

Scripture: John 21:1-14

Sermon Title: "Nature Proclaims"

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One fall morning, while still living in Pennsylvania, I took a friend of mine for a drive through the countryside of Lancaster County. You see, my friend grew up in Philadelphia, spent nearly all of his life in the city environment and so he never really got to see the rolling hillsides of rural Pennsylvania. So we were driving along on a road that I had been on many, many times before - a road that I had traveled through all the changing seasons - a road that was so familiar to me - as the saying goes "I knew it like the back of my hand". And as we came to the top of a hill starting down the other side, my friend gasped in awe and wonder at the view. For at the top of this hill, you could see multiple other hillsides covered with trees and being that it was fall, the trees were of all different colors. As he marveled at this beauty, he commented on how lucky I was to get to drive that road so frequently and to enjoy that spectacular, awe-inspiring view of God's creation on a regular basis.

Yet I must confess, that it had been a long time since I had really taken a moment to enjoy that beautiful view. Yes, I would drive the road regularly, several times a week in fact, but for so long I had not allowed myself to really take in the view. For so long I saw that road as just a means of getting from point A to point B rather than a bearer of God's glory revealed in the beauty of the created world which encompassed that road. But now I had a friend who was telling me - look again. Look again at the gift of creation that surrounded us atop that hill. For seeing the magnificent view of full hillsides and trees of fall colors is like seeing the fingerprint of God. He was telling me to look again and marvel at the fact that these trees that surround us are God's miraculous gift of breath to us as they fill our world with the oxygen that we all need. In that moment, in the car with my friend, I was called back to a reality that I had become blind to - being reminded of how that view of nature proclaims the glory, the beauty, the wonder of God. What a tremendous thing to be reminded of. To look at the created

world, and see the hand of God – to look at the created world and see the love of God all around us.

In our Scripture reading today which tells of the third appearance of Jesus to his disciples after the resurrection according to John, we get to witness a similar narrative of the disciples seeing the love of God revealed through the glories of the created world. Today we hear about how the disciples went fishing after the resurrection, which remember was the trade of many of the disciples. These are people who have seen fish many times in their lives. They have likely witnessed empty nets before as well as full nets. They have sailed upon that same body of water, upon the Sea of Tiberias before. But this time, as they were fishing, something was different. This time, unlike all the other times in their lives when they have seen fish, and they have seen many fish, this time they saw the fish and saw the Lord. These fish, which they have seen before, coming out of the waters which they have fished before, this time they saw the created world around them proclaim the glories of God. Because this time they had their friend Jesus on the shore, telling them to look again. And this time, they saw the love of Christ proclaimed through the gift of nature. Through the catch of fish, something that they had seen many times before, they looked at it again and saw the Lord.

The created world around us is a gift. A gift that reveals the glories of God in profound ways, and through it, God provides and cares for us. This world is a gift that we should never take for granted, but always be looking for the ways in which God's glory will be revealed. This world is a gift that we should cherish and love because it shows the love that God has for us.

Yet, it is not only through the created world around us in which we can see the wonders of God. As Jesus calls the disciples together after they have witnessed his glory proclaimed through the fish, he gathers them around a fire and shares with them a meal. And through that meal, shared in community, they knew that they stood in the presence of Jesus. For scripture tells us that after that point, after this shared meal, none of them dared to ask who this man was, for they knew beyond a doubt that it was Jesus.

They did not only have the proclamation of the fish, but they had the blessings of community to know that they were enveloped in God's love revealed through Jesus Christ.

Beloved People of God, we must open our eyes to see the beauty of the created world around us and to witness anew through the gifts of creation how nature proclaims the glories of God. Because like me with those rolling hillsides, we can often neglect to see the wonders of God that surround us. Yet it is not only through seeing the heavens and the earth, the land and sea, the birds and all creatures. We must also open our eyes and our hearts to see the beauty of people around us and to witness anew through the gift of humanity how nature proclaims the glories of God. For we all are a part of God's beautiful creation. And just like the trees of the rolling Pennsylvania hillside or the fish from the sea of Tiberias, the people with whom we share this world also have something to reveal to us when it comes to seeing God and appreciating God's love for us and the world. And there may be times when we neglect to see it. Yet may we be open to hearing and seeing, all the ways in which nature proclaims the glories of God, even in the places and in the people where we least expect it. Because just like all the aspects of our environment, community is a gift, and has the power to reveal the glories of God, the truth of Jesus, if we are willing to look and if we are ready to see.

You know, this idea of a gift fascinates me. For if we are able to embrace the world as a gift, maybe we will treat it a little different. And if we are able to see community as a gift, maybe we will treat it a little different too. Caring for, nurturing, and celebrating all that surrounds us. And so, as you leave this place today, look around this sanctuary and see the gift of community gathered here. When you go out those doors, see the beauty of the place in which we live and give thanks. And as you encounter every tree and every creature, as you encounter blue skies and storm clouds and all sorts of people, see it all as a gift and look for the ways in which God's glory is revealed through them. Because you just never know how, or when, or where nature, in all its many forms, will proclaim the wonders of God. So be it and may it be so. Amen.