

**Riverside United Church**  
**October 13, 2024**

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 46  
Revelation 21: 1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,  
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,  
lead us to deeper understanding of you,  
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

**“How Does the Creature Say - #6 - Joy and Home ”**

For the first 5 years after I was ordained, I lived in McCord, Saskatchewan. It may not be place that you have heard of because it is a hamlet located 2 hours southwest of Moose Jaw and about an hour and half southeast of Swift Current. The census population for McCord was listed as 52 and I often said it is not often you can move a community and increase the population by 2%.

I loved living in that community and serving the Grasslands Pastoral Charge. I learned a lot about ministry in those years, and I learned a lot about rural life and living with the seasons of creation. The first year was a drought and grasshoppers year and I remember wondering how do you talk about thanksgiving or harvest when the harvest had been so meager? When I shared that dilemma with some of the wise farmers, they said, “If we waited until everything was abundant to live in gratitude, we would be waiting a long time.”

Today, we gather on a day of thanksgiving and we come to this time of worship with a variety of realities of our lives. We recognize that gratitude is deeper than our mood. It is a posture or lens

through which we find meaning and hope.

Today, we continue and conclude our season of creation series on the words of the hymn, “God of the Sparrow.” When Karen and I were outlining this series, we looked at the order of the verses and the various Sundays and gave ourselves permission to change the order of verses if they fit better. It was tempting to save verse 3 for today - How does the creature say grace, how does the creature say thanks. But, we also thought that the 6<sup>th</sup> verse seemed to fit a thanksgiving posture:

God of the ages, God near at hand, God of the loving heart  
How do the children say Joy, How do the children say Home

How do think of home as we live in this world, in this wonder of creation? One of the things that I have learned as I have lived in various places, is that I can have more than one answer to the question, “where are you from?” or “Where is home?” It can be a place on a map or an anchor of the heart.

A year ago, I was at learning event where the theme was the care of creation and the leader asked us to identify where we lived by naming the watershed in which we lived. It was intriguing because the waterways of our country are not how we usually define our sense of place. The political boundaries of our municipalities, counties, provinces and countries have come to be through a variety of determining factors. But the watersheds of Turtle Island have been in place for thousands and thousands of years. A watershed is the land area that drains into a particular river.

When I lived in McCord, the hamlet was about 30 miles north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel-the border with the United States. All there was between the highway and the border was farms and ranches. I was down at that border a couple of times and all there was separating the pasture lands of Sask and the pasture lands of Montana was a barbed wire fence. A few miles north of that fence was a ridge of rolling hills and that ridge was known as the Bench. The Bench was the continental divide. On the north side, water eventually flowed to Hudson Bay. On the southside, water flowed into the Mississippi river system and eventually to the Gulf of Mexico. It would seem that the Bench would have been a more natural border between nations, but it would have been a pretty jagged line across southern Saskatchewan and northern Montana and North Dakota.

McCord was in the watershed of the Wood River, which flowed into the South Saskatchewan river, and onto Hudson Bay. As we gather here today at Riverside, we may know that the Rideau River is across the street, and it isn't far downstream that it flows into the Ottawa River, which flows into the St. Lawrence and into the Gulf of St Lawrence and the Atlantic Ocean.

There are 594 watersheds in Canada. What if we defined our sense of the land according to those watershed areas, instead of municipalities and provinces? Would that make any difference in how we regarded where we live, in how we lived in respect to creation?

In our psalm reading for today, we heard the assurance - “There is a river, whose streams make

glad the city of God.” It is that sense of unity of coming together as one. In Revelation, we hear a vision of completion - a new heaven and a new earth, with the spring of life being a source of renewal. Water is a dominant metaphor of life within scripture and within creation we know why - it is more than a metaphor. Water is life and the way that it springs up and flows is a tremendous image of the interconnectedness of life. On the bench south of McCord, water may flow in two directions, but both paths end up in the oceans which are connected. Keri Wehlander in her lyrics to the song “Like a rock” - says “like a river runs to ocean, our home is in God evermore.

As this season of creation comes to a close, we are reminded once more to live in gratitude for the wonder and beauty, the strength and fragility of this planet. As we think about the image of watershed and living in the Rideau River watershed, we are also reminded that the term watershed is used in another way. We hear about watershed moments - turning points, critical moments when things come together requiring action.

Maybe we need to shift our thinking and our living in relationship to creation as there are lots of disturbing trends, statistics and storms revealing the stress and strain on creation. Creation is wounded and this is a watershed time for our world to realize that the attitude of having dominion over creation cannot mean having domination in the way that we have.

Gratitude is never an end in itself. It is a posture which prompts action. How does the creature, how do the children say home. Our disconnection from the land and its cycles and needs is a spiritual issue. Our domination of creation is a spiritual issue.

As we think of the crisis of creation it can be paralyzing, yet what if we lived with a renewed sense of caring for our watershed - small acts to care for the land and water directly around us.

Wendell Berry - an eco-theologian - has reworked the Golden Rule to read:  
 “Do unto others downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you.”

There is a lot of wisdom coming from those more directly connected to the cycles and seasons of creation than I usually feel. It came from the wisdom of farmers and ranchers that I lived with in the Wood River watershed. It comes from voices in our past, it comes from cultures and traditions that have a different understanding and relationship with the earth - including many indigenous elders and writers.

A few years ago, some of us read the book “Braided Sweetgrass” for the Book Discussion Group. It is a beautiful and wise book and the author, Robin Wall Kimmerer, writes with an integration that inspires. She writes in the book:

“Until we can grieve for our planet we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health. But it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again. Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair.”

Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world is sustaining us. The fruits of creation are dying and rising anew. And there are many gifts and realities that prompt us to gratitude, to sing and live and act with thanksgiving. And we are called to say Joy, to say Home - as we recognize the God of the ages, God near at hand, God of the loving heart. Amen.