

"The Song of the World"

Rev. Greg Watling

First Congregational United Church of Christ, Gaylord, Michigan

Sunday, September 5, 2021

Based on Brian McLaren *We Make the Road by Walking, Chapter 3*

Texts: Proverbs 8: 1-12, 27-36, Psalm 145, John 1: 1-17

The evangelist (that's what we call a gospel writer) makes this clear:

"Though the Word, all things (*panta*) *came into being*." *All things*. Apart from the Word, "not one thing came into being." Here, close to the source of Christian life, one encounters another primal song, giving expression to the intricate dance between word and world. It is a song full of wonder and amazement at the notion that God has been speaking from all eternity through everything that exists. Wonder too that the creative Word through whom the cosmos came into being has taken on human flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), has made all things whole again." (Douglas E. Christie, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, pp 179 and 180).

Douglas Christie, in his book *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for Contemplative Ecology* continues: Does the world have a voice? Does it beckon to us, call us toward an intimate encounter, toward a response of reciprocity, even love? Can we learn to listen and to respond to this call, orient ourselves

toward the world in a way that reflects a renewed sense of responsibility and care for the world? Indeed, I believe there is a song of the world, a term first described by Jean Giono. And the cost of not hearing that song is enormous. Something fundamental in the very life of the world is being lost. Consider for example the growing number of places around the world that, through chronic ecological degradation, are now falling utterly silent. This is not a silence rooted in tranquility or peace; it is the silence of death. "This is," according to Christie, "a critical ethical-spiritual challenge."

I never expected to use the prologue of John to preach about our hurting and damaged world. And yet, it makes sense as we think seriously about creation in this section of Brian McLaren's *We Make the Road by Walking*. A couple of weeks ago, we learned that we were created good, as was the world, but that we were given much of the responsibility for it. Last week, we heard about the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and how it is that evil often comes into the world through our misjudgment. This week, we hear the primal song of a creative God who was joined both by the Word (whom we would later know as Jesus, or better said, the Christ) and, according to the book of Proverbs, by wisdom, which is often in the feminine *Sophia*.

Proverbs 8, in the words of wisdom, tells us, "When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Meanwhile, we're surrounded by other sounds. Loud sounds. Sounds of traffic and lots and lots of people talking all the time. When we stop for silence in church, we know there is little silence. We decide it's because we're on a busy street, and we are, but how many places truly are silent or quiet in our world? How can we hear the world's song if we have drowned it out with all the "noise, noise, noise, noise!" – to quote the Grinch. Christie goes on, "This strange paradox -- born of living in a world at once unbearably cacophonous and nearly empty of sound – points to the particular difficulty we face in the present moment in reckoning with the question of how or whether the living world can be considered expressive."

There are lots of reasons why these issues of the song of the world should concern us. First, the environment itself is being destroyed, mostly by us. Hurricane Ida reminded us once again that storms are getting more ferocious, more damaging, more deadly, and even can change the flow of one of the largest river systems in the world – even if for a short time. Second, this is more than an environmental issue, it is also a faith issue “if we hope to rediscover the living world as charged with the presence of the Holy.” (Christie, 183). To realize this may require us to learn again how to listen. But listen for what? To whom? What might it mean to listen with such care and attention that the life and spirit of the world became audible, perhaps even intelligible? What would it mean to respond to this “word” so fully and deeply?

I haven’t talked about McLaren’s book so much this week as I’m overjoyed that I get to share something I read weeks ago and then wondered, “I wonder if I’ll ever get to preach on the prologue of John’s gospel?” Who knew that a few short weeks later I’d be standing here, talking with you about what this prologue may mean. It might be something so much more than a poetic description of the presence of Christ at creation. While that’s important, it’s much more important that this prologue speaks to us (as McLaren relates), “that the universe runs by the logic of creativity, goodness and love. The universe is God’s creative project,

filled with beauty, opportunity, challenge, and meaning. It runs on the meaning or pattern we see embodied in the life of Jesus.” And then McLaren tells us that “here we are, alive and paying attention.” I would call us into question. How do we see the patterns of Creation? How do we hear the song that it sings, even if a troubled, or desperate song? How do we hear the silence in a world full of white noise? How do we discern how it is that this Jesus, this Christ, is active in the world? What is his pattern? What should be ours? Are we paying attention to the song of the world, the Word, and wisdom or are we listening to someone or something else?

I invite you, this holiday weekend, to take time to pay attention. To be alive. To be a part of creation.

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.

