



**A sermon by E. Scott Winnette
Praise with and for the Earth ~ Psalm 148
April 26, 2020**

Before florescent highlighters, before they highlighted any word, or sentence the Psalms called for neon bright praises. The Psalms **highlighted praising extoling** Creation's appreciations of the Creator. The Psalmist's praise is more than a thanks; it's a highlight, a high-five, a "Wow! Everyone look what God did!"

Before the incandescent bulb, before Broadway, long before any spotlight's shine on any celebrity, the Hebrew term we translate as "praise" meant to "shine upon", to "boast of." Psalm 148 declares the heavens, the heights, the angels, all hosts, sun, moon, stars, waters – all of them highlight God, praise God, admire God, boast of God. The earth, whales, snow, dew, tornadoes, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedar trees, wild and tame animals – **all draw attention appreciatively**, all shine light upon, all boast, all praise God. "Wow! Everyone look what she did!"

I denounce the shallow theology what the Prosperity Gospels call praise music. Praise isn't quid pro quo, isn't transactional – **I thank you God; therefore give me what I want**. To praise is to highlight – to draw florescent boundaries around the things we appreciate. Praise organically bursts from us as we allow ourselves to enjoy beauty, to be amazed with creativity, as we allow ourselves to appreciate, as we celebrate announcing, "hey everybody – look at this good, great, amazing thing, person, act." We praise coloring bright circles of gratitude around the things we appreciate.

In C.S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms*, he praised the praiser. "The humblest, and at the same time, most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works;

the bodones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected [person], even if luxuriously brought up and widely experienced in good cookery, could praise a very modest meal; the dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all.”

To be tightfisted about praise is to be half-alive, with eyes squinting, with heart and mind ferociously determined to shun beauty. The Apostle Paul in his jailed times, sang the Psalms. Today, we in our jailed sequestered living can benefit entering earth’s beauty through sanctioned socially distancing walks, through perusing old photo albums, through reminiscing with a friend. This Earth Day I urge you to find a tree, find a photo of a tree, look out a window towards a tree, remember a tree, or sit beneath a canopy and meditate upon it until words come forth, until your heart demands praise, and you draw florescent colors of appreciation of the tree and neon thanks glows with thanks to its Creator.

Katherine Abbot of Chatham, New Jersey proposes that praise should be a protector of the natural world. She praised a grove of trees surrounding a public pool. *“About two miles from my parish, there is a place where on these blazing hot summer days, you can enter a green lawn under an enclosure of towering oak trees and feel ten degrees cooler. The oaks surrounded an ancient spring-fed pond. ...Since 1995, I have raised my children on the partially shaded beach side of the pool... You feel an almost parental comfort from the stately trees. When you reach a relaxed equilibrium of playing, chatting or observing, you may notice the abiding presence of the trees. Amidst the gentle rustle of the leaves, you can become in tune with the hum, the perpetual motion of the earth’s energy within and without. The trees are breathing themselves, sending our lungs pure oxygen, and we, in a divinely complementary way, return the favor by breathing out carbon dioxide. In addition, the trees are performing transpiration by releasing fine water droplets through their leaves, thereby cooling all organisms living beneath their canopy. As one of these organisms, you may sense that you are nourished and suspended in a larger whole. This feeling of comfort from nature, this almost womb-like experience, is called Biophilia, the love of nature. Biophilia, a term coined by biologist E.O. Wilson, leads us to seek recreation in beautiful natural places, with water, scenic landscapes and clear skies. We want to recharge, re-create ourselves in natural spaces where we momentarily feel free from personal obstacles and challenges. Theologian David Toolan, calls this felt-sense of belonging to the infinite a “cosmic embrace.””¹* After praising the towering oaks, their beauty, their gifts she protests how city staff cut them down. First seven oaks were cut down to keep the leaves and acorns from falling into the pool. Then seven more were killed adding a storm drain. Had the City listened to the parents praise the shade, praise the beauty, articulate the serenity of the tree encircled pool, they may have been convinced to celebrate and protect the trees.

We praise God by planting trees. Rockville United Church has been planting trees: redbud trees behind the offices, dogwood and cherry in the Memorial Garden, a tree given by the Junods, a new birch tree, trees from native gardener, Anna Goodman. When you can get

¹ Kathy Abbott. Praise as Protector of the Natural World. [Crosscurrents](#). December 2013.

again to your Church's grounds, develop friendships, praise-ships with the trees. As our congregation's gift to this year's graduates the Faith Formation Committee will plant a tree.

Once a traveler came across an old woman who was stooped over what appeared to be thin sticks. He asked the woman what she was doing. "I am planting orange trees." He thought this a waste of her time. "Why do you bother? You are an old woman. These saplings will take years before they will be old enough to bear fruit. You will be long gone by then." "True enough," she answered. "But I don't plant these trees for myself but for those who will come after me, just as those before me planted the trees that bear the fruit that I eat today."

Wednesday at 6:30PM we will watch a similar story, written by Jean Giono, *The Man Who Planted Trees*. Join us in celebrating how one person over decades turned a dry, lifeless, desolate valley into a vibrant habitat. Our praise with and for the Earth, brings beauty, brings life, brings love, brings hope.

Poet Auden highlights the power of poets to lead us to praise.

Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice,
With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress,
In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of her days
Teach the free [ones] how to praise. Amen.