

## **Psalm 84**

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.  
Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Selah

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.  
As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah  
Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness.  
For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour.  
No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.  
O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

### **“It’s Time to Gander at the Grandeur”**

**Rev. Charles Schuster**

**August 23, 2009**

One of the really neat things about being appointed to this church is that you have all these young clergy whose books, you know, they're just right out of seminary, and they open their books and they kind of crackle and snap. And then you've got Ray and David and me. Ray just walked up here with a Bible that needs duct tape. It's got the back flap that's just... and I've got Bibles like that. It's wonderful. Well, the other reading is from Bob Keck. Bob was a United Methodist pastor in Iowa and Kansas. In his final days of ministry he lived in Boulder, was on the CU medical faculty, a theologian, and he's written a couple of books, unfortunately died a few years ago. This is from his book *The Sacred Quest*. His confidence in the human spirit to evolve. He was an evolutionist, he believed that the human spirit is evolving, moving from childhood to adolescence, and he thinks, possibly, adulthood, and he sees signs. This is from his book *The Sacred Quest*.  
Bob Keck:

The experience of eternity does not involve going somewhere, like "going to Heaven." The experience of eternity is simply waking up - waking up to the divine presence that's always been, is now, always will be available in the depths of life. And therefore, in our own depths. The Ground of our Being, and the Ground of our Becoming, is always down there in our soul. We just need to wake up to that fact, and to do everything we can to be open to the channels of communication. Jesus, as it turns out, demonstrated once again that he was ahead of his time when it came to the subject of eternity. When asked where

heaven is, Jesus scoffed at those who looked at his skies and said, "The birds of the sky will precede you." He said that Heaven is inside every one of us, as well as outside every one of us. When his disciples asked him when they would get to eternity, he responded with some rather blunt words. "What you look forward to has already come, and you don't believe it." In a similar fashion, on other occasions, when he said that eternity is "spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it." Those citations were from the Gospel of Thomas, by the way. Jesus, almost two thousand years ago, was saying something that we are only now ready to understand. Time and eternity are not mutually exclusive. Time is not the enemy of divinity. Heaven and earth are one. Human and divine are one. Eternity is available to us right now, right here, spread throughout the earth, inside us and all around us.

At the conclusion of the service this morning, we're going to be in a state of dedicating the people who are going from our congregation on the mission trip to South Dakota to work with the Native Americans in South Dakota, so at the end of the sermon I'll invite them to come forward. I also wanted to announce that there are college students here, and we wanted to let you know there's a table in the back of the sanctuary, we church people call that the narthex, it just sounds better than "the back of the sanctuary", there is a table back there and you can learn about our college ministry, the groups that we have, and we welcome you. I know lots of you are here for the first time, and we hope that this is a place you'll want to come back to.

The other thing I wanted to announce is, you don't see our adult choir. We have this wonderful quartet. I have said in the earlier service, they remind me of the Lennon Sisters, their music just harmonizes so beautifully, and our adult choir, for your information, is at Wellington today, leading in their service, and the Stover Street Stompers are at a Lutheran church leading in their services, so we got missionaries everywhere from the congregation.

I think we can blame Brian Bauknight for the two stories I'm about to tell, though I'm pretty sure they're not original with him, and they have been told in other churches before. He told them in his church in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania United Methodist Church. Mother and daughter are walking out of worship on a Sunday morning, the mother says, "That was such a nice service. I really liked the soft music during the prayer." The little girl turned to her mother and said, "Was that the piano? I thought God had put us on hold." Two brothers, ages ten and twelve, constantly getting in trouble, probably at the All-Church Picnic. They were told to go report to the pastor's office, he needed to speak to them, and they were to do it separately. The ten-year-old went in first. I don't think the pastor knew that there was a boy coming into his office, because he was doing what we all do, preachers, you write your sermons and then you practice them. For some of us that means you go down in the basement and yell at the wall. Anyway, he was going over his sermon, and in a loud voice, he was saying, "Where is God?" Well, the little ten-year-old heard this, in the doorway, into the pastor's study. He turned and ran, grabbed his brother, and he said, "We've got to get out of here, we are in so much trouble. Somebody stole God, and they think we did it."

