

Pentecost 2 – June 7, 2020 Cycle A

The natural world has always fascinated me, something I've studied for at least 50 years. I was 12 when I got my first telescope, aimed it at the sky, and “discovered” Jupiter. Obviously, I'm not the first to observe our solar system's largest planet, but I count Jupiter among my “discoveries”, because at the time I only knew I was pointing at something really bright in the evening sky. And I was amazed at the sight! That I recognized Jupiter did not take away from my genuine feelings of discovery. I could see another world – on my own, in my backyard, in my own “wobbly” telescope! Looking back, I know that view wasn't very good. At the time that didn't matter. I had “discovered” something amazing “all by myself” – fueling a desire that has not faded even after 50 years.

As a geophysicist, I was able to make actual discoveries – using data I had planned, gathered, and processed to uncover new facts about our planet, things never known before. I mapped totally buried mountain ranges – that have no surface expression. I discovered deposits of natural gas more than 3 miles below ground. I mapped ancient sea floors and long buried river systems, and helped invent new ways of unraveling their secrets. And I got to work with men and women who were just as passionate about making discoveries as myself. Through it all I learned that the more I found, the more awed I was of the world and its complex history. After 20 years, I retired from geophysics as a profession – not because of the science, not because I had lost any sense of my fascination about the world. I left for two reasons: 1) the politics of the oil business, and 2) my desire to discover more about how the science I understood “connected” with the God of my faith. It wasn't a question of whether science “could be reconciled” with my belief in God. I knew it could! That faith had been growing within me since childhood! What I wanted was to share something of “my discoveries” about this connection with others! And so I set off to become a pastor...

Among the many things I learned in seminary: there are as many things to “discover” in the world of theology as there are in the natural world; things I never expected to learn or “discover” on my own! Among of the richest grounds for discovery: Genesis – that perhaps more than anything else, Genesis is a book of wisdom – about God and about our relationship to God. The first chapter offers the inquisitive many fascinating insights into God. Obviously, God is revealed as the creator of all things. We are wise if we understand this. We are more wise if we realize that chief of among God's Genesis activities is the creation of order. God “separates” light from dark, land from water, heavens from earth, and things living from things that are not. And at each stage God proclaims the result of this creative ordering to be “good”. At completion, surveying the result, God declares the order to be “very good”! Before God acted, the universe was chaos, “formless and void”. Wisdom teaches that chaos is the opposite of “good”, the opposite of God's creative intentions. Before God acted the universe was without life. At the end of God's creative activity the universe is teeming with life, in wondrous variety! The culmination of God's creative life-ordering was the creation of beings capable of appreciating all that God had done – a telling fact. So pleased was God, that God gave us the privilege of naming each thing and stewardship of the order that God had created!

Genesis teaches that God is the creator of order – of life-affirming wondrous order, that is nonetheless free to make choices. This lesson is not often remembered. Many human societies

have “order”, but not of the free, life-affirming kind. The Romans loved “order” – that is, they loved to order people around and use them as they saw fit! Their society, though “ordered” was hardly free and life-affirming. Many governments today similarly love to “order” people around, and severely punish those who “disobey”. They have “order”, but so ponderous that it does not affirm life, it crushes it! Genesis affirms that order is intended for good, that it can be life-affirming – providing the very structure needed for life to thrive, but only if it is properly infused with freedom.

Looking at our society recently, you’d think that order was “the opposite” of good! Riots and violence have taken hold in many places. Lives and property have been destroyed. Lifetimes of labor has been lost. Why? Ostensibly, to protest the unjust, unwarranted death of one man – George Floyd. Yet we must ask, “How does destroying other lives help?” Many are justifiably upset over the George Floyd’s death. Many have tried to make their grievances felt through peaceful protest. But many others are only interested in chaos, in sewing disorder. Bluntly, this the opposite of God’s creating purpose in the world. You could call it “anti-God”, for violence and destruction do not affirm life, they turn life into suffering! Just as bluntly, when an officer charged with maintaining life-affirming order, instead callously and unjustifiably takes life – that too is “anti-God”. When officials charged with maintaining the good order of society, abuse their positions, they are not affirming order. They are sewing chaos! Some of the violence can be “chalked up” to the long-term abuse of office by those in government – who spend more time squabbling amongst themselves and reaching for power than they do in fulfilling their oaths! Some of the violence can be blamed on those in the media who seem to delight in pouring gasoline on a fire! And much can be laid at the feet of all who view other human beings – not as persons reflecting God’s image, but as “objects of scorn” because of skin color or uniform!

Luther argued that governments are instituted by God for the “good order” of society. Certainly, God would have all governments support the common good, but that does not mean that every government is good. Many are not, and should be resisted. But violence is not the way. Rome ran things when Jesus said, “turn the cheek”, “walk the extra mile”, “pray for those who persecute you”, and “love your enemy”! I can assure you; the people of ancient Israel had suffered just as much injustice as anyone today. Random violence and destruction is not the way, not the Way of Jesus Christ! At the same time, those in government are charged with this task: to create life-affirming order for everyone – not simply for one’s friends, not simply for those who look or think like you!

Our God is Triune: Creating, Redeeming, and Life-affirming! God did not simply create and then walk away. Instead, God continues to bring about life, God continues to invest and make sacrifices to shepherd human beings who have gone astray, and God continues to teach and inspire us to love each other, to be more than we are, to give rather than simply receive. God is not “unknowable, unsearchable, and beyond human reach”. Not because we are so great, but because God reveals God’s Self to us – in Scripture, in history, and in the order God has wrought in creation! For all who are open to a relationship, God calls – that we might discover just who we can be in all that God has done and continues to do. It’s a journey that is free, life-affirming, and without end! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen