

## Christ in Creation

Jan Wiersma

Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

5th Sunday of Easter - May 15, 2022

Texts: Psalm 148, John 13:31-35

Psalm 148 (*from The Iona Community*)

Praise God! Shout your praises from the heavens, declare them from the heights.

**Sing praises, all you angels and heavenly beings,**

**sing praises, sun and moon, and glittering stars.**

Praise God, you highest heavens, you waters above the heavens.

**Praise the name of God who called you forth, who established you forever and ever.**

Shout praises, all the earth, sea monsters and all depths.

**Fire and hail, snow and frost, storm winds, fulfilling God's word.**

Mountains and all hills, orchards and cedars, you beasts, both wild and tame, reptiles and birds.

**Monarchs of earth and all people, rulers and judges of every land.**

Women and men, young and old, praise the name above all names,

**Whose splendor is above the earth and heavens, giving strength and hope to the people!**

### A READING: On Christ in Creation

Every resurrection story found in the Gospels affirms an ambiguous—yet certain—presence of the Risen Christ in very ordinary settings, like walking on the road to Emmaus with a stranger, roasting fish on the beach, or looking like a gardener to Mary Magdalene. These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God's Presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions. The core message of the incarnation of God in Jesus is that the Divine Presence is here, in us and in all of creation, and not only "over there" in some far-off realm. When Jesus spoke the words "This is my Body," I believe he was speaking not just about the bread right in front of him, but about the whole universe, about every thing that is physical, material, and yet also spirit-filled. (From Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditations*, April 24-25.)

*John 13:31-35 Today's Gospel concerns Jesus' command to the disciples to love one another. Before I read it, I want to acknowledge that grievous events are taking place in the world today. War, too, is an offense against the body of Christ. Hear the contrast between works of mercy and works of war, as described in The Catholic Worker, a publication of the Dorothy Day House.*

*At Jesus' last earthly supper, after washing his disciples' feet, he leaves them with one final gift: love for one another. When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." This is the good news which we have received, in which we stand, and by which we are saved.*



I went out, and I came back, and all I saw along the way was beauty. When I got off the plane in Philadelphia, petals were already falling from the flowering crabs, and daffodils were drooping. Then, on the long drive back home, spring seemed to fold back on itself. Time flowed in reverse. All of it was beautiful. But home was the most beautiful of all. Not just because the eyes of the daffodils and bluebells are wide open in our garden, not just because the redbud we planted last year is cloaked in color. Home is beautiful because we love it.

Love sees beauty in the beloved. On the seventh day of creation, God looked on the brand new world and called it good. God poured love into every ounce and atom of the universe; and so all of it is beautiful to God. What does it mean that the world is beautiful to *us*? Do we even see its beauty? Can we see the hand of God at work? Can we see God's face in the open face of the dogwood flower? The velvety purple pansy? In the nub of asparagus just pushing through the soil? The spiritual seekers we call mystics see God in all things; to an extent, we all can and do.

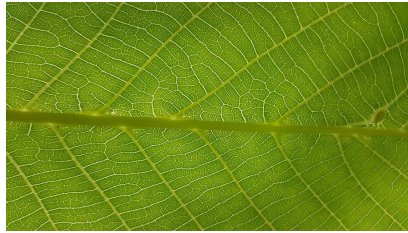
Bamako, the capital of the West African nation of Mali, did not initially appear as a likely place for a mystical experience. My first impression was not of beauty. Streets seemed all dust and dirt, buildings sagged and groaned. Beggars were everywhere; those disfigured by leprosy thrust out fingerless hands, forcing us to glimpse their grim lives. Leaving Bamako, we spent the night in a bare field that served as bus terminal, wide awake on the half-filled bus, waiting for enough passengers to make a full load to the Ivory Coast. All through the night, African travelers sat together beneath a lone tree, talking, laughing, singing. Music poured out of a boom box: the spicy complicated rhythms of the region. And without a breath of air moving, the tree above those travelers *danced*: it swayed and shook and shimmied and glorified God for life and for love. And then everything was beautiful, even the dust and the dirt and the beggars. All of it was part of God, one with God. Praising God. Where we walk and where we dance is holy.



