121.1&2, “lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Secure when the things of death threaten us Psalm 23.4a, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”. It is this security which caused the Psalmist to say v33a “I will sing to the LORD all my life” but also the slightly odd v35 “But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more”, which shows the recognition that the sin which mars creation will ultimately be swept away by the power of God and so in a sense this Psalm is a sketch of what creation once was and once more will be. God is the God of eternity who is able to keep us in this life and into the next.

Creation stimulates, satisfies and secures.

So our response should be the same as the Psalmist to praise the God of creation for his splendour and majesty. And I think I would add alongside that to enjoy the creation that God has given to us, be it walking on a sandy beach, sitting under a starry sky, swimming in a gentle river or whatever, God’s wonderful creation is there for us to benefit from and praise him for. But our response should also be to allow it to help us trust him more. To lift our eyes to the hills and know his power to help and keep us and to step forward knowing that at every step of the path no matter how steep it may be God is there with us and for us.

When our children were young we had a house in Malvern in Worcestershire and would often walk in the hills and a favourite walk was up to the Worcester beacon. Usually the walk would begin well with the kids skipping and running. At times they would need to sit and rest and then, as they flagged, they would lag behind a bit. I would take them by the hand to keep them going and often ended up giving one or other them a piggy back to get them to the top of the hill. Hopefully you can see the analogy with how the God of creation keeps us going when things get tough.

I don’t know what faces you this week but for some I’m sure the week will seem up hill. Perhaps as you struggle with being on your own following the death of a loved one, or with ill health or with problems at home or work, or you may feel out of step with God. Let me encourage you as it were to lift your eyes, to know that he who made the mountains is with you. V2 O lord **my** God – the Psalmist reminds us that it is not just God who is powerful but my God who has shown himself to be our heavenly Father and whom we can trust in every situation of life.

Praise the Lord O my soul are the opening and closing words of the Psalm. Praise because of the greatness of our God but praise because this God, who is awesome and mighty is our God whom we can talk to, whom we can call to for help and who will keep and guide us through this life and into eternity.