

# 1,000 Things to Worry About

Sermon by Pastor Patricia Geiseman  
Season of Creation 3: Sky  
Jeremiah 4:23-28  
Psalm 19:1-6  
September 22-23, 2018

Some of you will remember that, on July 20, 1969, Apollo 11's lunar module *Eagle* landed in the Sea of Tranquility on the moon's surface. Neil Armstrong climbed down the ladder and proclaimed, "That's one small step for a man, one giant step for mankind."

That night my mother urged all of us to go outside and look up at the moon. "Imagine!" she said. "Men are up there, right now!"

At age fifteen, I thought it would be better to watch the whole thing on TV. But I did go outside and look at the moon. And I am glad I did. My mother was right. Because of that, I remember the event.

I read that, in the last seconds during the descent, alarms went off. It was the computer was trying to do too many things at once. Armstrong later said that landing was his biggest concern. "The unknowns were rampant ... There were about 1,000 things to worry about."

Indeed. You don't have to be an astronaut trying to land a moon module to feel that there are about 1,000 things to worry about! Unknowns are rampant!

Our focus for this weekend in the Season of Creation is SKY. The Sky and its jewels of light—the sun, moon and star—have intrigued, inspired, frightened, and directed humanity since the beginning of time.

In the Bible the term "heavens" is used both for the physical location of the skies *and* for the dwelling place of God. Skies are associated with the divine/spiritual realm and Earth with the material realm. We remember stories of Moses and Mt. Sinai, where God is present but not visible in the cloud of darkness, in thunder and lightning, as the mountain shakes. But we also read that God traveled with the people.

In our lesson today, Jeremiah is sounding the alarms! He shares a vision of destruction, and in the preceding verses, of pending war:

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. (Jeremiah 4:19, NRSV)

Jeremiah forecasts dark days for the people. The Babylonians would overtake them and haul them into exile. But he speaks to more than political unrest. It was more than “poor us!” “Bad Babylon.” The descending darkness would concern the people who in some ways were already exiled, living separated from hearts of justice, community-mindedness, and compassion. Their apathy and denial have resulted in vulnerability to other powers and would have consequences for all of Creation. The devastation the prophet describes includes a reversal of the created order.

Jeremiah sounds the alarms. The cost of injustice, apathy, and denial would be high! Creation would suffer and bear witness to the consequences of humankind living only for self and forgetting their hope in God. “I looked...and to the heavens, and they had no light.” (Jeremiah 4:23, NRSV)

The prophet pleads for the community to pay attention and return to God with covenant written on their hearts. [1]

Still, the heavens turn black. Still, apathy and denial form dark clouds of war, injustice, violence, and misery. Still, creation groans.

Ah! But we are modern people. We listen to meteorologists who have Ph.Ds. and use satellites. We know that dark clouds are not signs of divine wrath but a developing storm. There are many kinds of clouds, and a quick search on the internet can tell us all about them: cumulonimbus, scrub, shelf, wall, funnel and tornado. Dark clouds are dark because they are thick with rain droplets, so dense that light cannot penetrate. Atmospherically, dark clouds are *not* signs of an angry God.

Metaphorically, we know of dark clouds in our lives and in our world. There are times when sunlight—rays of life and hope and new growth—cannot easily shine through. Injustice clouds the air and makes it tough for some people to breathe.

Injustice takes many forms: pollution of the air, language, and violence. There are many ways to be reckless, with the earth and in our relationships with each other.

The United States’ long battle against air pollution isn’t over yet. One study revealed that, following five decades of progress in cleaning up our air, U.S. pollution gains have slowed significantly in recent years. This means it might be more difficult than previously thought for the U.S. to achieve its goal of cleaner air. Exposure to elevated ozone can lead to coughing and difficulty breathing, and make respiratory diseases such as asthma worse.

Other injustices cloud the air, making living and breathing harder.

This past summer many people from St. Mark’s read and studied ELCA’s [“Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice.”](#) Everyone is invited to go online, read the document, and respond on line (the deadline is September 30). This needed statement on justice will inform, guide and, transform us.

People of St. Mark's also gathered for several weeks to study the refugee crisis, to learn more about the dark clouds that descend on vulnerable people and what the church can do in order to shine light on apathy and denial.

And this week we start a study on the Enneagram, using the book *The Road Back to You*. The Enneagram helps people understand who they are and why they see and relate to the world the way they do. As one spiritual director said,

It's full of wisdom for people who want to get out of their own way and become who they were created to be.

