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God Speaks Through Creation - Psalm 19:1-4

Today we begin a series of sermons called “The God Who Speaks.” Right at the start, I want to make clear that by “speaks” I mean “communicates:” as our psalm says, “of course, there’s no speech, no words – their voices can’t be heard – but their sound extends throughout the world...” So hearing, seeing, feeling – any way that God communicates with us – is what we’re talking about, no matter the words we use to describe it. That the Creator of the universe speaks to us is both a part of our faith, and an idea that is hard to grasp.

Still, God does speak to us, and in many ways. During these next few weeks we’ll examine some of them, and my prayer is that you will “hear” God speak to you in fresh and helpful ways.

To start: God spoke – the first word – and everything came to be. Creation is the result of that first word. We know that word as Christ. God spoke Christ to the world, and everything came to be. In that way, the universe is God’s speech, and the most dramatic display is above us.

Since people first looked up at the night sky humans have heard God. But what have they heard?

God's speech through creation is a bit tricky. Even people of faith often turn to the natural world when they consider God in the abstract. Take all the images that are supposed to be spiritual, remind us of the divine - posters, cards, on the internet. Next time you see one, look closely. Are there people there, or just majestic scenery? Most likely not. Even Christians, who know God directly through people, get pulled back to the theme our psalm starts with this morning: creation. Run to nature to find God! But there's more to this creator God. There's us.

I suspect there are probably more members of the Church of the Sixth Tee than any brick-and-mortar church anywhere. That's the ancient faith that says, "Hey, God's everywhere, right? So can't I worship out there on the golf course?" Or the tennis court, or on the patio looking at the mountains, for that matter.

Which is both the point, and misses the point. The point being that God really is everywhere, and everything just by being bears the mark of its creator God. But that's one of those really big, heady concepts, like love or freedom. Seeing, actually recognizing, that the universe that surrounds us shouts out that there is a God is one way to make that huge concept resonate in your heart. That's good!

Remember the first time you looked up at the night sky here in the desert? The awe? The wonder? The urge to buy a telescope?

That was one way that God spoke to you through creation.

My mother's favorite hymn is "This Is My Father's World;" it may be one of yours, too. Do you recall the first verse? "This is my Father's world, And to my listening ears All nature sings, and round me rings The music of the spheres. This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought."

That is a response to what the psalmist writes: "Heaven is declaring God's glory;" there is a message, a harmony, in nature that speaks, even sings to us.

Where this misses the point is that faith – and the rest of Psalm 19 – argues that music, that message is not all there is: it's the introduction, the invitation to something even greater – how that infinite cosmos, the world that surrounds us, comes down to God's relationship with you and me. God's speech in and through the natural world is not the whole story, and that's where the idea of communing with God up in Madera Canyon as worship enough is incomplete.

Another favorite hymn: "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds thy hands hath made, I see the stars, I

hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed...”

The sheer power of nature, not just in storm and flood and earthquake, but also in growth and fertility and diversity, has long overwhelmed people – reminded them of how little we can actually control, how puny our attempts to influence, to change, really are.

For ages, our ancestors heard a voice in creation that spoke of the divine, but they did not know how to understand its message. We have the key: as Christians, we lay claim to a history that declares that God is speaking to us through all nature, in ways we can understand. And what God is saying is that there is more. For followers of Christ, the words of creation always point to the God who is not simply all-powerful, impressing us with his greatness, but present to and with us.

God’s message is incomplete in creation alone: it’s the heading to a story, the love story of God for his children. What God is speaking in nature is glory and majesty, but specifically God calling us together, to know him more completely and clearly. Hearing the wordless voice resounding in creation calling creation to give glory to its creator also calls us into communion with God and with each other.

So the person who worships on the sixth tee may indeed hear God speaking, but the language is foreign without the interpretation of Christ. It’s like standing in a room full of Norwegians: you are with them, they

are human companions, but if you can't communicate, you can't fully understand each other.

When the fellowship of worship together is missing, we've only heard the words, we've lost the message; we lose the rest of the story that creation introduces. We fall back to ancient ways – we end up worshipping the speech rather than the speaker, which is what our ancestors did with sun gods, thunder gods, harvest gods. That's a response to the sound of God's voice, but not to what its saying.

Our faith teaches that voice leads us deeper.

In the rest of Psalm 19, the psalmist moves from his description of creation's display of God's glory and the shouted message which has no sound by pointing to God's specific direction: God's gift of the Law, the psalmist's love. We believe that Christ makes that Law, God's instruction, present to us, and we are present with Christ in worship.

So God's speech in creation has a focus – to call us into closer communion with God in each other, in Jesus Christ. Do you hear that message?

All of life, all of creation is God's work, and in its beauty and complexity it praises God. But everything that God made also speaks of its maker, as Paul says in Romans: "Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – God's eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God

has made.” And so we sit in this beautiful sanctuary, with creation right there in front of you – our spectacular view of the Santa Ritas, the birds, the clouds while we worship together. Gives you something to do when you’ve lost the thread of my sermon!

Back to the Church of the Sixth Tee, worshipping God in nature rather than together as the church. Well, yes, it does give God glory, but indirectly. It’s worshipping the creation, and not the creator that it points to. There is so much more.

Last week, I came across an article by one of our denomination’s mission workers in Hong Kong about the young college women they work among. One, who they brought to church for the first time, told them afterwards something truly amazing: she said, “Every morning I pray to the sun. But now I know to whom I should pray – God.”

So, yes. Let creation call you to worship. But in your thanksgiving for the beauty that surrounds you, remember to give thanks for the incredible gift of yourself, and worship together in this invisible, soundless bond that connects us all in Christ through the Holy Spirit. That impersonal God behind the stars is very personal – working in and through each of us.

God’s speech in creation is part of, not a substitute for, our worship. Creation’s magnificent story is a call to us to come experience God, and God’s love, in all its richness, together.

