

*You Are Earth's Caretakers*

Pastor Jason Bryan-WEgner

PSALM 65:5-13 NSRV

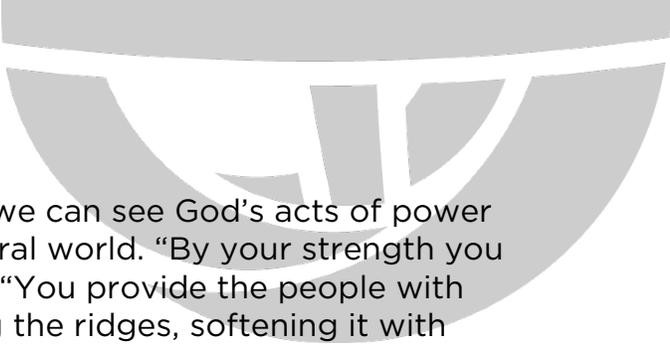
<sup>5</sup>By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. <sup>6</sup>By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. <sup>7</sup>You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. <sup>8</sup>Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

<sup>9</sup>You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. <sup>10</sup>You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. <sup>11</sup>You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. <sup>12</sup>The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, <sup>13</sup>the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

My family and I took a road trip earlier this summer. We headed south and west in our minivan and pop-up camper, across the vast plains of Kansas and Oklahoma, toward the desert highlands and arid mountains of New Mexico. We traveled through the 200-million-year-old petrified forest in Arizona, and on to the Grand Canyon. When we approached the rim the first morning, my son Will asked, "Is this the grandest of all the canyons in the world, or are there others like it?" I love his ability to think that the world's splendor should show up in other places as well.

Most of the trip was hot and dry. The landscape at times felt as though we could have been on another planet, not just in another part of the country. After a few days in this vast arid place, you could wonder in such a landscape when the last time God "visited the earth and watered it, enriching it greatly", as the psalmist praises God for doing in today's Bible reading.

But among the vast panorama of tan, brown, and red landscape were wonderful, yet subtle signs of life. The desert was blooming. Pink and yellow blooms darted out from spiny cacti. Small clumps of yellow, purple, and white wildflowers gathered along the edge of the backroads we traveled. Judging by the widening cracks we saw in the ground these flowers were pure grace, that God had watered the earth just enough to bring forth such beauty. No one planted them or watered them. No one cared for them or ensured their wellbeing. They were simple reminders of God's ongoing creativity and creation's resilience against all odds.



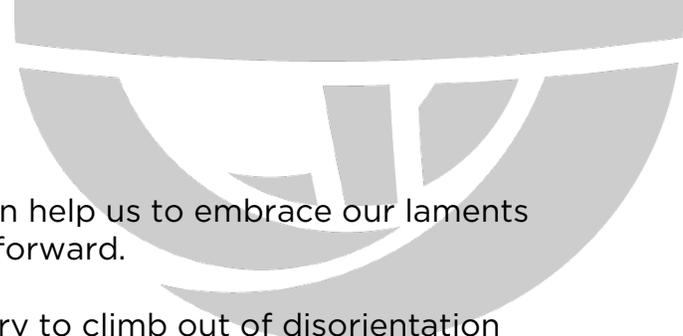
The poetry of the psalms points us to the ways we can see God's acts of power and might, and care and grace through the natural world. "By your strength you established the mountains", writes the psalmist. "You provide the people with grain...You water its furrows abundantly, settling the ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth." We can see this dynamic God in these images, intimately interacting with all that we depend on for life. Everything we see in the world has been touched by God, blessed by God, cared for by God. And in some places that seems more amazing than others because life seems so hard won - like the desert. The dynamics of God's power and care remind me of an orchestra conductor who directs with vigor, leaving the audience on the edge of their seats in one movement, while in the next moves the audience to sheer serenity by barely moving their baton.

God is like that. As deeply connected to us and creation as a conductor to the orchestra. And all of creation is the orchestra, including us, moving in rhythm with the care and attention of its conductor. But the music is not always harmonious. Creation isn't always playing in step with its conductor, singing and shouting for joy. It's fair to say much of creation is not playing in harmony with its conductor. A few weeks ago, it reached 116 degrees in Siberia. Two weeks ago, four feet of snow melted off of Mount Rainier in two days. At the same time, firefighters are bracing for another unprecedented fire season out west. And tropical storms come faster and more furious each year to coastlands.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann views the psalms in three categories, psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Like seasons in life the psalms speak to the various experiences in our relationship with God. Psalms of orientation are psalms that speak of the times when life is all good. These are cheerful, full of abundant praise for God being God. These are the "Make a joyful noise all the earth!" kind of psalms. Times when Creator and creation make beautiful music together.

