

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Transfiguration February 3, 2008
Psalm 148:7-12

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children.



People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

It happened last Tuesday down in Galveston, TX. A couple was out bird watching. Have you ever done that – watch birds? Armed with your binoculars and your guide book and a camera and a note book. Very quietly you watch for different birds. Sometimes you count – how many nesting Yellow Breasted Orange Crested Warbling Nuthatches you can find on a given morning. A couple was out bird watching – when they saw off in the tall grass what looked like a car seat – a very nice car seat – kind of on its side. And there next to it – at first glance – looked like a doll – with soft blonde curly hair. It wasn't a doll. It was a little baby – just a few months old – wearing a clean diaper – with a painful mark on his head. This little person was broken beyond repair. They think – perhaps – he was thrown from a moving car! How tragic is that? Where was his mommy? Where was his daddy – the one with the God-given essential responsibility to keep him safe from such hurt and harm? Jesus died on the cross – for that little baby boy – born through and through with the infection of sin – inherited from Eve and Adam. Jesus died on the cross for the mommy who is not supposed to forget her little nursing baby. Jesus died on the cross – doing what his Father wanted – giving up his life – for wretched sinners just like us. It is because of Jesus' powerful forgiving love that we gather in God's House in the winter – in the cold – to hear that sweet good news – our sins are all forgiven. This *Transfiguration Day* we join the Psalmist to:

Praise the Great I AM!

- 1. Praise Him all his creatures**
- 2. Praise Him all his people.**

There are 150 Psalms in the book of *Psalms*—songs of repentance, songs of pleading for deliverance, for protection and healing. *Psalms* are 150 songs—songs of praise and thanksgiving for all of God's blessings. The one we praise is the Great I AM—the **one who changes not—the same yesterday and today and forever!** If you read the *Psalms*—you will be encouraged. Read the *Psalms* and remember what a mighty fortress is our God. Read the *Psalms* and praise the LORD and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all your iniquities and cleanses you from all your sins. He redeems your life from the pit and satisfies your mouth with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Read the *Psalms* when you are sorely tempted—and be reminded—he will send his holy angels to watch over you—to camp around your sick bed—or the death bed of your loved one. They will guard you and protect you from all danger! Today we want to concentrate on just a few phrases of Psalm 148. All we really need are a few phrases. When people my age were students at the Seminary—one of the classes we had was a study of the Psalms. Every student was assigned a Psalm. We would study it—for a very long time—trying to discover all the law and gospel we could. Then we had an appointment with Prof. Gawrish. We would go to his home—within walking distance of our Wartburg Castle dormitory. We would explain to Prof. Gawrish all the theological truths we had discovered after our

translation from the Hebrew. And then—while we ate Prof. Gawrish’s favorite snack—peanuts and root beer—he would show us the untold riches of the Psalms that we had never imagined! It was one of the most powerful lessons ever—in the richness of Scripture. There is packed into each word then phrase then sentence then verse then chapter—more nourishment for your faith and soul than you can imagine!

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures... People in the past—like Charles Darwin—were pastors—students of theology—who studied biology and zoology and botany—because the more you understood about animals and plants—the more you could see the wonderful works of God in all he made. Darwin first studied God’s Word. And then he studied the creatures that God had made. Everything was going very well. But slowly but surely—the devil worked to sow the seeds of doubt. Darwin was bothered by the fact that certain spiders seemed horribly cruel to the caterpillars they fed to their young. As horrible as that might be— isn’t man’s unspeakable inhumanity to his neighbor far far worse? And how do we understand that? The horrible **wages of sin**— isn’t it? It bothered Darwin that there were countless creatures in the ocean—that people have not even discovered! But why be surprised by unknown ocean creatures? Are there not hundreds of thousands of plants and animals and insects and flowers that people have not discovered yet? There is something terribly wrong if we ever begin to think that we have a handle on all of God’s creation! Consider the weather—the climate—the well being of our whole planet. It is in God’s hands! Again and again—in spite of all the weather satellites—all the computer models—all the wisdom of meteorologists we are wrong again and again—trying to predict the temperature *three days from now!* Darwin doubted God’s Word—doubted the accuracy of Old Testament history and geography. And then when his little daughter Annie—just ten years old got sick—Darwin prayed desperately for her. Instead of making her better—Jesus made her perfect. That’s when Darwin despaired—turning his back on Jesus. Renouncing his Savior who loved him very much! How tragic is that? We need to know and remember and be reminded again and again in Church and in Scripture—that God’s **Word is truth**. That Jesus’ forgiving love will never ever fail us!