Has God put us on hold? Where is God? Has God been stolen or lost? I said it, and I think it's true, one of the primary tasks we have in church is theological. Our main mission, because it leads from this to everything else we do, is to point people to God, and the way we do that is, we spend a lot of time talking about what other people have written about God, and sharing with each other, where we find God, because there's not a one of us who know all, but each of us a part of it. God hasn't been stolen, isn't putting us on hold, but we've got to look. We've got to look to see it. Where do we look? Well, one of the places we look.. We can gander at the grandeur, and we must. The Psalmist had it right. Some people think David wrote all the Psalms. I don't. I think the Psalms were written by a number of people, were used in worship, to be sung, to be used in liturgy. "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts." "My soul longs, my whole body yearns, yearns and pines, my heart and my body cries out, for the joy of the Living God." We take a gander at the grandeur of God.

Edgar Mitchell, the astronaut, when he came back from the moon, he said, "We went to the moon as technicians, we came back as humanitarians." And then he said, "My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity." Craig Nelson in his book *Rocket Man* said, "Before Apollo 11, travel to other planets was science fiction. Now it's a reality. We know how to do it. We have done it successfully. We went to the moon because the universe is our home, and the universe is beautiful and mysterious." We take a gander at the grandeur of God. We see ourselves in the light of the cosmos, and that makes us feel very small, but it also has the effect of putting us in touch with something that is amiss. Theologian Sarah Maitland, talking to an elderly woman, British theologian, elderly woman in London, there had been a time when a lightning bolt struck Yorkminster Church, one of London's great churches, and the old woman was distressed. A bolt from heaven, an act of God. "Do you think this is an act of God? As it says in the newspapers?" Sarah said, "No I don't think so. Do you think that is an act of God? Do you think, really think, God would do something like that?" And there was a long pause, and the old woman thought and thought, and then Sarah said "What seemed like in affectionate criticism, the old woman said, 'Well, he should have been more careful. He should have known there'd be talk.'"

Sarah Maitland, British theologian, goes on to say, "God is big enough to take the heat." We have a God big enough to reach through the Internet. We have a God big enough to break through the cynicism. We have a God big enough to push through the barriers of race, nation, and culture. We have a God big enough to wade through hatred, despair and anxiety. We have a God big enough to fly through the infinity of the universe. We have a God big enough to enter through the expanding possibilities of medicine and science. Charles Darwin wrote it, the last sentence of that controversial book *The Origin of Species*, his last words, "There is a grandeur in this view of life."

Of all the people I have read, Abraham Heschel has developed this idea the best. He calls it "radical amazement." He wrote once, "The grandeur and mystery of this world that surrounds us is not something perceptible to just a few. All of us are endowed with a sense of wonder and a sense of mystery. All of us." His daughter Susannah, now a medical doctor, she remembers one day as a child walking with her father in New York City. They were walking on Broadway. It was a dirty, grimy, ugly, noisy street. They

made the turn walking down the hill toward Riverside Drive, and there before them was the Hudson River, and then the magnificent sunset, and she said, "My father would describe what we were seeing, he would point to the wonder of God's miracle in nature. I just shook my head and rolled my eyes. He would say something about the beauty of the sunset, and then he would add, "It reminds me of the wonder of God's presence in the world." Susannah then adds, "I realized later, when I'd grown up and I began to read his books, that the words of his writings and his speeches were one in the same. Perceiving God's presence is our task, and he lived his life with that constant awareness."

The last baptism I did, it was the grandson of some of our members, it was in their back yard, the grandparents', it was on a Saturday. The water that was used for the baptism had been taken from the healing fountains in Lourdes, France. At the baptism, two miracles occurred. The first miracle: When I put my hand into that water, from the healing fountains of Lourdes, France, the arthritis in my thumb completely went away. And if you believe that.... The other miracle was behind me, and the family and friends and the parents and the baby were facing it. It was the wonder and beauty of nature. The whole Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. It was a gander at the grandeur of God. We were face to face with God, in the immensity of that scene, and we saw it.

