

Week 5: Creation

This is My Father's World

Text: Maltbie D. Babcock (1858–1901), 1901

- Born in Syracuse, New York, to aristocratic parents, he was a talented and charismatic student whose varied pursuits included captaining his university baseball team, directing the university orchestra and glee club, performing in the drama club, swimming, and sport fishing
- Ordained a Presbyterian minister, led churches in Lockport, New York; Baltimore; and New York City
- At the age of 42, his congregation provided a gift of funds for travel to the Holy Land; regrettably, he fell ill en route in Naples, Italy, and died in hospital there
- Following his death, his wife published a collection of hymns and sermon excerpts entitled *Thoughts for Every-Day Living* later that year

Tune: Franklin L. Sheppard (1852–1930), 1915

- Born in Philadelphia, graduated as valedictorian in his class at the University of Pennsylvania in 1872
 - Three years following his graduation, he moved to Boston to run the foundry for his father's stove and heater manufacturing business
 - Sheppard had been close friends with Babcock, leading him to set "This is My Father's World" to music when he edited the Presbyterian songbook *Alleluia*
 - The tune, TERRA BEATA, is likely drawn from an English folk tune and takes its name from the Latin for "blessed earth"
1. The original poem had sixteen verses, but Sheppard chose only three for inclusion in his songbook and later hymnal editors followed suit. The first stanza considers the large-scale majesty of creation (e.g. "skies and seas", "his hands the wonders wrought"), whereas the second considers its small-scale beauty (e.g. "morning light", "rustling grass"). Have you been to a place where you were struck by the sheer size or power of nature? What about a place where you could hear God in the stillness? How have you drawn on these experiences when you returned back to your "normal" life?
 2. The third verse considers that universe is subject to God's moral law just as it is His physical laws, although it acknowledges that still "the wrong seems oft so strong". Why do you think God allows "wrongs" to persist even though it's contrary to His will?
 - a. This is a BIG topic, we don't need to solve it in this class. The "problem of evil" has kept philosophers busy for centuries. Answers to this question are called "theodicy" and mostly boil down into two basic camps (though there are others too):
 - i. *God has a greater plan.* We may not be able to see where things are going, but the "wrongs" we encounter are really working toward something good in the end.
 - ii. *God respects our freedom.* The "wrongs" we see are the fault of man - either directly, or through the fall of Adam. Although God could just clean everything up, he values us enough to let us make our own (often bad) decisions.

Creator God, You Made the Earth

Text: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (1961–), 2001

- Born into a Methodist family, her father was an English professor who previously attended seminary
- Attended Princeton Theological Seminary herself, where she met her future husband
- Following her ordination in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1986, she wrote her first hymn in 1998
- She and her husband co-pastor Limestone Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware
- "Creator God" was written for a conference of the National Association of Presbyterian Clergywomen in April 2002, responding to the conference theme of "Ancient Ways, New Hope"

Tune: Traditional Irish, 1906

- The tune ST. COLUMBA first appeared in the 1906 edition of The English Hymnal
 - A traditional Irish tune, it takes its name from a sixth-century Irish missionary (roughly a century after St. Patrick) chiefly known for bringing Christianity to Scotland
1. This text is unique in that it touches on themes not normally found in "creation-oriented" hymns. In the first

verse, Gillette writes that God “gave [the earth] worth”. What do you consider the source of your own worth? Is it something intrinsic to you, or is it “granted” to you by God?

- a. Many people define their worth in terms of what they do or accomplish. How would you convince someone their self-worth is not defined by their possessions, their achievements, or their social status?
2. Verse two refers to the seventh day of creation when it refers to “Sabbath rest” as God’s gift. Do you normally think of rest as a gift from God? What does this gift tell you about God’s character?
- a. God cares enough about us small creatures to include rest specifically for us.
 - i. See Matthew 6:26 - he even cares about each bird.
 - ii. God didn’t need to rest (obviously), it’s a gift because it’s purely for us, not Him.
 - b. Could God have created humans without the need to rest?
 - i. Think of how much more help for the needy and how many more souls could be saved if we could stay active around the clock!
 - ii. And yet, God called creation “good” even with the need for rest.
 - iii. Even the kindest people can end up suffering from “compassion fatigue”... is this part of our fallen world, or is it specifically by God’s design?
 - c. In resting on the seventh day, God was setting an example for us to follow. We certainly need literal rest each night, but do we also need spiritual rest? If yes, what does a spiritual rest look like?
 - i. Perhaps church-sponsored “retreats” serve this purpose.

For the Beauty of the Earth

Text: Folliott S. Pierpoint (1835–1917), 1864

- Graduate (with honors) of Queen’s College, Cambridge; was born in Bath, England
- Taught classics at the nearby small Somersetshire College
- Like Matthew Bridges (author of “Crown Him with Many Crowns”), Pierpoint was a member of the “Oxford Movement” of high-church Anglicans
- Published three collections of religiously-inspired poetry and contributed hymns to several hymnals
- Lived a long (to age 82) and quiet life, continuing to stay in Bath and surrounding areas
- Despite the wild success of “For the Beauty of the Earth”, none of his other hymns are in use today

Tune: Conrad Kocher (1786–1872), 1838

- Studied piano and composition in St. Petersburg, Russia, and later in Rome, Italy
 - His interest in reforming church music in Germany led him to found the “School of Sacred Music” in Stuttgart, largely responsible for popularizing four-part singing in German churches
 - Published *Zions Harfe* in 1855, a large collection of chorales which included this tune
 - William Monk (composer of EVENTIDE, tune for “Abide With Me”) later adapted Kocher’s tune to be used with William Chatterton Dix’s text “As With Gladness, Men of Old”, from which the tune acquired the name DIX
 - Only afterward, when Pierpoint’s text was written, did this text and tune become paired together
1. This hymn was intended for use in communion services, and its original refrain was “Christ, our God, to thee we raise / this our sacrifice of praise”. Does this change how you think of the hymn? In what way would you consider praise to be a “sacrifice”?
- a. The shift away from usage in communion was probably a result of its popularity here in America, where we (naturally) associate it with the Thanksgiving holiday
 - b. Verse six (often omitted by hymnal editors) makes much more sense given this context. Since Christ was sacrificed for us, the appropriate response is to offer a sacrifice of our own.
 - c. The act of praise forces us to humble ourselves, in a sense a sacrifice of our pride