



4.7.24 God's Wide World | Psalm 104:5-24 & Job 12:7-10

It was so good to celebrate Easter together! Good to be together to worship and celebrate the risen Lord! Christ proved himself Lord over death and the grave!

In rising from the dead, the Lord also offers us a new quality of life. Part of our new lives is celebrating truth. Such as, Jesus is Lord of Lords, lord over all things.

Jesus is Lord over all power and authorities, over the Evil One, over death and the grave, he is Lord over sin and sickness, Lord over all humans and governments, AND he is Lord over ALL the earth.

This was highlighted for us last Sunday when Jesus said at the end of the gospel of Mark, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”**

We are to be good news and bring good news to people AND be good news and bring good news to the planet. Loving others also means taking care of this earth we all live on.

For the rest of April, we will be exploring this connection between God and creation. And I am so excited! We will be acknowledging how we are inextricably intertwined and interdependent not only with one another but also interdependent within a shared eco-system.

We sometimes forget we are interdependent and interconnected. Sometimes we get caught up in our own stuff, forgetting the world does NOT revolve around us. What?!

Just think of the benefits as we explore these concepts more fully. What might we gain in perspective, in appreciation, gain in wonder in awe, when we slow down and notice nature?

What does creation tell us about God and ourselves when we listen? What does nature have to teach us about life and living well?

For example, in our Early Word (at the 10:30 service...in the first service), The Tale of Three Trees, George shared with the kids AND adults, a unique perspective of trees. How that story opened our ears, to hear nature cries out and groans to worship the Lord too! That was perfect for today!

Let me share from my own experience a bit. A time when the Lord met me in nature, used nature to bring comfort and peace.

My grief over my mother's passing was weighing heavily on me. It was so overpowering and impossible to escape. One day, in utter exhaustion and desperation, I just stopped in my tracks and looked out the window.

In fact, at first, I didn't even know I had stopped in my tracks. It hadn't registered that I was looking out a window.

But slowly the grief drained out of me, my mind grew calm, my spirit experienced relief and comfort. And I sort of came to myself asking myself, **“What just happened? Where did the grief go?”**

And when I asked myself about the grief, it was only then I realized I had stopped and had stared out the window, gazing at the lake.

The lake had grown calm like it does in the evening. When the light becomes mellow and soft, an hour or so before sunset. And I realized my body, my eyes intuitively knew to reach out to nature, to look to the lake for solace and a sense of peace.

In those moments, I not only felt calmer in my spirit and peaceful; I also simultaneously felt connected and closer to God. A sense that God was always there, present, and with me each step of the way.

A short but powerful experience where I was reminded, we were created for nature and nature was created for us. Nature has so much to give, has much to teach us about life and help us connect to God.

I am guessing even as I reminisce about nature and connecting with God, you are reflecting back on your own experiences too. Remembering times where being in nature, observing wildlife, noticing creation has also encouraged and supported you in your relationship with God.

Maybe it's when you go for your morning walk, or go puttering around in your garden, when you notice the birds at the birdfeeder, talk to your dog, visit a park, notice the blue sky, or the moon and stars at night or when you go hunting or fishing.

Powerful moments of connecting with God in nature.

We are Minnesotans after all. We love our state. We love our four seasons. We love our outdoor activities. We love nature.

God has especially blessed up with a beautiful state and a beautiful corner, and this special spot created for us. We get these creation truths: nature is a gift from God. God created

nature to help us connect with God, the earth, and others. We are to be responsible stewards of the earth.

This connection to nature is such a strength for us in Minnesota, in Buffalo and this area. It is such a strength, we had to open this sharing to more voices today.

In a moment, we will be hearing from three other women. Glenda Vidmar, Robin Anderson and Rita Varner Otness

And they will also explain Fresh Expressions in more detail, talking about our new ministry opportunity SING, and share another way nature impacts us, helping make a deeper connection to God.

First up will be Glenda.

Second, Robin Anderson.

Third, Rita Varner Otness.

I'd like to express my heart-felt thanks and gratitude to the Fresh Expressions Leadership Team for coming to share with us this morning.

I appreciate their willingness to share about what they are excited about. Their willingness to share how they value connecting with God in nature and promote our Spirituality In Nature Group.

They'll be handing out a brochure with more details after the service.

Our first SING gathering will be on Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30pm at Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park in Monticello, MN. Our first theme will be the Spirituality of Water.

We'll meet at their outdoor amphitheater first. Plenty of parking and bathrooms, no park sticker needed.

We realize for some SING might be part of group they participate in as well as attending church. For others, SING might be their church experience.

They might be leery of organized religion but attending a SING gathering might just work for them.

We have other ministries that reach out to others in love. We need many such expressions from our church. I am just glad we can offer something like this for those who connect with God easier in nature.

In closing, we hear stories in the news every day about global warming and issues with the environment. That can be overwhelming and hard to process.

Participating in a SING group might be a good fit for you, a way to take a step or another step in caring for the earth.

And it is another place to deepen your relationship with God. It is a wonderfully safe and beautiful space to invite friends, family, and kids or grandkids to enjoy those experiences with you.

We welcome all efforts in building a diverse community committed to connecting with God in nature and caring for the earth. Amen.

**Time of Reflection:** Let's take a few quiet moments to thank the Lord for the gift of creation, the gift of nature. And invite God's guidance in how we can become better stewards of our planet.