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures... There are lots of great sea creatures—toothed whales—such as Sperm Whales, dolphins—pink dolphins that swim up the Amazon River through Peru. There are Gray Whales, Humpback Whales and great Blue Whales—breaching the water—then crashing back into the ocean—their tail—with markings as unique as a fingerprint—along the fluke—the edge of the tail. There are manatees—gentle and quiet—horribly cut by the propellers on boats down in Florida—then shipped very carefully up to the Midwest—to our aquariums—to be medicated—to mend and heal. There are seals—sea lions and walrus— that sun themselves on the rocks with their great whiskers and huge tusks. There are sea otters—who dive to the bottom for clams and oysters and a flat smooth rock. They float on their back—and crack the shell—picking the salty meat out and eat it. If another sea otter snatched their food the moment they have cracked open the sea shell—they don’t fight. They don’t grab their neighbor and bit them and hit them and make them bleed—don’t make them sorry they tried to steal our lunch. **Love is patient. Love is kind. Love never fails. Love covers over a multitude of sins.** What does that mean? Does it mean sin doesn’t matter? Certainly not. But when there is a powerful love—there is a profound amount of grace and mercy! There are polar bears—spending huge amounts of their time in the frigid water. We watched a polar bear show at Great Grandpa Schultz’s house the other day. They said polar bear fur is not technically white! They said—their hair is clear—like very tiny straws—to insulate and hold warm air. That polar bear skins are actually black. That their body temperature is about the same as ours—98° or 99°. That part of why polar bears often walk so slowly is so they don’t over heat! Did you know that? Only Jesus could invent bears so big and strong—they are not afraid of people. Only Jesus could invent mommy bears that give birth to

their babies in ice and snow caves while hibernating – then to teach them how to hunt and swim and survive in the coldest places in the world. Only Jesus could make creatures that powerful and beautiful!

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths... There are lots of birds the LORD God made. A whole family of birds called Auks. Do you know about Auks? They are birds that kind of look like penguins – black and white. Except they can fly. They have very short little wings – so they have to flap them very quickly so they can fly. They are good swimmers and divers – but their walk appears pretty clumsy. They are very small – like 3 oz. and just 6 inches tall. They live on the open sea – and just go on shore to have babies. You have seen Auks – like puffins – with their very colorful bills. These little birds praise their Heavenly Father in many ways. Jesus talked about them in his sermon on the grassy hillside when he said – consider the birds. They do not cultivate fields – don't plant seeds – they don't make itty bitty birdy barns to sock away seeds for the winter. No – they trust their heavenly Father to give them their daily bread. On the coldest mornings – when the wind is blowing hard and the temperature is way below zero – there were a whole bunch of birds under my window – well feed with seeds and suet – their bodies warm in the shelter of our pine shrubs. Our Heavenly Father took very good care of them. They were not worried at all!

