



“ABANDONMENT ISSUES”

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 104

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, May 21, 2023, Earth Sunday, Outdoor Service

The Rev. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

Psalm 104

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,

2 wrapped in light as with a garment.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent;

3 you set the beams of your chambers on the waters;

you make the clouds your chariot;

you ride on the wings of the wind;

4 you make the winds your messengers,

fire and flame your ministers.

5 You set the earth on its foundations,

so that it shall never be shaken.

6 You cover it with the deep as with a garment;

the waters stood above the mountains.

7 At your rebuke they flee;

at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

8 They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys,

to the place that you appointed for them.

9 You set a boundary that they may not pass,

so that they might not again cover the earth.

10 You make springs gush forth in the valleys;

they flow between the hills,

11 giving drink to every wild animal;

the wild asses quench their thirst.

12 By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;

they sing among the branches.

13 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;

the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

14 You cause the grass to grow for the cattle

and plants for people to cultivate,

to bring forth food from the earth
15 and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
16 The trees of the field are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
17 In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
18 The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
19 You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
20 You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
21 The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
22 When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
23 People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.

24 O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
25 There is the sea, great and wide;
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
26 There go the ships
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

27 These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
28 when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
 may the Lord rejoice in his works—
32 who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke.
33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the Lord.
35 Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
 and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God

The sermon this week was extemporaneous. Below are notes and many different links about sacrifice zones and cancer alley for your own learning and research. You can watch and listen to the sermon here:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/GRPF9JdOvKY?feature=share>

The sermon begins at 46 minutes.

Psalm

- 103 and 104 kinda go together
- 103 about God's mercy and love
- 104 about creation
- God saves and provides through creation (not abandonment but provision)
- Radical in the early Mediterranean world—emergence of monotheism.
- And we constantly have proximity to God in and through creation (panentheism)
- In the Psalm there are echoes of Ancient Near Eastern/Canaanite mythologies—creation as the result of battles among the gods. Then in 104 those things are shifted to be reflections of the sovereignty of Yahweh, the one God of Israel.
- All that is alive depends on God for sustenance, for life, for survival
- God's house is the whole universe
- God holds the world together, brought order out of chaos,
- Moon and sun were seen as deities in early mediterranean thought—but here the Sun is not worshiped, it serves the purposes of the way God created an intricate and interconnected universe.

- In Canaanite view the ocean was a god of chaotic power—even Leviathan, a monster of chaos, is just playful now—harmless!
- This all powerful God who makes sure everything comes out in the end—can also make us creatures prone to learned helplessness and arrogance and callousness—we can abandon God and each other and creation—because we figure God will pick up the pieces.

Sacrifice Zones

- Cold War—use of lands for weapons testing—indigenous lands were used for nuclear testing and waste
- “sacrifice zones,” which are communities located near pollution hot spots that have been permanently impaired by intensive and concentrated industrial activity, such as factories, chemical plants, power plants, oil and gas refineries, landfills and factory farms.” <https://www.nationofchange.org/2021/04/07/sacrifice-zones-how-people-of-color-are-targets-of-environmental-racism/>
- Naomi Klein writes that “running an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones—whole subsets of humanity categorized as less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable.”
- Four years later, scientists at the EPA’s National Center for Environmental Assessment released a study in the American Journal of Public Health called “Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status.” The report confirmed that environmental racism presents a clear and present danger to people of color across the United States, as they are much more likely to live near polluters. The study found that poor communities (those living below the poverty line) have a 35 percent higher burden from particulate matter emissions than the overall U.S. population. The health burden carried by non-whites was 28 percent higher than the overall population, while African Americans had a 54 percent higher burden. The researchers cited economic inequality and historic racism as major factors in the siting of facilities emitting particulate pollution.
- The *No More Sacrifice Zone Policy Proposal* uses the Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool to determine if a community qualifies as a Sacrifice Zone.
- The Center for Health, Environment & Justice is conducting conversational meetings in communities across the country to discuss ideas and foster support for a No More Sacrifice Zones Policy. At each meeting, CHEJ presents the Proposal for New Regulatory Policies in Sacrifice Zones Presentation and distributes all No More Sacrifice Zones resources. The floor is then open for questions, commentary and

suggestions on the policy proposal to gather community insight on the type of policy residents of polluted zones would like enforced.

- <https://chej.org/issues/sacrifice-zones>
- Cancer alley
 - Cancer rates are 50% higher
 - Images (between Baton Rouge and New Orleans)
 - Was plantation alley during chattel slavery
 - EPA is suing some of the manufacturers who are polluting
 - Unincorporated areas of Louisiana: no formal system of social engagement and governmental accountability
 - “Most of the factories in Cancer Alley are petrochemical plants and oil refineries. Petrochemicals are derived from petroleum and natural gas and used to manufacture products as diverse as synthetic fibers and rubber, drugs, fertilizers, and cosmetics, among much else” (Sharma et al., 2017).
- <https://projects.propublica.org/toxmap/>
- <https://www.propublica.org/series/sacrifice-zones>
- The Environmental Justice Lab: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-environmental-justice-lab/id1629798644?i=1000604160814>
- Hotspots and Sacrifice Zones in our area

Monotheism

- A theological/social/cultural move away from the nefariousness and chaos of polytheism in which humans are pawns in the games the gods play—how they get even with each other, how they blow off steam, relieve boredom, or try to establish dominance. Monotheism overlaid an ultimate justice over the sorrow, tragedy and suffering of human experience.
- Monotheism brought with it its own problems—and human beings have struggled to reconcile all kinds of big questions with the one God model—why does evil exist if God is good, how does human freedom fit into the picture of God’s power, how does divine power work in a world so full of suffering, pain and injustice.
- Our Jewish and Greek roots in the culture of the early mediterranean world have struggled with scarcity models—really in a way scripture is a push pull between scarcity and abundance models of Divine grace and love.
- Violence was born in scarcity when Cain killed his brother Abel (what was that about—ask)
 - It was about scarcity

- It was about the fear that there is not enough blessing from the father to go around.
- It was about the fear of love being a zero sum game.
- It was about fear of abandonment.

Abandonment Issues

- Fear of being abandoned by God
- Living as if there is no God
- Abandoning ourselves and each other
- Sacrifice zones—are the human family turning on itself—abandoning our created goodness, abandoning our family,
- Living as if we were abandoned
- An distorted self concept
- Can result in personality disorders and controlling behaviors
- Reluctance to commit, struggles with intimacy,
- Hypersensitive to criticism
- Insecurity, inferiority, unworthiness
- Failure to fully commit

Closing

People of faith

- Where does the existence of sacrifice zones fit into our faith tradition?
- How does a nation that fashions itself as Christian have so many sacrifice zones

Healing from white supremacy at its most basic elemental level is healing our relationship to the earth and all living things.

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