

"Consider the heavens"

Psalm 8

October 8, 2006

There is an old legend of a swan and a crane. A beautiful swan alighted by the banks of the water in which a crane was wading about seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in stupid wonder and then inquired: "Where do you come from?" "I come from heaven!" replied the swan. "And where is heaven?" asked the crane. "Heaven!" said the swan, "Heaven! have you never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City. She told of streets of gold, and the gates and walls made of precious stones; of the river of life, pure as crystal, upon whose banks is the tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. In eloquent terms the swan sought to describe the hosts who live in the other world, but without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane. Finally the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?" "Snails!" repeated the swan; "no! Of course there are not." "Then," said the crane, as it continued its search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

Today we have shared in speaking one of the most powerful - most beautiful Psalms ever written. To simply hear the words seems to lift me in the grandeur of the images. "O Lord, our Lord how majestic ..." Just to speak the name of God is a privilege - but we are given so much more. We are set in the midst of His glorious creation and allowed to have a glimpse of God in all that we see. The Psalmist tells us of his reflections on the nature of God as he considers all of creation. We do not see the streets of gold or the walls of the city set with precious stones. We do not now have the ability to walk along the river of life flowing from the throne of God or to pick leaves from the trees that line the river and provide healing for the people of all nations. But we do have all of creation.

Have you taken time to consider who this God is who has called you into a relationship with Him? Have you considered the heavens and thought about the birds of the air and the fish of the sea and wondered about who you are in relationship with all living things? Sometimes it seems so obvious that we are focused only on the snails and have lost sight of the heavens!

I found it really interesting about a place in Spain, where Christopher Columbus died in 1506. There is a monument there in honor of Columbus. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the memorial is a statue of a lion destroying one of the Latin words that had been part of Spain's motto for centuries. Before Columbus made his voyages, the Spaniards thought they had reached the outer limits of earth. Thus their motto was "Ne Plus Ultra," which means "No More Beyond." The word being torn away by the lion is

"ne" or "no," making it read "Plus Ultra." Columbus had proven that there was indeed "more beyond."

There is more beyond the snails - more beyond the dark side of life - more beyond the struggles, the hardship, the pain - - - but too often we are just looking for snails.

It seems as though that has always been the way with human being. Jesus has confrontation after confrontation with the religious leaders of His day. Today's Gospel text is no different. We read it and quickly get caught up in exactly what the Pharisees wanted Jesus to get trapped in. Who is right - who is wrong - what is legal or illegal. In a world that is filled with so much pain we want to find someone to blame - someone who is responsible - some way in which we can point the finger and justify our own righteousness so that we look good. The Pharisees, above anyone else, knew exactly what was legal - they knew what the law said - they did not have to ask. They only wanted to condemn Jesus because no matter how He answered, they were sure they could find fault with Him. So Jesus did not answer their question - no really. Instead, what Jesus did was tell them that it is God's desire that all human relationships be marked by love. From the very beginning of creation God cared about His human creation and wanted nothing more than that they love and care for each other. Every human being was that important - man and woman - husband and wife - male and female. And even the children that everyone considered to be unimportant and in the way - even the children, He took in His arms and blessed.

When I consider the heavens try to truly imagine it. The Sun and the moon - that big, bright, beautiful full moon that we have enjoyed the last few nights. Beaming light into our dark nights - light beams that reach us in 1.3 seconds traveling across 239,000 miles. Did you know that if you jumped on a flight out of Minot leaving for the moon on a non-stop flight, traveling at 500 miles per hour it would take you 19 days. Good Luck! Such a flight headed for the Sun would take 21 years [pack lots of Sun Screen - SPF 20,000,000]. And if you were just a bit more adventurous and wanted to go to the next nearest star, the flight on one of our modern jumbo jets would only take you about 51,000,000,000 [51 billion] years. Of course that is just the closest star and it is 4.3 "light years" away. Think about the closest galaxy - it is the Andromeda Galaxy. Its distance from us is approximately 2.31 million light years away! Scientists estimate there are billions of galaxies, each of them loaded with billions of stars. Galaxies tend to group together. Andromeda Galaxy and our Milky Way are part of a cluster of at least thirty galaxies. Other clusters could contain as many as thousands of galaxies.

A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed; "Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!"

Have you ever considered the heavens, the works of God fingers - the moon and the stars and then asked "Where is my place in all of this? How is it that God can create all of this and then still be concerned about me? What does such a thing say about all of human life? And then all we wonder about is "what is legal?" We try to justify ourselves in broken relationship. Family disputes breakout at a baseball field in Tennessee and 3 of God's precious people lay dead. In an Amish school house lives are destroyed and the pain and darkness breaks the peace and quiet. People starve and die in the Africa from continuing wars and disease. And to often we just sit back and shake our fingers at the guilty parties and ponder what is lawful. Through it all God gently calls us to consider the heaven and remember how much He loves and cares about all of His people - those whom He has created to be little less than the angels in heaven. Consider the heavens and then walk in the footsteps of God as we seek to love one another.

AMEN