Grounded and Unbounded

Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:4-7 Kimby Young

Psalm 19:1-6; Psalm 8 August 13, 2017

During my study leave in Nebraska in June, one of the professors was Anna Case Winters who is a theology professor at McCormick Presbyterian Seminary in Chicago. Her topic was about the relation between faith and science – and she is firmly of the opinion that faith and science are completely interactive and compatible – an opinion which I share. God works through science and uses physical material principles to create and move in the world. After all God created those physical material principles and the order of all things. Miracles are not supernatural or above nature. Miracles are God in the midst of nature creating and recreating again. She talked about the new discoveries in science and the theological questions that grow out of those new scientific understandings. Seeing God in the minute particles of creation and in the infinite possibilities of the universe. I found her lectures fascinating and mind-blowing, even though I didn’t know about half of what she was talking about scientifically. Theologically it opened up all kinds of questions about who God is, how God acts, who we are as God’s creation and how we are called to act in the world responsibly.

There were 5 days of lectures and Professor Winters would make leaping connections between the nature of God and new scientific work in Physics, between the nature of humanity and atomic research on sub-particle level. The scripture passages we read this morning were passages she used throughout the week and the sermon title “Grounded and Unbounded” was a phrase she used to talk about the nature of humanity in relation to God. We are grounded in God, created of nature of the ground, and find our basis in that nature as God’s creation. We are of the earth and built of dust – particles knit together in remarkable ways. At the same time, we are not limited to the natural order. We are freed by God to unimaginable heights – created of the earth but in the image of God. We are more than the earth, more than matter. And always we strive to find that balance between the elemental and the universal, between the practical and the imagination, between what is and what might yet be. It’s a fine balance – life that is – a balance of body, mind and spirit; a balance of being of the earth and being of God; a balance of understanding and mystery.

Psalm 8 expresses this struggle and balance well. What is humanity that God is mindful of us? That God thinks of us, considers us, loves US? Why should God care about us? “And yet”, in verse 5. And yet… God has made us a little less than the stars, just shy of heaven. God has made us that we can soar and shine – of the earth, but not bound by the material world. God has made us of the earth, and yet makes us able to connect with God – to be spiritual in the greatest sense of the word – filled with the Holy Spirit of God. We were made of dust – like Adam. The name comes from the same word as Adamah –dust or dirt. So we are made of the earth, and yet made in the image of God – to be God’s reflection, to shine like God shines, to share God’s light in the world. It is hard to grasp. And almost overwhelming to live up to.

So, if we are the image of God – then who are we? How are we called to act in the world? We have to look to the nature of God to see who it is we are called to be, who it is that we are created to be. First, God is loving. God is always compassionate, caring, generous and kind. God loves us more than we can ask or imagine. So since we are in God’s image, we are created to live that love. Second, God is wildly and abundantly creative. God’s nature is to create and to continue creating every moment of every day. God continues to unfold newness. And we are called to that kind of imagination and creativity. We are created to think big, to imagine the possibilities, to believe in the unproven, to reach for the wideness of the stars and the infinite love of the Creator. These two characteristics in the nature of God seem like opposites sometimes – God’s greatness and God’s love. That is the wonder of Psalm 8. At the same time, God who can unfold such a wondrous universe has the capacity to care for each little tiny detail, even caring for each little one of us. And again, God calls us to do the same. God created us to observe and to protect – to notice the broken and to bring healing, to touch the intimate and the immediate and also to care for all that we see. God placed us as care takers in the garden. God created us to care for each other with the depths of our souls, with all that we are, just as God cares so amazingly for each of us. God is acting everywhere and always. While we are finite and cannot act in as complete a way as God, we can act and care and love with our whole hearts to the best of our ability.

The challenge of listening to a Professor like Dr. Case Winters, or to a sermon like this, is that it is fascinating to think about but perhaps not incredibly relevant for day to day living. So let me return from the unbounded portion of the sermon to the grounded nature of our faith. We are spiritual creatures – connected to God in profound ways, and at the same time material beings bound here on Earth in this time and place. We are God’s people here at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner Kansas. What does that mean for our daily living? What does that mean for our next steps as a community of faithful people?

In my opinion, it means that in everything we do, we need to remember who we are – in fact whose we are. We belong to God. We are rooted in God and find our strength knowing those roots, knowing who we belong to, knowing what God expects of us, and knowing who God has created us to be. At the same time, God has freed us to infinite possibility. God asks us to dream and soar and fly to new heights – unbound from human sin or selfishness or failure or frailty. God frees us and empowers us to work miracles of grace. Sometimes we fail to believe that miracles can happen. Sometimes we hold back when we should let go. Sometimes we let fear control or limit us. We call it practicality, realism, good sense. We limit ourselves and thereby sometimes limit God. Sometimes we need to remember God can do anything, God can do everything, and through the grace of God we too can work miracles. We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. Unbind the image of God that is in you. Let your creativity go. Let your imagination flow. See what amazing love God can release among us.

Many of us have been praying for this congregation – praying for us to grow, praying for us to be what God has called us to be, praying for us to serve well and faithfully, praying for us to be a place where others may come to know the boundless love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. I am excited about these prayers, but also a little bit frightened. If God unbinds this congregation, and unbinds the gospel in this community, it will require more from each and every one of us. If we ask God to let us go and help us to grow – we might just get what we ask for. And that might be frightening. Things might change. We might not be the comfortable familiar church of old friends that we have always been. And that’s a little scary. But on the other hand – it is immensely exciting. God might just use us to work miracles in Gardner. God might just use you to bring someone to faith in Jesus Christ. God might just use this church to bring light and hope, justice and joy. God might just move among us – unbound creativity and potential. Children of God, Beloved people of Christ, believe it. Let your spirits soar and let God’s Spirit move among us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.