Then there are the psalms of disorientation; these speak to the times when life is out of whack and God seems far off, when injustice seems to go unpunished or the wicked seem to win over the righteous. These are like Psalm 13 where the psalmist cries out, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me? How long will you hide your face from me?" We've all been there - we know those dissonant times, when faith is fleeting, and life is hard. A loved one gets sick or dies. A job ends abruptly. A child battles addiction. A marriage hits the skids. These kinds of psalms remind us that we are not alone. Others, for millennia, have felt this way too. Psalms of disorientation give us language to express raw emotion, to show our disappointment with God and with the way we and the world are at odds with





God's vision for life. The psalms of disorientation help us to embrace our laments for that season, and eventually find a new way forward.

In fact, Brueggemann would caution us not to try to climb out of disorientation too fast, or to do it on our own. Like everything else in faith, it comes as grace and as gift.

The psalms of reorientation set that gift before us reminding us in fresh ways of God's grace and strength. They point us to the miracles of redemption and reconciliation. They help us experience the transformation from pain and grief to growth and gratitude.

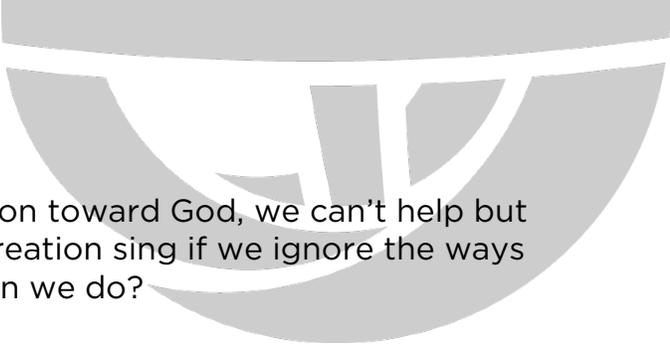
There seems to be an element of this kind of reorientation in psalm 65. Just look at the first part of this psalm. I'd invite you to look at the text in the bulletin. Right off the bat, "By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation." Something has happened. The people singing this song have been through some stuff. If you know what I mean. We're not sure what it is, but people don't usually talk about being delivered or saved if they haven't felt the threat of isolation or death recently.

Maybe it was an argument or an attack by other people. Maybe they faced serious illness or disease. Maybe last season there was a drought that nearly caused a famine? Even earlier in the psalm, back in verses 3 and 4, the psalmist writes, "When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. Happy are those whom you choose to bring near to live in your courts." Maybe they are recognizing that they screwed up somewhere along the line, that they broke the covenant they have with God. Do you hear the echoes of feeling far off? Can you sense how they may have felt as though they'd fallen from grace, yet now are experiencing God's grace and mercy as if it's fresh and new?

These are not just words for an ancient people. These words are for you, and for me. When we experience disorientation and then reorientation, we experience new life; life as God intends for it to be lived. Perspectives are changed and stretched. Priorities get reordered. We may see life emerge from the most unlikely of places in ways we didn't notice before. It's at times like these, after we've come through the stuff of life that leaves some scars, that we realize life is still waiting for us; that there are new reasons to shout for joy, and that God still yearns to make music with us.

Here's another thing about reorientation. When you come to this new place, you can't help but want to join in God's creative work. You can't go about life the same way. You can't ignore that you are in the orchestra and that there is a part to play in God's ongoing creative work of harmonizing with the world.





You see friends, when we experience reorientation toward God, we can't help but also be reoriented toward the world. How can creation sing if we ignore the ways it cries out in pain? So, what do we do? What can we do?

I think it starts with allowing God to reorient us to the natural world. God is the Creator, we are the created. We are an inextricable part of this world, but we don't own it. God needs us to play our part in caring for what God has made. One small thing to do is pay attention to what you consume and why. I had a friend from college who never drove his car over 3000 rpms. He knew it burned gas faster and was mindful of his carbon footprint. Is that going to prevent fires or save a flood plain on the coast? No. But for him it was a spiritual practice. It was one way he was mindful of his relationship with God and his call to care for the Earth. Our care for this beautiful, complex, and fragile place is a matter of the Spirit. It is a call from God to get caught up in the music of Creation and join our lives to God and our voices in shouts of praise. Amen.

