

## **“The Heavens are Telling”**

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Sunday, October 29, 2023

Texts: John 20: 19-23 and Psalm 19

In a *Boston Globe* article titled, “Looking at the Sky Might Change Your Entire POV,” journalist Jan Brogan details her journey towards cloud and sky awareness. Her journey was prompted by a cryptic email she received one day. “Look at the sky as often as you ‘can’ -- for about 21 days. I’ll contact you again in 3 weeks.” Signed, “More Light”. Looking at the sky over the past several days and into next week doesn’t sound like “more light” at all! Here in Gaylord, we’ve had buckets of rain, lots of fog and drizzle to boot. Snow is predicted for this week – even just snow showers – which makes sky gazing seem a bit odd. And yet, I was out this week raking leaves in the rain (yes, I am a bit odd!), and found myself stopping, listening to the rain, looking up at the sky and breathing in all the smells of fall. I spend a lot of time outside, and I’m constantly amazed at how different the same places are on different days, and different times of the day, and in different seasons. Even in our own backyard, nature has something to offer that we often miss.

The psalmist writes, “The heavens declare God’s glory, the sky is proclaiming God’s handiwork.” According to Daniel Cooperrider, “The poet of Psalm 19 saw the sky and the clouds along the same lines, as masterpieces in creation’s permanent collection (*Speak with the Earth and It Will Teach You, p144*).” C.S. Lewis called Psalm 19 “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” The literal translation of the first verse is something like: the beautiful skies are telling the glory of God; the expansive skies proclaim the work of God’s hands (Cooperrider, p144). Is that hard to agree with, given Gaylord weather this week? Do we only appreciate the artwork of the skies on a beautiful sunny day, with a few cirrus clouds to grace the landscape? Do grey skies, rainy days and Mondays always get you down?

For me, November is the toughest month of the year. All the fall colors are gone, and we have a lot of grey days. Everything is brown, seemingly lifeless, and the air has a chill that makes it harder to go outside. I even remarked to Cindy the other day that 58 degrees should feel warm, but when it’s damp and maybe windy, it doesn’t feel as warm as other times of the year. I don’t know if I could be

diagnosed with seasonal affective disorder or not, but I know that November is tough for me. Maybe it is for you as well. What better time is there to be reminded that the “heavens are telling the glory of God”? It’s counter intuitive. Sometimes in life I think we get what we expect. And every year, I expect to have a down month in November. Dull, drab and boring. But if you look at the facts of the last couple of years, my prognostication might be flat wrong. After all, I began work here November 1, 2020, and most every day, I can’t wait to be among you and serve, work, pray and sing with you. Cindy will start her position we think next Monday, November 6. That is just the tip of the iceberg. I wonder if it is a clue about how we look to the skies as well, and what that might mean about our relationship with God?

In both Psalm 8 and Psalm 19, “the celestial phenomena of stars and clouds are instances in which we can witness the hand of God at work in creation,” says Cooperrider (p145). “They are occasions to trace the fingerprints of God, as these poems make direct reference to God’s hands (Psalm 19) and God’s fingers (Psalm 8). The feeling is one of dizzying, dazzling intricacy and immensity – that the things of heaven, the stars and the clouds, as distant and vast as they are, are but miniature figurines, the playthings of God’s fingertips.”

I want to go back to where I started in this sermon, about Jan Brogan and the challenge she received to look up at the sky for 21 days. It turns out this challenge was issued by Jack Borden, a former Boston television reporter who started For Spacious Skies, a nonprofit organization advocating the cause of “sky awareness. “Lamenting our general lack of attention paid to the sky and to the clouds, Borden is quoted as saying, “When we are unconscious in regard to our surroundings, we are irresponsible to them (Cooperrider, p146).”

How does my predetermination of what November will bring – weather-wise – lead to my being unconscious of what really is happening? Am I the only one who suffers from such a problem? Or are there many among us who are unconscious, whether it’s about the weather, the environment, politics, or religion, relationship, or whatever else, and what are the consequences of our decision to be unconscious, or at least unaware?

Jan Brogan took up the challenge and did look up at the sky for 21 straight days. Day 1: “Some clouds and a lot of blue sky.” was all she wrote. After a few days, she begins to notice more about the details of the sky. She even begins to identify some of the cloud types, making connections between cloud formations

and precipitation patterns, even predicting tomorrow's forecast based on today's sky. It wasn't long before paying attention to the sky yields something like spiritual dividends, as when, on Day 10, looking at the sky helps smooth a traffic-laden commute. "Stop-and-go traffic just before 4 o'clock, heading west on Route 109. I divert myself by looking at the different shades of sky: deep blue, periwinkle, and aqua. Ahead, the clouds are tattered, low on the horizon, and under-lit by the sun. I do not try to identify the clouds by type, which I think might wreck the moment (Cooperrider, p146)."

"By Day 21, she finds herself a changed person. After she identifies the clouds overhead as the type of high cirrus that tends to usher in a cold front, she notes the transition in her experience from observational to the spiritual dimensions of this sky watching practice. 'I like having this type of knowledge [of the cloud types],' she writes, 'but there is something else going on. It seems amazingly self-centered to have to narrowly focused my visual field until now that I did not bother to notice the medium, I lived in. The draw is not so much the beauty of the sky every day, but the enormity of it (Cooperrider, p146-147)."

There is something else going on here. Maybe that's what people like me need to hear whether in November (in my case) or in whatever time of year, or season of life they are experiencing. What we expect, and we plan to see, often casts a shadow on what is actually happening. I don't know about you, but I'm going to try the 21 days look at the sky challenge and see what happens. For if the Psalmist is correct, then every day I'll see the glory of God written across the sky. Cooperrider closes this first chapter on the sky this way: "The show, of course, goes on and on. Everywhere and all the time. If only we but lift our eyes and see. The heavens are telling the glory of God. The skies are proclaiming the work of God's hands. The ultimate art gallery. Just above us. A daily feast."

A feast for which we will not have to wait until Thanksgiving to enjoy. May our preconceptions be challenged, our hearts and minds opened, and our spirits allowed to soar, even in November.

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.