



Praise the Lord from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy winds fulfilling his command!

P s a l m 1 48:7-8

FRAME MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1300 Main Street
Stevens Point, WI 54481

a member of
WINNEBAGO PRESBYTERY
SYNOD OF LAKES AND PRAIRIES
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S.A.

MISSION STATEMENT

We, the congregation of Frame Memorial Presbyterian Church of Stevens Point, Wisconsin welcome all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to join us in worship and celebration—center of our faith community.

We deny no one full participation in the life and leadership of the church on the basis of race, ethnic origin, worldly condition, age, gender, gender orientation, or any other particular of his or her humanity. We believe the errors of society which have resulted in oppression and despair are not the ways of God. And we seek not to judge our sisters and brothers in our journey of faith. Instead we seek enlightenment about the ways in which we can offer our support and our love to all children of God.

FRAME MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Season of Creation – 4 Compass Points and 4 Elements Sunday
September 24, 2006 9:30 a.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

PRELUDE

DAN MITCHELL

INTROIT

Earth, Water, Fire and Air

TRADITIONAL

Earth, water, fire and air. Round and round the world is turning. Turning always 'round to morning. And from morning 'round to night.

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

***HYMN** *Thank You God, for Water, Soil and Air (v. 1, 4, 5)* #266

***LITANY FOR THE FOUR ELEMENTS**

Leader: Earth, air, fire, and water are traditionally symbols of life. Our 'slavery' to sin' has meant that these elements may equally contain and carry death.

Life: I am life. If offer earth to share between the daughters and sons of God – soil for bearing plants to sustain the planet's life and yield bread for all people.

DEATH: I AM DEATH. I TAKE EARTH AWAY FROM THE MANY AND GIVE IT TO THE FEW. I EXPLOIT AND OVER-USE IT. I WASTE ITS BREAD WHILE MANY STARVE.

ALL: O God, who wore our clay in Christ, we confess we have not shared the land; we have broken our bond with the earth and one another. Forgive us: we have chosen death. We long for healing: we choose your life.

Life: I offer air to breathe: for the endless energy of the wind, for birds to fly and seeds to blow. Air has no frontiers; we share the breath of life.

DEATH: I FILL THE AIR WITH POISONOUS FUMES WHICH ALL MUST BREATHE, AND WHICH CLAW AWAY THE THREADS OF THE UNIVERSE.

ALL: O God, who breathed life into the world, we confess we have polluted the air; we cannot sense the harmony of your creation. Forgive us: we have chosen death. We long for healing: we choose your life.

Life: I offer fire for light and warmth, for purification and power. Fire draws us together in fellowship, around a meal cooked and shared.

DEATH: I USE FIRE FOR MY OWN VIOLENT ENDS. I BURN THE FORESTS AND CHOKE THE AIR. I GIVE THE RICH THE EARTH'S ENERGY TO WASTE: I DENY THE POOR THEIR FUEL TO COOK WITH.

ALL: O God, pillar of fire and pentecostal flame, we confess our lack of inner fire for your justice to be done, your peace shared on earth. Forgive us: we have chosen death. We long for healing: we choose your life.

Life: I offer water to drink and cleanse: to be the veins and arteries of the land; I offer strong waves for energy and still lakes for calm of spirit.

DEATH: I POLLUTE WATER WITH THE WASTE FROM MINES AND FACTORIES, THAT IT MAY KILL THE FISH, BE BITTER TO DRINK, AND CARRY DISEASE. I WITH DRAW WATER FROM THE LAND AND MAKE A DESERT; I EXTEND THE WATERS OF THE SEA AND DROWN CITIES.

ALL: O God, fountain of living waters, we confess that we are cracked cisterns, lacking stillness to listen to your word, and energy to act on it. Forgive us; we have chosen death. We long for healing: we choose your life.

Leader: God of earth, air, fire and water,

We surrender to you our old humanity:

ALL: Christ, we would rise with you: we would be born anew.

Leader: Christ has died: Christ is risen.

ALL: We are forgiven: we too may leave the grave.

RESPONSE (Hymn #455, adapted from verses 2-4)

Thou rushing wind that Art so strong, ye clouds that sail in heav'n along.. O sing ye! Alleluia! Thou fertile earth, that day by day unfoldest blessings on your way! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou flowing water, pure and clear, make music for thy Lord to hear, Alleluia! Alleluia! Thou fire so masterful and bright, that givest us both warmth and light, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

***THE PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you all. **And also with you.**

(You may share Christ's peace by saying "Peace be with you," and/or with a handshake or hug.)

