

Psalm 104: Selected Verses

- ¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul.
O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour 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.
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 use,
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 LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that God 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 labour 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 Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 creeping things innumerable are there,
 living things both small and great.
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.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
 may God rejoice in God's works—
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to the Holy One,
 for I rejoice in the LORD.
³⁵ Bless the LORD, O my soul.
 Praise the LORD!

This psalm is a beautiful meditation of praise to God for the marvel of creation. It is also composed as a prayer to God. It's not asking God for anything, but rather, praising God for how astonishingly everything needed for creation to flourish is provided. God is the great provider like some cosmic gardener, farmer or groundskeeper. All life depends on God at every moment. Unlike some traditional images of God as having created the world and then standing back to watch it do its thing, biblical images of God vision a creative force actively engaged with all living things, all the time.

But note God's involvement. God does not force the animals, the trees or any other life to do this or that. There is freedom in creation and in all living things, even as they are also dependent on certain things being provided in order to exist and to flourish. God provides the means to such flourishing but then encourages life to do it's thing without any divine interference.

So, where did God as "omnipotent" power to control come from? Human fear is where it came from. As vulnerable creatures we humans crave greater power and control to dominate that which threatens us: from the animals, to the forests, to what the weather can do to us, to what other people may do to us... Power to coerce, to use the earth as a resource for our protection and pleasure, to dominate all that may dominate us... and so we imagine a God who is the grand controlling puppeteer at our prayerful beck and call if and when we are righteous enough. "We'll scratch your back, O God, with sacrifice, praise and worship, and then you scratch our back by giving us health, happiness and every advantage over those who may threaten us. May you also bless our domination of creation as we become mini-gods controlling the earth for our use as we imagine you as

the great controller in the sky”... This is the traditional image of God we have created as our idol as western peoples... How well has that worked?

This psalm may awaken us to other possibilities for being human and opening our hearts to a greater mystery some of us call “God.” In her wonderful book: *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer offers us an image drawn from her indigenous spiritual roots: The human as part of creation in reciprocal relationship. The earth needs us as much as we need the earth. God’s creative force running through the universe thrives on reciprocity. Love is in the relationships between all living things. As we care for each other and serve each other we receive and flourish in return and all life thrives and grows the more life is engaged in reciprocal relationships. Isn’t it marvelous that an indigenous tradition can shine a light on what scripture is actually teaching us but for thousands of years we have failed to see it?

Psalms 104 is a beautiful example of the psalmist being taken up in praise of how God and creation are reciprocally connected. It’s an invitation for us to join the dance and join the relationship in reciprocity rather than domination and control. As we move into summer, may this psalm and its meditative invitation be taken up in your engagement with creation. Praise the creator in the creation!

PRAYER: Meet us, O God... meet us in this season of our lives... meet us in the creation around us... meet us as we re-evaluate and rebuild our relationships with mother earth and with all that lives around us... May we grow our blessing on the earth and may the earth praise God because we are part of it... May those around us bless you because we are in their lives too... Amen.