As long we stay in the dark about how we see the world and the wounds and beliefs that have shaped who we are, we're prisoners of our history.  
[2]

Even if you cannot attend either class, I encourage you to read the book. The dark clouds of our atmosphere have many factors, including us!

The ancient people blamed the Babylonians for all their troubles. And we sometimes do the same, blaming someone else.

A long time ago in my first call, when I was a very young pastor, I visited an older woman who lived alone out in the country. No one gave me any heads up. Vera was well into her eighties, eccentric, paranoid, and suffering from dementia, about which I knew very little. On our first visit, Vera told me that all of the problems of the world and the country (back in 1980) were because of moon rocks! Yes. She said the astronauts should never have brought moon rocks back. As she looked me straight in the eye, I wondered how I could get out of there, but instead asked, very pastorally, how she knew this. She told me she heard it on the radio. She also heard many other things on the radio. I learned quickly there was no way to offer a different possibility. I felt as if I were on a different planet! This never changed, and no one ever really talked about it. I learned I had to roll with the moon-rock theory and try to offer at least a peaceful, trustworthy presence.

Our blaming of others for our dark clouds may not be this outrageous. But we do it. We blame others for just about everything. We blame our parents, our spouse, our boss, our kids, our government; we blame the Democrats and the Republicans. Blaming doesn't get us anywhere.

In *The Road Back to You*, we read, "You are the only person who is consistently present in every scene of that long running the drama we call our life." [4] In other words, the source of most of your problems is you. AND, until we face that we are the source of most of our problems, the dark cloud of disappointment will hang over our heads. And we will be stuck, like poor Vera.

The old, desperate, frantic, prophet Jeremiah pleaded with the people to remember who they were.

When we look at the dark side of our own personality, and loosen our grip on self-defeating behavior, we are opened to the Light. We can again participate in God's gracious goals.

The Psalm for this weekend is one of praise for the heavens; the stars, moon, and sun sing praises that cannot be heard. Their existence is a song! It is good and healing to understand our world and ourselves.

Still, humanity reaches into space, seeking to know and understand what and who may be out there. Still, the idea of walking on the moon seems remarkable.

When my husband, Ed, and I fly to Australia, we fly non-stop from San Francisco to Sydney. It is a long flight. And I prefer *not* to watch the monitor of the little speck of the plane moving over the ocean on the screen in front of my seat. It is a time for trusting, not tracking

But you know what is even more remarkable? In Australia there are some migratory birds that fly south to escape the arctic winter. They fly a minimum of 25,000 km, or 15,534 miles, every year, just in migration! There are some bird species that fly further than the distance between earth and the moon in their lifetime.

One species, the bar-tailed godwits, flies non-stop from Alaska to New Zealand—almost 7,000 miles—in 8 days, without landing! Isn't that something? (Many of these migratory birds are endangered due to the loss of wetlands. Historically, humans have filled in wetlands in order to build on them, not realizing or noticing that other species depended on them. Now scientists and others are working to preserve and create new wetlands.)

Jeremiah spoke to people who were in despair. He urged them to look closely at the dark clouds ... and their own suffering.

So we reflect on our dark clouds, times of doubt, despair, discouragement, and denial. Even if we are not landing a lunar module, there can be 1,000 things to worry about!

How has the light of new life shone through the stormy times?

Here in the community of faith, we confess our need for light. We gather for worship, to have our wings washed by the waters of baptismal promise and power. Guilt and shame are lifted away like oil that sticks to feathers.

We are freed to fly again. To be part of the heavens and Earth. To live lives that praise the Creator.

And week after week, we pray with Jesus and with each other:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ... your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ...

We trust each other with our real selves.

“Unknowns are rampant. There are about 1,000 things to worry about.” Dark clouds form.

And ... the kingdom of God comes again. In our confession, courage, and compassion.

And there is Light!

Amen.

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Resources:

[1] *Seasons of the Spirit*, “Season of Creation.” pg 54.

[2] Cron, Ian Morgan and Suzanne Stabile, *The Road Back to You*, InterVarsity Press, 2016, pg 14, 15.

[3] *The Road Back to You*, pg 37.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What are some consequences we live with on our planet due to human self-interest?*
- *Why do you think it can be easy to live in denial? Or to blame others for suffering?*
- *Can you think of a time when you drew closer to God’s promises after something was nearly lost?*
- *Can you remember what it felt like to be “found again”?*