

THE GOD OF NATURE

JUNE 22, 2008

We are quickly coming to the end of the first half of the year. Today is the beginning of summer and the longest amount of daylight. Tomorrow, the days begin to wane as we move into the second half of 2008.

There are two ways to look at this junction in the year. We can be glum and dwell on the sadness of the shortening of the days or we can decide to celebrate each day and wait for the adventures ahead with anticipation and joy. Which will it be for you?

Growing up on the prairies, I was keenly aware of the changing of the seasons. Spring and summer were coveted for the lack of snow and the balmy weather. Autumn, while also beautiful, caused depression in many people as they looked ahead to the harsh winter which was to follow. In my experience, I missed the beauty of autumn thinking of winter to come.

It appears to be a human trait to worry about what is coming ahead or to commiserate on the missed opportunities of the days which have passed. What about the enjoyment of today? Do we consciously try to get the most out of each day, not to achieve the most tasks but to catch the enjoyment of life in the present?

When you travel around this country or this world, you quickly realize how varied is the topography, the weather, the availability of water and greenery. Animals, birds, plant life and sea creatures are also in great variety across the globe. God's world is indeed a kaleidoscope of colour, shapes and sizes.

On a day like today whether it is Picnic Sunday as it is at Friendship United in the beautiful surroundings of Northport Park or in the enchanting setting of Wesley United, we become evermore aware of the God of Nature.

Many of you are old enough to remember the days of Walt Disney. Walt was a man who always saw everything in living, vivid colour. He envisioned God as a great artist holding the artist's pallet and carefully coloring the world with his paint brush. He also said he saw God as a bold artist utilizing bold colours to create a bright and inviting world. To Walt Disney, God was not an artist of muted, careful brush strokes though he saw God as a God of detail as well. To Walt, God was his inspiration to stretch the imagination and to create for people a wondrous canvas of beauty, excitement and imagination.

We all know that Walt Disney had a capacity to unlock the child in every man and woman, to unleash the imagination so often stifled and to create a world of make believe that lifted you out of the everyday mundane and transporting you to a new world of possibility and excitement. Who but Walt Disney could imagine great heavy hippos dancing ballet wearing tutus in the film Fantasia? Who but Walt could make a folk hero out of a mouse named Mickey?

God is indeed an appropriate role model for Walt Disney in his work. The writers of Genesis as they attempted to understand the creation of the world had a vision of a great mind behind the creation of the universe. As they looked at the world they knew, they could not see any evidence of happenstance where the world just happened. They were convinced that there was a master creator and they instinctively knew it was the one true God they worshipped as their God.

The Creation Story in Genesis portrays God making a decisive decision to bring order out of chaos. There is no sense that God was bored and dreamed it up as a way to keep busy. Rather the underlying theme of this story is that God was very deliberate, creative and imaginative.

God created the light to separate the darkness. The early writers knew that life was enriched and possible because of light, primarily light from the sun. They were aware of how light changes everything and enables possibilities beyond measure.

When I was a boy on a farm in southern Manitoba, electricity came to our area in 1950. Previous to this, when you stood outside at night and looked in any direction, there was darkness only cut into by moonlight and the stars. With the advent of electricity, people erected yard lights which illuminated the house area all night. Suddenly, as we stood outside at night, we could see lights in the distance where our various neighbours lived. One did not feel so alone and isolated. Light, which separates from the dark, is a wonderful gift indeed.

God created light and it was good. He also separated the land from the water and created dry land so that life may begin on earth. The story goes on to say he filled it with wonderful trees and plants of infinite variety, animals of all shapes and sizes on land, birds of great variety for the air and numerous species to live in the rivers, lakes and sea.

The writers go on to say God then stood back with a smile on his face and saw that his handiwork was very good indeed. His was the satisfaction of an artist who is content with the wonder created on the canvas.

On the second last day of Creation, so goes the story, God made a conscious decision to create mankind. He gave humans dominion over all other things on earth living and inanimate for the use of all men and women. Then the story says God blessed these new creatures called humans and urged them to be fruitful and multiply. And God looked around at all he had done, and he saw that it was very good.

The second chapter of Genesis contains another version of the creation story. The main additional feature from this story's tradition is worth mentioning. In it we see God fashioning man out of clay as would a potter. These figures were inanimate and lifeless. Then God breathed his breath into them and they came alive. His greatest gift to men and women was his very spirit!

These creation stories then say a number of things to us and enrich and anchor our faith:

- God **is** the creator of the world in all its rich variety
- God created the world and all therein **intentionally**
- God was **pleased** with his creation and saw it was good
- God **gave** over the world to men and women for their home and nourishment
- God saw men and women as **stewards** of his creation with responsibility to treat the world with nurturing care
- All human beings regardless of colour, race, gender or place of origin received God's breath of life – each one is a unique creation and as such should be honoured, respected and loved. As God loves, so should we.
- God from the beginning of time was interested and has continued to be interested in an ongoing and intimate relationship with his creation.

These stories, not in their details, but in their overall truths are fundamental to how we perceive our world and all that is in it. Christians should be most aware of our role as stewards of this place in our time and our responsibility to pass it on to the next generation in as good a shape as we can. Christians need to be respecters of nature, caring for the earth because it is such a wondrous gift. It is also fundamental to our well being.

We are so blessed in this part of God's world. We are surrounded by the beauty of trees, flowers, water, fields of grain, vineyards, beaches, space to move and places to call our own. One only has to watch the weather channel or the all news networks to know that this is not the norm for everyone on earth. Therefore, being so blessed, even more is expected of us.

Is it not a wonder that our God who created all so long ago, still walks beside us, still takes a great interest in us and still urges us to open our eyes and live each day to the fullest? Be careful with my world he reminds us, try to leave it a better place than you found it. Love one another as I have unconditionally loved you, care for one another and share the beauty which is all around you with others.

Walt Disney understood the great gift of imagination that God had implanted in all of us. This gift was spontaneous, full of colour, magical in possibilities and boundless in creativity. To Walt Disney, the Creator of the world was an artist, bold and imaginative, capable of wonderful dreams of endless possibilities. Just as Walt Disney tries to hook adults into opening up their dormant creativity, so our God urges us to open to life so we not miss the wondrous things all around us. God's greatest creations are all around us.

Rev. Gary Magarrell