MOMENT WITH CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG AT HEART

PRESENTATION OF GOD'S WORD

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

LESSON FROM THE GOSPELS

Luke 13:22-30 (p. 58)

LESSON FROM THE EPISTLES

2 Peter 3:3-13 (p. 186)

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ANTHEM

Jesus Calls Us

JOY PATTERSON

Megan Younkle, Soprano

Jesus calls us over the tumult of our life's wild, restless, sea; day by day his voice is sounding, saying, "Christian, follow me!"

Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store, from each idol that would keep us, saying, "Christian, love me more!"

In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease, still he calls, in cares and pleasures, "Christian, love me more than these!"

Jesus calls us! By your mercies, Savior may we hear your call, give our hearts to your obedience, serve and love Thee best of all.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE LESSON

Genesis 28:10-17 (p. 19)

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

Here, There and Everywhere

Rev. Zencka

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

***HYMN**

In Christ There Is No East or West

#439

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND OUR LIVES

OFFERTORY

DAN MITCHELL

RESPONSE (Hymn #455, verse 6)

All creatures, your Creator bless, and worship God in humbleness. O sing ye! Alleluia! Praise ye Creator, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

SHARING OF CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND PRAYER TO THE CREATOR

Our Creator and Parent, who is as far as the stars and as near as our breath, You are holy. Let all creation worship you and live in harmony with you and each other. Give us today what we need; and forgive us for turning from You, as we forgive those who have hurt or offended us; let us find our happiness in You. For all that matters is in You, and through You, and of You and for You, forever. Amen.

BEARING THE WORD INTO THE WORLD

***HYMN**

Let the Whole Creation Cry

#256

***BENEDICTION**

***CHORAL RESPONSE**

God's Fire

EAST AFRICA

God's fire is burning in my soul, God's fire has come to make me whole, God's fire is sweeping through the earth; praise God, I've got God's fire and it's burning in my soul! Praise God – yes, hallelujah it's burning in my soul!

POSTLUDE

DAN MITCHELL

*Please stand, as able

OUR LITURGY THIS MORNING is adapted from a prayer by Kate Compston in *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*.

Here, There and Everywhere

September 24, 2006

Rev. Susan Gilbert Zencka

Frame Memorial Presbyterian Church

Texts: 2 Peter 3:3-13; Luke 13:22-30; Genesis 28:10-16

The text from 2 Peter reminded me of the story where the fellow is praying to God about his financial problems, and God says to him, “Well, you know, God’s ways are not the ways of humans: a million dollars is like a penny to me, and a million years is like a minute.” And the fellow says, “Well, in that case, Lord, would you give me a penny?” And God replies, “In a minute.”

These three texts are very different, and somewhat difficult, but the one thing they share in common is that sense that humans don’t know what’s going on with God. 2 Peter is discussing a time of future apocalypse and judgment and making the point that some people had expected it to happen already during his time. In the passage from Luke, Jesus is being asked pointblank, “Is everyone going to be saved?” And Jesus is clear is saying some folks are going to be surprised. And finally, in the Genesis passage, the surprise seems to go the other way – it’s not about who’s going to get to go be with God, but a surprise about whom God has come to be with. My apologies to those who are in the strict camp about ending sentences with prepositions. What’s the old reminder? A preposition is the one thing you should never end a sentence with.

And as if these questions weren’t enough, and I think the historical evidence is that the “who’s in and who’s out” question is more than enough to occupy a sermon or two or 1200, I want us to remember that these texts were chosen as part of our Season of Creation – and this Sunday is 4 Compass Points, 4 basic elements Sunday. So we need also to consider what we learn of God from the 4 compass points and 4 basic elements. Yow.

So, with additional apologies for this intended pun, I am going instead to take my basic orientation from these concepts of 4 compass points and four elements, and see where we end up.

As I read scripture, the four compass points do come up from time to time in passages. And each time, it seems to have the same suggestion as as in the Genesis and Luke passages – a sense of universality. God says to Jacob, “...your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread aboard to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be bless in you and in your offspring.” And there is a certain reiteration in these three clauses: your kids are going to be all over, and you shall go everywhere, and everyone will be blessed because of you.”

