

Peace for the Planet  
Psalm 104  
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A few years back, our church held several events at Summerfield Park on teacher workdays. Peace in the Park aimed to teach four concepts to elementary school children. Peace for me. Peace for you. Peace for everyone. Peace for the planet. Peace for me was about recognizing yourself as a beloved child of God. This is foundational to any notion of peacemaking – that it arises from our awareness that God loves us deeply, that we are the beloved, and as we see ourselves that way, we become a blessing to others. Peace for you means I learn to listen to you, to communicate effectively my own needs, and be aware of both yours and my emotions. Peace for everyone is a recognition that we are different and that diversity is good. Peace for everyone pays attention to those differences and how people respond to us accordingly. Last but not least Peace for the planet is an appreciation of the goodness of the earth and our responsibility to care for it, and to work for the day when all of us have access to clean water and good healthy food.

As I wrote this sermon, I began to wish we were still doing Peace in the Park, and I began to wonder if perhaps we might teach these four concepts in rooms of intergenerational learning at our early November 3<sup>rd</sup> Peace Festival. Now more than ever, we need to teach the next generation while reminding ourselves of the value of seeing the connectedness of everything and everybody. God created the sun, the moon, the stars, the water and the land, the plants, trees, and vegetation, the animals that creep upon the earth, that fly in the air, and that swim in the sea, and God got on a roll and even created us, in God's own image, female and male, and all along gender spectrum, all of us in the image of them, the Divine Trinity, who said, "Let us create humankind in our image..." And it was very good, until our desire for power became arrogance over obedience, profit over protection, greed over gratitude. Psalm 104 celebrates God's goodness in the creation. The psalms are meant to be sung, more than read, so we will sing our lesson today. I invite you to join in on the refrain after each verse.

## Psalm 104 (to be sung Hal Hopson's setting)

Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, <sup>2</sup> wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, <sup>3</sup> you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, <sup>4</sup> you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. <sup>5</sup> You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. <sup>6</sup> You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. <sup>7</sup> At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. <sup>8</sup> They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. <sup>9</sup> You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. <sup>10</sup> You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, <sup>11</sup> giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. <sup>12</sup> By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. <sup>13</sup> From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. <sup>14</sup> You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, <sup>15</sup> and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart. <sup>16</sup> The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. <sup>17</sup> In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. <sup>18</sup> The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coney. <sup>19</sup> You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. <sup>20</sup> You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out. <sup>21</sup> The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. <sup>22</sup> When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. <sup>23</sup> People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening. <sup>24</sup> O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. <sup>25</sup> Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. <sup>26</sup> There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. <sup>27</sup> These all look to you to give them their food in due season; <sup>28</sup> when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. <sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. <sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. <sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works-- <sup>32</sup> who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. <sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. <sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD. <sup>35</sup> Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD! (NRS)

I was sad on Friday not able to attend on Friday the John Dear event, which we helped sponsor entitled “They will Inherit the Earth: Peace and Nonviolence in a Time of Climate Change” I’ve started reading the book and hope we might read it together sometime. Who is it that Jesus said will inherit the earth? Those of you who have been in the Sermon on the Mount class, come on. Blessed are the meek, or non-violent, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who humbly care....for they shall inherit the earth. How many of you have enjoyed a walk on the beach in the last few weeks? How many of you have enjoyed a view from your window? How many of you have taken a walk in the woods or in the neighborhood? How many of you have nurtured some shrubs, plants, or flowers and admired their glory? Oh, how easy it is to stop noticing the beauty all around us!