The second place to look for God. A glimpse, just a glimpse, at the glimmer of God. God hasn't put us on hold, and hasn't been stolen, and isn't absent, but we have to look down to see it. It's the glimmer of God. Jesus knew that. He talked about the birds of the air, and he talked about the lilies of the field, and he talked about mustard seeds and lost sheep, and coins found in the mouth of a fish, and pearls hidden in the ground. He talked about the difference between buried treasure, and the treasure that's in the heart. The glimmer of God.

There is a story about a botanist who was studying that heather that's in Scotland. The first year we were married, we spent a year in Scotland. I was working for a church, the Church of Scotland, and going to school, and this heather.... There are only two habitable months in Scotland, and one of them is August, and the other one is the last week in July. That's when the heather is brilliant. It's a purple flower. If you've ever seen it, it covers the earth, it's like bluebonnets in Texas. It's like the aspen trees in Colorado. It's magnificent, but the bush itself is ugly. If you had it in your back yard, you'd pull it up. Well, this botanist is looking through a microscope at a flower, and a shepherd comes in and notices what he's doing, and he says, "What is that flower, could I take a look? What is that flower?" "It's heather," says the botanist. "My God," says the shepherd, "I've spent my whole life trampling on that."

What have we been trampling on? A glance at the glimmer of God? The microcosm? The microcosm? Doritos and orange juice, that was this child's lunch. The baby sitter heard this. Four-year-old Alicia. I guess you've been to church, maybe a lot of it, because she was reciting the Communion ritual with her lunch items. Memorized the words of institution. She was heard to say, "And Jesus took the cup and he blessed it, and he gave God thanks for it, and Jesus said 'Fill with with Folgers and wake them up.'" Tony Campolo calls it heightened awareness. Greg Jones has written a book entitled *Everyday*

*Matters.* It's the case that the title's better than the book, it's a great title. "Every day we live matters. There are matters that happen every day we will want to attend to." A glimpse at the glimmer of God. Sue Monk Kidd understood this, she was one who lives a heightened awareness of the small things. She writes, "When I worked as a nurse on a pediatric ward, before I listened to the little ones' chests, I would put the stethoscope into their ears and let them hear their own hearts beat. Their eyes would always light up with awe. But I never got the response equal to the four-year-old David. I gently tucked the stethoscope into his ears and place the disk over his heart. "Listen," I said. "What do you suppose that is?" He drew his eyebrows together in a puzzled line and looked up, as if lost in the mystery of the strange tap-tap-tapping deep in his chest, and then his face broke out in a wondrous grin, and he said, "Is that Jesus knocking?"

The beat of the heart. The purple flowers covering the earth. Everyday matters. The heightened awareness. Consider the lilies of the field, and the birds of the air. In the glimmer, a glimpse of the glimmer of God in the small things, but you have to look down. The grandeur and the glimmer, on final place to look. We gaze into the glow of a human face. God incarnate, the glow of love. Some would argue that doesn't seem to be true today, in a time when Lynette Squeaky Fromme is released from prison, in a time when the Lockerbie bomber is released from the prison, celebrated as a hero, some of us would look at what has happened in the world, the bombings now in Iraq, the wars. I'm reminded of Ann Landers column a number of years ago. "Dear Ann, I've been sleeping with three women for several months. Until a few days ago, none of them knew the others existed, and things were going fine. And then by chance two of them met together, compared notes, I was found out. Now they're furious with me. What am I going to do? P.S. Please don't give me any of your moral junk. Signed, Trapped." Ann Landers wrote him, "Dear Trapped, One of the major things that separates the human race from animals if a God-given sense of morality. Since you don't seem to have any sense of morality, I strongly suggest you consult a veterinarian."