Same thing in the Luke passage: Jesus says, “Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God...” and he means, all kinds of people from all over are going to be there. There is a sense of universalism, that what is being described is the whole wide world. It’s about ‘everywhere’.

When we talk about the four classic elements: fire, water, air and earth, I think we’re going both in the same and also in a slightly different direction. I think in this case, the Biblical writers are talking specifics – they are getting gritty. And it’s the difference between a global concept and an encyclopedic one. Describing what God has made and done is not only a matter of including the whole wide world, but every little thing in it. God has made this, and this, and that, and that, and fire and water and wind and earth, and all the other stuff, too. Not only all the mountains, but every little grain of sand too. The sense is also one of talking about real stuff – God really made the real stuff. God didn’t just make the whole wide world in some general sense, but the whole diverse interconnected universe and all that is in it. And it has a sense of locality that is also present in the story of Jacob – the sense is that God is here, in particular. I can’t tell you whether our understanding of God being

everywhere was part of Hebrew theology at the time Genesis was written. I tend to think not – although I can't support that now. I do know that there was a sense of God being the local God of the Hebrews, and later, of God being particularly present in the Ark of the Covenant.

In any event, Jacob is pretty up front about his experience in saying, "Surely God was in this place, and I did not know it." He hadn't a clue. It never occurred to him that God would meet him there. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this story – Jacob is one of two brothers, he is the younger of the two. And Jacob had cheated his older brother twice. First he had tricked him out of his birthright, in terms of inheritance. But then he had tricked his father into blessing him in his brother's place. He has manipulated and defrauded his brother, deceived his father, so I can imagine his being surprised when God shows up, with a blessing and a promise. And this says volumes about God and about this collection of stories in the Bible. The stories are about God, and about God's caring about and creating the whole wide world, and about God's work in particular corners of the world with particular people. It's both-and. And the promises of God to Jacob are very particular: he says, *Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.* God says, I am here, I will care for you, and I will take you home. The promises are particular, and they are consistent with God's message throughout the Bible. I read in one commentary that these promises are the same promises as in the 23rd Psalm: *The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want...even in the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for you are with me...and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* And it echoes the last words of Jesus to his disciples: *remember, I am with you always.*

And the particulars are what is especially interesting in this episode – and what startles Jacob as well. Wow, he says, God was right here...and I didn't know. And I understand that wonder, for I had a similar experience once. It wasn't knowing that God cared about all people that I found riveting, stunning, amazing. It was that God loved me, in particular. For just like Jacob, I was certainly familiar with my own deficits. And it was remarkable to realize that I mattered to God.

In all the references to fire and water and wind and earth, I think there is a sense that matter matters to God. The Genesis story tells us that God forms humans out of clay, and then breathes life into them. As Karl Barth said, so I too believe: "I take the Bible far too seriously to take it literally." Were we made of clay, literally? I don't think so, but just as the Hebrew word for man, *Adam*, is related to the word for earth, *adamah*, so too is our word human related to the word humus that indicates rich soil. And while I don't think that this means that human beings were literally formed of clay, I do think that it means that the material world matters to God, and our human experience matters also. There is that wonderful quote by Teilhard de Chardin – *we're not human beings having a spiritual experience, we're spiritual being having a human experience.* This world and our experiences in it matter to God. Matter matters. And this is part of what we understand from the theological doctrine of the incarnation, because this world and our lives in it matter enough to God that God became part of this world – walking our earth, being baptized in water, sailing a ship in the wind, cooking fish over a fire. He shared our experience, he shares our lives. Matter matters and we matter. And we, too, have an experience somewhat akin to Jacob's although we have understood it intellectually – surely God is in this place, in this life with us, and I did not know it. God is with us – if we take nothing else from this incarnation, we should take that, and because God has been WITH us, we know in a new way that God is FOR us...

So how do we think about that, as we read the other dimension of this morning's readings, that dimension of judgment and exclusion? Do we just dismiss it? Do we accept it at face value although it seems inconsistent with the preponderant reading in Scripture of God consistently seeking relationship and welcoming people? Or do we find some other responsible and thoughtful way of receiving this dimension of Scripture? Hmmm, no bias in those choices, is there?