I believe that our awareness of and appreciation of God, and our loving-kindness toward others is directly related to how much we revel in the beauty of the earth. I believe that all environmental concern arises from an attentive love of the Creator, creature, and creation. It is all connected. True confession: I cannot write a sermon without first going to the garden to pray. And when I get stuck in the middle of a sermon, I take a longer walk in the neighborhood. If I cannot finish the sermon, I go whack the hedges or pull some weeds. Some of you know that God is out there in the trees and the birds and the flowers. And some of you have not fully attended to it. God is always wanting to be seen in the beauty of creation. And the more you look, the more there is to see. Slowing down (keeping some Sabbath—stopping your usual busy life) to appreciate the creation has the power to shape you into more loving people. Caring for a loving pet in your home can vastly improve your inner peace. We are meant to be at one with all of God’s creation. Try listening to the birds for a while in the morning and see if your anxiety does not fly away.

Think about how Jesus said, “If God cares for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, then why should we worry.” His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me. Wanna be free? Wanna be happy? Pay more attention to the

sandhill cranes and the mocking birds and wonder how they will get their next meal. Watch the deer for a while. The Session smiled at them Thursday night. We're glad construction has not scared them away. Speaking of construction, I've been meaning to start telling you how things are going to be different when we move to the new sanctuary. I'm going to really miss looking at our beautiful courtyard while preaching. But you will get to enjoy the courtyard views more when you have coffee and conversation here each week. In the sanctuary all of us will have equitable views of the lake on one side and the woods on the other side, and we'll have a chance to linger in view of the fountain as we walk between buildings. Another outdoor area to get excited about is the Peaceful Path and Meditation Garden which is in early stages of design and planning. (slide) This is not the final plan. The path will wander around the lake and into the woods and the meditation garden will provide a place for you to pray and to remember loved ones, whose remains may be placed there. We hope this space will welcome people from the community, from the neighborhood needing a place to consider their Creator and their humble place in the creation, the beauty of earth and the brevity of life.

Peace for the planet can mean so many different things. (slide) It can mean that we at Peace Church are for protecting the environment and standing against measures that would pilfer earth's wonder for mere profit or personal convenience. Many of us will be considering Globing Warming this evening at 5:00 in the Forum and how that affects Manatee and Sarasota Counties.

(slide) Peace for the planet means that we are considering with the Christianity and Science group the theory put forth by two scientists who studied the 18 features that make this planet Earth so rare. Rare Earth may be unique not only in our solar system or Milky Way galaxy but in our entire universe as the home for complex self-conscious life.

(slide) Peace for the planet could mean that you might consider joining the Deiberts in slowly (though not purely) shifting our diets away from meat, and even poultry and fish – using these as merely a garnish, or enjoying many

vegetarian meals. There is no doubt that a plant-based diet or a forks-over-knives diet is healthier both for our bodies and for our planet. We're mostly motivated for health reasons, but when we consider the issues of big-industry animal production, we find other motivations as well.

(slide) Peace for the planet means that our families needed a week-end at Cedarkirk to escape technology and find themselves and God in the woods and around an open fire. (slide) Peace for the planet means that the youth group joined up with Tampa Bay Watch to plant salt marsh grasses in Apollo Beach and (slide) went to the Bird Sanctuary on Rye Road to build toys to keep the birds free of anxiety.

(slide) Peace for the planet means we are picking up garbage along the sides of the road at Upper Manatee regularly as good environmental citizens, and I am doing it along the Peace driveway and at our SR 64 frontage on a twice-a-week basis. I've had people stop and ask me, "Is this in your job description?" No, but Jesus washed feet. And getting outside in God's creation is what keeps me peaceful, grounded, and humane.

(slide) And that brings us to my first and final point – caring for the earth goes hand in hand with caring for one another. And all of it – peace for me, peace for you, peace for everyone, peace for the planet – involves walking humbly with God, with gratitude for God's beautiful handiwork, and with a desire to love and preserve, to honor and protect, to have dominion and not dominance. It means we value people and planet, more than profit and shallow pleasures. In fact, we discover that our deepest joy comes from living in concert with all of God's wondrous creation, touching earth gently, and humbly giving thanks to the One who gifted us and called us to care for it. And now I must end with an e.e. cummings poem, reciting by the poet himself.

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

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(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and love and wings and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any-lifted from the no  
of all nothing-human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)