

The Ground and Glory Connection- A Theological Reflection

I love the prairies. I can stand on the crest of a hill and see the horizon in every direction. The immensity, the spaciousness, and the beauty takes my breath away. It is easy to imagine God doing the very same thing—standing, slowly rotating, taking in and celebrating all that He declared to be good.

This contemplation of a full horizon is both fascinating and mysterious. It testifies to a universal horizon, the creation in its totality, completely inclusive in its scope. And yet it is also completely imminent, specific, real, a concrete location.

The Hebrew word for “earth” as used in Psalm 24:1 confirms this bi-fold meaning. The term *’eres* can mean both “earth” in the sense of creation (and God’s ownership of it because God is its Maker) and “land” in the sense of actual ground or territory inhabited by a people.¹ When coupled with the second phrase in which the word “world” or *tebel* is used, the psalmist is declaring that everything – the entire earth, all that God has created whether on the ground or in the heavens, the entire universe and all its inhabitants, especially the inhabitants, is God’s.

So what are we to make of this ground and glory connection, this earth and heaven celebration? Several themes are worthy of instruction.

First, because God delights in His entire creation, so ought we. The psalmist’s declaration echoes God’s declaration of His pleasure with it when it was first brought into being, a pleasure that is in the entire creation, not just the parts relevant or useful to people.² God’s sense of celebration is infectious. Whether it is beholding the majestic mountains, or meandering alongside a stream, or considering a field ready for harvest, or even marveling at a city skyline, we ought not be surprised that our language turns to poetry and our hearts are filled with wonder.

Second, because every created element holds within in it an echo of the creator, we can come to know more of God by coming to know that which God created. Theologian Walter Brueggemann wonders if the North American focus on personal salvation and redemption has distanced us from the doctrine of creation.³ The Biblical teaching on the land and the

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "On Land-losing and Land-receiving," *Dialog* 19 (1980): 166-173.

² William van Geest (2e, 2007), *God’s Earthkeepers: Biblical action and reflection on the environment*. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

³ A five-part video series from Earth Keeper TV: Biblical scholar and author Dr. Walter Brueggemann talks in northern Michigan during October 2007. www.earthkeeperinitiative.wordpress.com/2007/10/31/earth-keeper-initiative-five-part-video-series-on-famed-scholarauthor-dr-walter-brueggeman/

story of the people of God “as Israel lives prior to the land, enters into the land, struggles to keep the land, loses the land and reflects on how to return to the land,” will always characterize the people of God as a people called to obedience whose discipleship leads to the cross – the ultimate loss of home so that a new home can be offered.⁴

Third, because humans are part of the fullness of God’s creation, we are inseparable from the rest of creation. Kathleen Norris begins her book entitled *Dakota* with this quotation from the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, “Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are.”⁵ Being part of the created order means that our identity is connected to it. It means that our actions are both determined by all of creation and have an effect on all of creation. As part of this interconnectedness, we have the responsibility of ensuring that it functions as God intended. If we don’t, we risk being charged by God for undoing God’s creation. This happened to the people described in the book of Hosea were. The land was mourning and the people were called to account. Exploitation of the earth is not just something that disappoints God: God will not tolerate it.

Lastly, because of the Psalmist’s special mention of the world’s people belonging to God, every person is a descendant of the most high and deserves to be treated as such. Former US President Jimmy Carter often recounts a lesson he holds dear. It was taught to him by a Cuban-American pastor who readily admitted that he was not a trained theologian. But this is what the pastor knew to be true—we are to love God above all else and we are to love the person standing in front of us at any given moment regardless of his or her status in the eyes of society, regardless of our personal estimation of his or her worth.⁶

Perhaps the story of Naboth the Jezreelite (I Kings 21) embodies the lesson of Psalm 24: 1. Naboth refuses to sell his land, his ancestral inheritance, to King Ahab, and pays for this refusal with his life. To Naboth, protecting his ancestral inheritance meant that he could not sell the land, not because of a nostalgia regarding ancestral lands, but because, as Brueggemann observes,

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "On Land-losing and Land-receiving," *Dialog* 19 (1980): 166-173.

⁵ Norris, Kathleen (1993). *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

⁶ Jimmy Carter (2005). *Our endangered values: America’s moral crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

the land was not Naboth's to sell. The land did not belong to him. Rather, Naboth belonged to the land.⁷

This earth on which we live, this entire world and all its people, is the Lord's. It is not ours to own or to exploit. It is God's. Through God's generosity, we have the privilege of beholding its magnificence, of prospering from its capacities, and of loving its inhabitants. May God grant us hearts, minds and wills to demonstrate such glorious obedience to that which God desires.

- by Carla Nelson

More supplementary material is posted at www.bwawd.org.

⁷A five-part video series from Earth Keeper TV: Biblical scholar and author Dr. Walter Brueggemann talks in northern Michigan during October 2007. www.earthkeeperinitiative.wordpress.com/2007/10/31/earth-keeper-initiative-five-part-video-series-on-famed-scholarauthor-dr-walter-brueggeman/