

“Give Thanks”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
World Communion Sunday – October 2, 2011

## Psalm 19

This world in which we live is filled with violence. It is filled with the natural violence of storms and floods and earthquakes and tornadoes. It is filled with the man-made violence of hatred, oppression, anger, and greed. It is filled with such an endless stream of violence that it can be difficult for us to see anything but darkness.

Sometimes that conflict from the world seeps into the church, as the church's history clearly shows. For hundreds of years, the Church has suffered from divisions of all shapes and sizes. Church councils which caused the separation of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the Protestant Reformation, the inevitable ties between church and state which caused division and conflict, the Civil War and its divide of our own denomination in this country for over 100 years. Although we would like to think that the church is perfect because God and Christ instituted it through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is nonetheless composed of imperfect human beings. Our arrogance, our selfish desires, our emotional memories cause us to act in ways which are hardly Christ-like.

And yet, we are indeed part of a global family. As Christians, as citizens, as human beings – we are a worldwide fellowship which is as strongly united as it is so widely diverse. Today, we are asked to remember that reality on what is called World Communion Sunday. This is a day which, at least for me, has much more meaning today than it has in the past. In a post-9/11 world, we are reminded that God loves all people – all people – and that reality is grounded in God's son, Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 19, we hear the psalmist sing of God's providential love and care for the entire earth. It is a fitting psalm on which to reflect on this World Communion Sunday, for we not only hear of God's beauty in the created world, but also the gift of God's Word to humanity, and how our proper response to that gift is abundant thanksgiving.

The first section of the psalm speaks of God's beauty in creation. Verses 1-6 describe the cycle of days which the Lord has set for humanity, and the ways the created beings give glory to their creator. “Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words . . . yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (19:2-4). While the sun and moon and stars and earth do not “speak” as us humans speak, they do tell us the story of God's goodness and might. It is in our observing and appreciating this beautiful creation that we truly hear “the heavens telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaiming his handiwork” (19:1).

The second section of the psalm, verses 7-10, speaks to the gift God has given humanity in the form of God's Word – the Torah, the law, God's instruction for his creatures. We as humans cannot just find God's goodness in the creation, but must also receive the guidance which is God's Word, a path for humanity to be in a right relationship with God. God's Word revives our soul, makes wise the simple, brings joy to the heart, and endures forever and ever (19:7-9). Indeed, “humans live not by our ability to earn, achieve, or possess, but ‘by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

In the final section, verses 11-14, the psalmist speaks for us all in asking God's guidance and grace in following God's Word. We hear in these verses a penitence on the

part of the psalmist, even a call to confession and seeking forgiveness: “Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me” (19:12-13). It is only through the power and grace of the Creator that the human can truly discover the reward which may be found in following God’s Word.

As one commentator writes, “In essence, Psalm 19 affirms that love is the basic reality. According to the psalmist, God whose sovereignty is proclaimed by cosmic voices is the God who has addressed a personal word to humankind – God’s *torah*. Furthermore, this God is experienced ultimately by humankind not as a cosmic enforcer but as a forgiving next of kin! God is love, and love is the force that drives the cosmos. This is, indeed, an extraordinary thought!” (J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 4, Abingdon Press, Nashville, © 1996: 751-753)

Psalm 19 is an affirmation of God’s providence and care for both the creation and those who inhabit this creation. That is evident in the language used by the psalmist, for the Hebrew language itself reflects the close tie between the earth and humanity: *adam* (humanity) and *adama* (earth). Just as we are connected to the only home we have been given, we too are connected to one another as a family of faith.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). The peace we are called to seek is in response to this extraordinary love which the psalmist praises in Psalm 19. If we claim our identity as children of the living God, then we are stirred to seek the peace which God has set forth in his creation.

I believe this congregation is called to be peacemakers in its future. Two weeks ago, several of this church’s leaders spent time in prayer, discernment, and discussion about where God may be leading us as a congregation in the years to come. That discernment was centered on the Beatitudes, and one which your leaders strongly claimed was that of peacemakers. We spoke that day of seeking peace with one another, with our neighbors, and within our community. We spoke of the peace which Christ models, and how we are called to model that peace in small yet significant ways each day. We dreamed of how the light of God might transform our community and world through the peacemaking efforts of the women, men, and children of John Knox Presbyterian Church.

On this day when we dedicate the Peacemaking Offering of the Presbyterian Church, may all that we offer to God seek to bring reconciliation and wholeness to God’s creation. On this day when we share the Lord’s Supper with Christians across the world, may we not be afraid to show grace and peace to all of our neighbors – no matter their race, language, ethnicity, or culture. On this day when we recognize God’s glory and love in both creation and the Word, may we step forward in faith, giving thanks for all God has bestowed on us. “Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.” Amen.