

The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.

Sermon for Proper 22, Year A

The Text: Psalm 19

When it gets dark in the outback of Australia, it's wonderful to roll out a swag, lie on your back and look up at the stars. The stars are so clear and can appear to be so close that you feel you could almost reach out and touch them! Then you realise they are light years apart, further than the human mind can imagine! The stars can fill you with wonder.

During the night, the moon, stars, and planets follow the precise pathways the laws of God has set for them. We call them the laws of physics, or astronomy.

The psalmist describes it this way;

*"The heavens tell of the glory of God.
The skies display his marvellous craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or a word;
their voice is silent in the skies;
yet their message has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to all the world."*

The heavens point to God, and honour God, without saying a word.

In the daytime, it is the sun that takes pride of place. The sun is the centre of our universe. It also follows the laws of physics as designed by the creative genius of God. The sun not only provides us with light, but also warmth, healing and growth.

Imagine what a disaster it would be if the sun didn't come up one morning! The darkness and havoc would be indescribable. But the huge sun carefully follows the exact path God designed for it. The psalmist points out in verse 4:

"The sun lives in the heavens where God placed it."

In verse five he compares the rising sun to the bridegroom who beams with pride and joy after his wedding:

"The sun bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding."

Then he compares the sun, travelling across the sky, to an athlete who just loves running, and goes out running every day:

"The sun rejoices like a great athlete, eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end."

In our day we might say the sun is a keen jogger who goes out every day and delights in running the course from one end to the other! As the sun travels, it touches everything with its warmth and light. The sun does everything it is designed to do.

God has designed the universe so in the daytime, and during the night, the skies honour God, and we all benefit. God also designed human beings with healthy goals in mind. They would all benefit one another, and bring honour to God. God has laws for us humans to follow so we are a wonderful blessing to other people as we travel through each day. Here are a few of the laws as we might know them from Luther's small catechism:

- "Help people in all their physical needs!"
- "Love and respect one's partner in marriage."
- "Say only good things about other people, and explain their actions in the kindest ways."
- "Be pleased for others with what they own, and help them to look after it."

How wonderful it would be if we all followed these laws for living!

The Psalmist says:

*"The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair.
They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.
They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb."*

The rules the sun and the moon and the stars follow might honour God every day and every night, but with us human beings it is different. We choose to live as though the laws of God don't apply to us. In our own little ways we each damage other people as we travel on our journey through life. There is a fatal flaw in us that separates us from God. We might expect others to do the right thing, but we don't want to follow God's wonderful rules for living ourselves. As a result people around us suffer as we pass by.

We can be oblivious to the harm we cause other people, or we might excuse it.

The Psalmist puts it this way in verses 12 to 14:

"How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. Keep me from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Our sin is so strong it wants to control us each day. It too gets up early in the morning and sets out on its destructive path. God could come like a threatening and angry God out to get revenge, and say, "You change, or else – you won't

even know what hit you!" When anyone comes to us and demands, "You do this or else ..." we tend to get our backs up, dig in our heels and mutter to ourselves, "Like Hell!" or worse, like we might to our worst enemy.

But God doesn't come to us as our worst enemy. God comes to us as a friend who knows we desperately need help. He comes to lift us up and carry us on our journey like a shepherd might pick up and carry home an injured lamb.

God goes down to the Israelites and lives among them like a neighbour. He is their best friend, who rescued them out of Egypt and is now travelling with them to lead them to a new land to call their very own. The laws he hands out are not new. They were written in their hearts, and now they are carved in stone. They come as God's gift for their blessing. With God's love, they can have a great future.

The same God has plans for you and me. We each have an important role to play as we travel through this life. It would be marvellous if we each had a mind full of positives - full of joy and peace. Or a heart filled with loving concern for the people God puts near us. But in reality, our hearts and minds can tend to be nurseries for negatives and evils that hurt people. So God comes to us, because we need him to be our neighbour.

The God who personally comes to us is the Jesus who went to the cross, and into death and hell. He received the greatest hurt God could ever hand out. This Jesus shines on us each day with healing and forgiveness. His Spirit shines in us with positives, like reaching out to help our neighbour, no matter who they are. The Spirit fills us with love and respect for our partner who travels with us. We are touched by the Spirit to speak up for others, and to only say good things about them. We are glad to help others look after what they own. We are a neighbour of love, like God is to us!

We could try to use threats or force to get people to turn to God, and maybe turn up for church but it wouldn't work! God's Spirit wants to win people with love. He enjoys going out into the community with us to shine on others and light up their lives, like the sun.

God's forgiveness is sweet like honey. We love to taste it and share it. We can be keen like the sun to hop out of bed each morning to bring healing and health to the people we meet up and travel with. That way we bring honour to the God just like the sun and stars in the heavens.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