How are we doing? I heard the other day – about a lady who lived in a very upscale gated neighborhood. She lived in a very nice home – and would have been very happy except for the fact that she didn't get along with her neighbor. So what does she do? She throws bunches and bunches of birdseed on her neighbor's lawn. What does that do? I thought – it makes funny weeds grow. It also brings bunches of birds, then squirrels and maybe even field mice and worse – to eat in your yard. So the neighbor says – stop throwing seed in my yard. She keeps throwing seeds so he literally throws a rock at her. Then chases her into her garage where they literally struggle over a .38 pistol that goes off – shooting the garage. Then he grabs a garbage can full of bird seed and dumps it in her swimming pool and she gets a shotgun and shoots him! How sad is that? If we have grudges against our neighbor. If we refuse to forgive our relatives – our closest neighbors – members of our own family – how are we different from unbelievers? We praise the LORD by forgiving our neighbor – no matter how horrible they have been to us! Forgiveness – gives glory to Jesus who died on the cross to forgive us!

Praise the LORD you fruit trees... Fruit trees praise our Heavenly Father. Did you think about that? Do you have any idea how many kinds of fruit there are? There are fruits in the pome family – *pome* being the French word for apple. There are 12 different kinds of pome fruit – like apples, loquats, pears and quince. Do you know how many different kinds of apples there are? There are over 7,500 different *cultivars* – that is different species or hybrids of apples! Did you know that? 7,500 plus kinds of apples – different colors and sizes and shapes and tastes and textures and flavors – and at the same time – still – basically and essentially – apple! There are 7 different kinds of fruits with pits – like apricots, cherries, peaches and plums. There are at least 29 different kinds of berries – raspberries, strawberries, loganberries and lingonberries – blueberries, crowberries, cranberries and huckleberries and more! Berries praise the LORD by feeding God's people – and feeding the birds. They praise the LORD by falling to the ground – and growing more vines – to make even more berries. Fruits praise the LORD by making juice for little people who are growing up to be the pastors and teachers and staff ministers and home and world missionaries who spread the gospel around the world.

Praise the LORD you...kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Often times we are quick to say – there aren't many kings today. The truth is – if you really make a study of it – there are kings all over the place. There are kings in Nigeria. There are kings of Oba – pronounced "Or-ba". This "kingdom" is made up of three generations of towns. The 1st generation – the original kingdom

– the 2nd generation towns sprang up when people moved and spread out. The 3rd generation towns were made it's easy to understand from war and from conquest. Each town has a king. The 1st and 2nd generation kings wear literal crowns – made of beads. There is a king named Michael Okpara. He is the king of people in Nigeria and Cameroon and other places in Africa. Do you know how many subjects he has? Experts aren't sure either. Somewhere between 20 and 30 maybe even 50 million subjects. King Okpara's kingdom is held together by a common religion that is in part Christian – and in part traditional African superstition and part ancient Egyptian religion – going all the way back to the false beliefs of the Pharaoh in the time when Moses said to mighty Pharaoh – **this is what the LORD says – Let my people go!** Oh, they say – the Christians who came to preach the Gospel didn't tell them this is idolatry. They just said – don't talk too much about where these teachings come from. Or, don't make a big deal about these superstitions and traditions. Be a little discreet. Be a little subtle – and we will just kind of let it slide. OK? No it is not! Jesus wants our whole heart. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind.** Jesus doesn't want to share your heart with anyone or any thing!

Praise the LORD...old men and children! I was picking up some groceries in my neighborhood the other day. Grocery workers and delivery guys are busy putting more and more groceries on the shelves – even as people are throwing groceries into their carts. The next aisle over – one man was asking the other man – and how are you today? The other guy said, *"I'm living the dream!"* I thought to myself – I should look quick to see what this guy was doing – that he was *living the dream*. Do you know what he was doing? He was putting little bags of noodles on the shelf – thick Kluske noodles – wide egg noodles – home made style noodles – noodles with Omega-3 good for your Cholesterol noodles. How can stocking noodles be living the dream? It all – once again – has everything to do with attitude! Where you're stocking noodles for Jesus – putting noodles on shelves for Jesus himself – wouldn't that be a dream? The fact is – whatever we do – if we are doing it for the LORD gives praise and glory to him! That's what we will do – we will praise and glorify him here. And we will glorify him in heaven. We will live the dream by grace alone for Jesus' sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz