

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Friday, December 24, 2021
Christmas Eve

“Joy to the World!”

Hebrew Scripture: Psalm 96



Psalms for A New World¹

AN IMPROVISATION BASED ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND INCORPORATING THE MODERN LENSES OF ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS, TAOIST SENSIBILITIES, AND POST-MODERN THEOLOGY.

Psalm 96

*Sing a new song to the Holy One
with all the names and none.
Proclaim our joy and thanksgiving
for creation, for life, for growth, for love.
Turn your face to the light.
rejoice in God.
Worship God in the beauty of holiness
let the whole earth tremble in awe.
Call out –
There's this beautiful world
and all the life in it.
and there's the rule of law in our hearts*

¹ Christine Robinson, “Psalm 96”, *Psalms for A New World*, June 4, 2006, found at: <https://doubterpsalms.blogspot.com/>, accessed December 24, 2021.

and Love at the heart of it All.

The heavens rejoice

The earth dances

The seas roil with life

The fields are glad

The trees of the wood shout for joy.

Friends, I love this translation of Psalm 96 that Jackie [Toth] read so beautifully for us. One may rightfully think that that a psalm is an odd choice for a minister to preach on for Christmas Eve. But, I feel it most appropriate to highlight Psalm 96 on this very special and sacred of evenings because it captures a joy that we as people of faith feel *for more than ourselves*. Psalm 96 describes a joy for us as human beings and that joy extends beyond us to that of all of Creation.

Listen to the psalm's conclusion:

The heavens rejoice

The earth dances

The seas roil with life

The fields are glad

The trees of the wood shout for joy.

This psalm is about the joy of all Creation, of which we as humans are a part. Trees, water and the creatures that inhabit the sea, fields and plants, and even the cosmos itself all celebrate being created by God, loved by God, and redeemed by God!

Christmas is about redemption or “God’s action of saving”. And what is being saved by the birth of the Christ in Jesus? Why, it is all that God created that is being saved. The Earth, the heavens, and yes, us too!

The psalm is not very different than the gospel readings that we will shortly hear. We are familiar with the humans included in the story: Mary and Joseph, the inn keeper, the shepherds, and the wise men. But also included is the star, praising God by shining over the birth site. We have, perhaps not in our scripture, but in our nativity scene here at the front of the church: sheep, cattle, a donkey, and other animals. You see all living creatures join in the joy. And the manger is made of wood. And the straw that lines the manger was harvested from the fields. You see friends, all of Creation is a part of the story that we tend often to see only as anthropocentric, as human-centered!

In Jesus the Christ, Emmanuel, ‘God With Us’, God’s love overflows and spills-over all of us and then saturates ‘all that we can see and touch’. Or rather, God’s love overflows and spills-over ‘all that we see and touch’ and then saturates all of us.

Friends, tonight, we sing Joy to the **World**. Not Joy to Scott. Not joy to you. Not Joy to human beings. But joy to the World. Yes, I am joyful that God’s love shown to me in the life and ministry of Jesus, saves me from despair. But, I am

even more joyful, beyond all measure joyful, that God's love saves me, and you,
and all that I can see and touch. Joy to the **World!**

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And
the People of God responded, "Amen!"