The basic principle, I think, is that God desires to be taken seriously, and that just as God came within our human experience to reach us, we cannot properly understand God without entering the God-breathed life from within. God is not merely an intellectual proposition, and discipleship cannot be merely understood, it must be lived. And God, indeed, asks for discipleship. This is also one consistent message throughout Scripture: God is seeking commitment of the whole-hearted variety. God expects our hearts, our actions, our wallets, our minds and our choices to reflect that commitment.

And just as we see God's commitment to us lived out in the material world, and just as we are learning in this Season of Creation to recognize the revelation of God in creation, as last week we began to understand through studying trees that transformation is not incidental to God's world, it is integral to God's world, so too we learn from this physical world with its physical laws that choices matter and actions have consequences.

Recently, in a couple of places, people have been asking me about eternity, and the heaven/hell questions. Just as in Biblical times, folks in our time continue to be concerned with questions of who's in and who's out. Mostly, of course, we're concerned with whether we're in, and if we are, we want to know who's in the neighborhood. Just like politics, it turns out all theology is local. We'll get back to that, but to give my answer of the question: my answer is consistent with what we experienced in this morning's readings: first, I'm a human, and I don't pretend to fully understand God or provide explanations for God, and I fully believe that God's ways are not our ways, and that God is beyond our full understanding. Secondly, the Bible, and my own experience, teach me that we matter to God, that God is FOR us, that God deeply loves us and is faithful to us. And finally, the Bible and my own experiences also teach me that this life matters and that there are consequences to my choices.

What does this mean? It means that I trust God, that I know God to be merciful and faithful, that I understand God expects me to be faithful, that choices have consequences, and that my relationship with God is NOT all about what comes next, it's about what I do in this real world that really matters to God. The bumper sticker tells us, "Think globally; act locally." The theological counterpart is "Think eternally, live now." The local corollary in theology is our commitment, our treatment of those around us, and our care for the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the sick and the planet. A retreat group that I used to be involved with opened its weekend retreats by asking us to reflect on our priorities: what do we think about? How do we spend our money? How do we spend our time? This, by the way, is the connection between stewardship and discipleship, and why people say that giving is a spiritual issue. It's a spiritual issue in the way that every choice is a spiritual issue: it reflects our priorities.

If we say we care about God, but we don't spend any time studying God, or resting with God in prayer, or serving God and caring for the people and places that God cares about, or giving our finances to support the ministry of the local church and wider mission, then we can't really be skeptical about God, because we haven't given God much of a try, but we could certainly understand why God might be skeptical about us.

And this isn't some judgment sermon about how if we're not faithful to God then God won't be faithful to us – I don't pretend to know how God is going to balance judgment and mercy. This sermon is about how the big picture is connected to the little picture, that the forest is made up of trees, that north south east and west are part of earth air fire and water, that our lives and choices matter, and that God desires us to experience him. So just as I can't complain that my YMCA membership isn't getting me fit if I don't show up at the Y, so too, I can't really complain that I don't have any real experience of God if I don't make choices that make room for the holy. For those of you who have seen the movie or play *Rent* about young people living with AIDS, some of its central messages reflect this same truth: 525,600 moments, 525,600 minutes in a year, how do you measure a life? There's only this: forget regret or life is yours to miss, no other way, no day but today – measure it in love. The universal and eternal, the north and south and east and west of time and space, is lived out in the elemental, the earth and fire and wind and air of our daily living. Eternity is in the now.

I have more fun giving sermons like last week's that unpack the holy in the ordinary and point to mystery in our midst, but actually, this is the same sermon. *Our real world teaches us about God.* The physical world holds lessons and one is that choices have consequences. The other is that God is utterly faithful. Remember the promises to Jacob? *I am here, I will care for you, I will take you home.* And yet there is that other message as well: choices matter, your actions and decisions have consequences. You make sense of that, but don't try to make sense of it without living it from the inside. And that is the essential message of all scripture I believe: the invitation to enter the God-breathed life. All theology is local, and it is lived from the neighborhood of our checkbook, our day planner, our prayer and our conversation. And this is not to ignore global mission, for it can be lived from the same neighborhood and we'll be hearing more about that in coming weeks – it's all one. One world in which we care for God's children near and far, one life in which our choices really matter for now and for always, one reality in which our spiritual experiences are intimately connected with our material experiences, one eternity that today is part of, and one love, which must be entered into to be known. Amen.