

Psalm 19 is quite famous in Jewish and Christian usage... having many settings in choral music. "The heavens are declaring the glory of God and the earth proclaims God's handiwork!" The writer of this ancient psalm or song is basically saying that God-in-Nature is a preacher. The Creation teaches us so many things without using words. Jesus used many examples from nature in his parables or teachings. (Look at the birds, look at the flowers!) Awe of nature is a universal experience that connects us with people of all faiths. It causes reverence and praise, and learning. And so It also causes humility... as in another Psalm (8): "When I look at the sky and the moon and the stars you have made, What are humans that you are mindful of them?" Our place in relation to the vast Creation is indeed humbling. Psalm 19, a psalm of David, starts with awe of Creation and ends with the important, humble prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and Redeemer."

In our New Testament reading, Paul tries to move his Corinthians church members to more humility as the "body" of Christ. He says, Look at the human body: Can the head say to the foot I have no need of you? Can the eye say to the ear, I am better than you? Paul was with the Corinthian church for only about a year and a half as its founder. We know that the city of Corinth was a large cosmopolitan Greek city with diverse people, and that diversity became part of the church. What they had in common was their baptism invoking and committing to the Spirit of Christ. Unfortunately, egos were big, and over time, the church had growing divisions; we hear of comparisons as to who was more spiritual, who had which gifts, especially supernatural gifts like working miracles or speaking in tongues. Paul tried to

emphasize that all gifts came from the same Holy Spirit, and that no spiritual gifts were better than others. Rather, he concludes in the famous Chapter 13 on Love, that that most important and essential gift is simply to show Love toward one another.

Paul's lesson about spiritual gifts is obviously true for humanity in general: We all have different "skills" or "talents" that we can use to help our community. And there an important associated truth: That no one person has all the gifts needed in a community. Pastors know it all too well, or learn the hard way... that they cannot do everything. Paul lists some spiritual gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, preaching, power to heal, power to work miracles, praying in tongues... but it is from the Same Spirit, giving *a different gift* to each person. Spiritually gifted people are mentioned as: apostles, prophets, teachers, healers, and yes, organizers(!) I know that I don't have all the spiritual gifts (especially that one some translations call "organizing!"), I'll never forget the sermon at my own ordination: the title was "The Guilt and the Gaps." Needs in a community are endless, so there will always be gaps, and maybe feelings of guilt. I always need to let go of some ministry needs, let go, let others... let go, let God!

We have heard this lectionary reading so many times over the years, that it can be helpful to listen to another translation, or paraphrase. In THE MESSAGE, a paraphrase Bible by New Testament scholar Eugene Peterson, he puts it this way: *You can easily see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. We have a body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost: I don't need you? Or, Head telling Foot, you're fired; your job has been phased out? The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding*

our lives together as a church; every part dependent on every other part. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing, if one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ's body - Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything.

Not only do we not have every gift; even the gifts we do have are in some way incomplete. Paul goes on in the famous chapter on Love to say that "Now we see dimly, but that one day we will see face to face," and "what we know now is only partial, one day it will be complete." Peterson rephrases it to say "We know only a portion of the truth and what we say about God is always incomplete."

I recently read a very good illustration of this lesson in a book by UCC preacher Lilian Daniel (*When Spiritual but not Religious is not Enough*). She writes: *We discover that most of our important jobs are never complete. Take PARENTING for example. Parents of small children will look at the parents of teenagers and say, "Tell me it gets easier!" But parents of teenagers will tell you that it just gets more complicated. And Parents of adult children tell me the job of parenting is never done! Kids move out, and then in many cases, they move back in! I think God gives us a gold star for hanging in there, still working, in the incompleteness of life. One day we will meet the Alpha and the Omega, we will see God face to face, and finally be complete. But until then..... there's nothing wrong with the occasionally being incomplete!* (I think such acceptance is called Grace... which was of course the conclusion of that ordination sermon 36 years ago ... "The guilt, the gaps" ... and Grace was of course the Good News).

So we take do well to ponder this lesson, for both our individual lives and our lives as a community. In this age of many many churches downsizing, there will always be ministry jobs left undone or partially done. There will always be *Gaps* in our ministries, needs that are left unmet. We cannot do it all. Again, that's where *Grace* comes in. We are always always in the position of letting go and letting God.

Good News is that God is always at work in our midst, and leading us into a future: We may see only dimly what that future is, but it becomes clearer with time.

Good News is that we all do have gifts to use for God's work, for service in the name and spirit of Christ. Undoubtedly there are needs here and in the world that can be met with the gifts that each of us have. Good News: if we step up the the plate, if we offer our gifts for Christ's service, God promises to be with us, to make us fruitful in that service.

The needs and wounds around us are endless. YET... God will shower us with GRACE when we experience gaps and limits in our ministries. Amen.