

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
September 1, 2013

God Creates

Read Psalm 104:5-9, 24-30

Key verse: “Lord, you have done so many things! You made them all so wisely!” (Psalm 104:24)

As a young adult, I went through a period of “experimental agnosticism.” If God existed, I decided, He didn’t have much of anything to do with my life. And I was going to return the favor.

I eventually found my agnosticism unsatisfying in a number of ways. I remember one particular experience that made me reconsider things.

It was the first week of spring. I remember that I took a walk through a park. The sky was a cloudless blue and almost seemed to crackle with the bright sunlight. I stopped under a crab-apple tree that was covered with fragrant white blossoms.

I remember that I looked up through that sea of white, swaying in the warm breeze. I breathed in the apple-blossom aroma, and I watched the sun glinting off the white blooms. Then suddenly it hit me: My heart was filled with gratitude for this great gift of life—but I had no one to thank for it. Since I no longer acknowledged the Giver, who could I thank for the gift?

Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to God as our creator, the giver and sustainer of life. The psalmist borrows heavily from the creation narrative in Genesis 1. And his focus is on the visible creation around him as that which reveals and displays God’s glory.

Verses 5-9 sing of the earth’s solid foundations and secure boundaries:
“You set the earth on its foundations, so that it will never be shaken.

You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them.

You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.”

Verses 24-30 acknowledge God the creator’s glory displayed in the sea life (vv. 24-26) and God as the sustainer of life on earth (vv. 27-30).

God the creator's glory in the sea life (vv. 24-26):

"O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it."

Three years ago, after a decade of research involving some 3,000 researchers, scientists presented the first "Census of Marine Life." Those researchers discovered 6,000 *new* species. That brings the total number of known marine species to 250,000.

Highlights included 600-year-old tube worms, herring that swim in formations as large as Manhattan, the "yeti crab" which features long downy claws like fur mittens, a jellyfish with a Darth-Vader-like helmet, and another species of jellyfish that uses lights to "scream" for help.

The scientists who worked on this project were often surprised and stunned by the diversity, abundance, and beauty of God's creation. One of the leaders of the project said, "Life astonished us everywhere we looked.... The discoveries of new species and habitats both advanced science and inspired artists with their extraordinary beauty." Another researcher said, "The most surprising thing was the beauty.... Our eyes pumped out of our heads in front of this beauty."

God as the sustainer of life (vv. 27-30):

"These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hands, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground."

I now live on Florida's beautiful Gulf coast. I have long since abandoned agnosticism and returned to the Christian faith. A few days ago, I drove over a local bridge that spans a pass which connects the bay and the gulf. On top of that bridge, I looked out at emerald waters glistening in the sunlight of early fall. My heart was filled with gratitude to the creator and giver of life. How glad I am that I can both know God and praise God:

"Lord, you have done so many things! You made them all so wisely!"

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)