When we see and celebrate the beauty of the earth, when we strive toward a way of life that not only benefits from the vast generosity of nature but equally gives back to it, life for life, love for love, when we recognize our home, mother earth, the planet herself as a living being, we do not worship nature—we are not pagans, though they may have something to teach us—but we join nature in worshiping God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Gaia, Wakefield Cathedral, Great Britain.** A temporary art installation in the nave of the cathedral in August 2021 as part of the city's 'Festival of the Earth', consisting of a seven metre diameter globe covered in a seamless set of NASA satellite images, representing the earth as seen from space at a scale of 1cm to 18km. Here we see South America with cloud covering most of the southern Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Photograph by Stephen Craven.

And as Christians, we see all creation as emerging from the living Christ, who is, the Bible tells



us (Colossians 1:15-17) “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; [*for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers*]—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” If Jesus is the single historic presence who meets us face to face as God in flesh, the universal

Christ is the life of God *alive in all flesh*, in everything that has life and breath. Including, as the psalm says, sun, moon and stars, mountains and hills, orchards and trees, fire and hail, snow and frost, all doing God’s bidding: each loving and praising God. “Every leaf, every tree, every stone will attest that to everyone and everything God says, ‘YES!’”

When Jesus, just before his suffering and death, commanded his disciples to love one another, he wasn’t telling them never to disagree (sometimes we come to truth only through bumping up against each other), and he wasn’t telling them to circle the wagons and keep the love inside and the enemy at bay. He was telling them to love as he loves, with a wide-open heart, and eyes that see beauty in everything, answering the spark of God that lives within every one. When you love that way, you can’t look at *anyone* (no matter how wrong-headed they may seem to you) as a mistake or a problem to be solved but as another expression of God in Christ, as much as you yourself are. It’s so simple it’s hard to understand. And sometimes hard to swallow, because the Light of Christ seems so dim and overgrown with sin at some times and in some people. Sometimes, though, the error is in our own eyes. Are we prepared for that, too?

The twentieth-century Trappist mystic Thomas Merton (1915–1968) wrote, “When you and I become what we are really meant to be, we will discover not only that we love one another perfectly but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ.”

Do you think you love your family, your neighbor; Jesus? Do you ever think you would like to love them more, or love God better? Then you need to be aware that every wound inflicted on this suffering earth, every clear-cut forest, every leveled-off mountaintop, every oil spill, and every act of violence or injury of war is also a wound on the body of Christ, whom we claim to love and follow. That is why observing Earth Day is so important. For Christians, it means learning to love this world and all that is in it as God loved the newborn earth, and to treat it with the reverence it deserves.



Can we love like that? Not immediately, not perfectly, not consistently. But we can try. We can always try to love and see the beauty. And we do not try alone. All creation joins in praise.

**Prayers:**

Creator God, we celebrate your gift of Earth, your gift of all Creation. We give thanks that you embodied your love in Jesus, made your compassion real with the dust of the earth, and so blessed our lives, our breath and our bodies. Loving Creator, we renew our reverence for your gift. We look to Earth not as a “resource,” for our use, but a temple of your presence, a living being that we are part of and in relationship with. May we love as you love. God our Savior,

With sorrow, we remember all the insults, injuries and wounds our actions inflict upon your world and your people. We mourn the divisions and separations in our own nation that deny your command to love one another. We pray that we may always seek to be healers, working mercy, rather than striving for conquest. God our Savior,

We thank you for life in community, for these others you have given us to know and to love: we pray especially for those we know to be ill, isolated, in transition, healing, or facing the end of life, and for all who suffer from the ongoing menace of covid and of war. May your realm of healing love be brought to birth in and among us, for as you taught us, we now pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name....”

Also shared during worship was this quote contrasting the works of mercy as taught by Jesus and practiced by Christians to the works of war, from *The Catholic Worker*, a publication of The Catholic Worker Movement founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin:

**The works of mercy:**

Feed the hungry  
Give drink to the thirsty  
Cloth the naked  
Visit the sick  
Shelter the homeless  
Visit the prisoners  
Bury the dead  
Pray for the living and the dead

**The works of war:**

Destroy crops and land  
Seize food supplied  
Destroy homes and villages  
Scatter families  
Contaminate water  
Imprison dissenters  
Inflict wounds and burns  
Kill the living