Now, there is that in the world, true. But that's not what most of the world's about. Most people, most people this day don't worry about whether Christianity is going to get is into heaven. Most people this day want to know if Christianity will make us a better person. Will it help us find out better side so we can discover out best? Will it allow us to live the length of our days, until our story is completed? There is the glow on the human face of love. It is to gaze into the glow. It is God. Those of us who knew Robert Keck and considered him a friend when he lived in Boulder had so much appreciation for his point of view. He was a theologian and an evolutionist, and he believed in the human soul. He was certain we had a chance to become what God wants us to become. Oh, he knew that things were not all good. He wasn't just an optimist who had no sense of reality. He liked to quote Meister Eckhart. One of his favorite quotations was, "Let your being you sink into the flow of God's being God." He believed that our human souls evolve. He tracked the childhood of the human soul. He tracked the adolescence of the human soul. He looked for the transformation of the human soul and he thought he saw it coming. He thought Jesus saw it coming. He though Jesus was one who was way ahead of his time. Heaven and earth are one. Human and divine are one. Eternity is available for us here and

now, and spread throughout the earth, inside us and all around us. Gaze into the glow of God. Believe in each other. Trust the God incarnate.

I have to tell you, if you ask any of the ministers here on the staff or any who have ever been here - Jim Cowell was in the service at 8:00 and he would confirm the same thing - we're so lucky, and what we get to see and what we get to be involved with, and what we witness. Many of you know Janet Blandin, 98 years on this earth, most of it in this church, a single mom, a courageous widow, a pillar of the church, an icon. One of the last times she came to church, she came in a wheelchair. She came to the 8:00 service, and she was parked in the doorway of the chapel, and that is about as far as you can get, in the chapel, with a wheelchair. She sat there alone, until a member of the congregation, someone she didn't even know, someone got up, walked over to where she was and sat down on the floor, and these two women sang the hymn of promise together. And there was a gaze in the glow that was God in that moment in the chapel, here at church, two people singing God's praise.

The last time I saw her, she was asleep in her room. There was a sign on the door that said, "Wake me up." I couldn't to it. We never spoke. But there was music in the background, and the song was a familiar melody, and I thought I recognized the style of the artist, because I thought I had heard the artist, and I had. It was Eugene Lowry, our preacher here in July, and he had been here in the previous October. He was here in July speaking about the blues, playing songs, saying, "Trouble comes, and it will not leave, but God is always with us." I emailed Eugene, I accused him of putting our church members to sleep. Two days later I got a call. It was 4:45 on a Saturday afternoon, and the call was notification that Janet had died. Ten minutes later, Eugene Lowry called. He had gotten my email. He didn't think it was so funny, but it was important to him to know more. "Tell me more" about this woman who was listening to his music. "Tell me more about her." I told him how she was so bright and so positive, how she loved his music. I told him she was a football fan, and she had coached the new football coach on how to coach the football team at CSU. I told him that the CSU mascot came to her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party. I told him she was one of the bright lights in the church, and she was at his concert in October, and she loved music, and loved his music in particular, and that's why they were playing it in the background. Then I told him, "Eugene, ten minutes ago I got a call, ten minutes before you called, I was told she died."

And there was a long silence. The greatest preacher in America, the finest pianist, working to deliver the Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School, he and Janet had a bond between them, the glow of the human spirit, the strong bond that defeated death. A bond between the preacher and the parishioner, a connection between the pulpit and the pew, the glow of incarnation that said that God almighty is the God intimately revealed in our quest and in our journey together, the glow of God in the human face, the greatness of the human soul, the glow of God, the face of humanity. It was there, you could see it, you could hear it. As we closed our conversation, in almost a whisper, Eugene asked, "You mean my music meant that much to her, and it was one of the last things she heard?" And I said, "Yes." The glow of the human spirit is the face of God. Israel saw it. When the people escaped slavery from Egypt. The glow of God. Moses saw it in the burning bush.

Shepherds saw it in the stable in Bethlehem, the disciples saw it when he asked them to follow him. The Roman soldier even saw it at the foot of the cross. Mary Magdalene saw it when the stone was rolled away. But it didn't vanish from the earth. It's still here. It's still here. We can gander at the grandeur if we look up. We can glimpse at the glimmer if we look down at the small things. We can glance at the glow of the human spirit if we look in. We can see it still. There is grandeur in this life, but we have to look with the eyes of faith.