

**Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.**

**New Year's Day**

**ZOOM Service**

**January 1, 2022**

**The Rev Dr Scott Couper**

**"Cosmic Praise"**

**Christian Scripture: Psalm 148**



*Credit: Psalm 148, Psalms Clip Art, Christart.com*

Happy New Year everyone!

A quick listen to Vermont Public Radio this morning on the first day of 2023 informs us that Barbara Walkers died. She was an incredible journalist who broke professional glass ceilings for women. We also learned from Pope Francis that his predecessor, Benedict, died. Benedict was the first Pope in over six-hundred years to resign from the papacy. (Despite what you may think of him it was an incredible act of humility that that is almost without compare in modern history). The new

President of Brazil was elected, while his predecessor like Trump claiming electoral fraud. On a tragic note, the war rages in the Ukraine, with Russia cynically raining explosives over the country on New Year's Day as it did on Christmas Day. On a humorous note, Don Lemon on CNN missed the countdown and stroke of midnight on his New Year's Eve live broadcast from New Orleans. Those are just some of the events reported on our green and blue ball hurtling through space on January 1, 2023.

Speaking of space, a generation ago, the world was awed by images taken by the Hubble telescope. Our generation is further awed by stupendous images taken from the James Webb telescope. The Webb telescope's genius is its ability to collect infrared light, rather than visible light, to glimpse of the enormity of the universe. Yet, what makes the Webb telescope especially fascinating is its ability to see 'back' in time, almost to the creation of the universe. Do you remember in my Christmas Eve homily, I spoke on the speed of light? Well, the Webb telescope is able to see so far into space that the amount of time it takes the light to reach Earth is close to the time (100 million years) that the universe was created during the Big Bang. The telescope can see the first stars and galaxies being formed.

It is difficult sometimes to comprehend, let alone discern some kind of cohesive purpose amidst the great spectrum of our personal lives, national life,

global life, and of cosmic life. With life's massive disparities from great acts of despotism to heroic acts of selflessness, from the beauty of creation to its polluting by human beings, from personal lives filled with moments of celebration and depression, it is hard to discern one unifying tenet upon which to center ourselves and upon which to be mindful.

Yet, the scriptures do provide us with one unifying theory to answer the question 'What is your purpose and what is the purpose of Creation?'. The answer: 'to glorify God'. Psalm 100:2-3 makes clear what the Bible claims throughout: "Serve the Lord with gladness, Come into God's presence with singing! Know that the Lord is God! It is God that made us, and we belong to God, and we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture". Yet, the psalms claim that it is not simply humans' purpose to glorify God, it is also all of Creation's purpose. Psalm 19:1-2 makes it clear what the Bible claims throughout: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge". At the close of the eighteenth century (1797-1798), Franz Joseph Haydn's famous piece of music "The Heavens Are Telling, the Glory of God" based on this scripture. Yet, verse 3 of Psalm 19 states that the universe does not make any sound. We cannot fault the psalmist, because the psalmist did not have the scientific equipment that

we have today to listen to the universe pour forth audible speech. Let us listen briefly to how the universe proclaims the glory of God.

## SHARE SCREEN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAtgHMLuJnM>

Our scripture this morning from Psalm 148 also proclaims that humans' and Creation's purpose is to glorify God. Notice how the psalmist starts with the heavens.

*<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights above.*

*<sup>3</sup>Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars.*

*<sup>5</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for at his command they were created,  
<sup>6</sup>and he established them for ever and ever—  
he issued a decree that will never pass away.*

Then the psalmist moves to the Earth.

*<sup>7</sup>Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,  
<sup>8</sup>lightning and hail, snow and clouds,  
stormy winds that do his bidding,  
<sup>9</sup>you mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars,  
<sup>10</sup>wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds,*

Then the psalmist moves to the nations and individuals of his day, to you and I.

*<sup>11</sup>kings of the earth and all nations,  
you princes and all rulers on earth,  
<sup>12</sup>young men and women,  
old men and children.  
<sup>13</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;*

Friends in Christ, if you are sometimes overwhelmed by your sense of smallness in the universe, know your purpose is to praise God. If you are sometimes dismayed by the confusion of current events, know your purpose is to praise God. If you are overwhelmed by your own personal life with all of its joys and tribulations, states of peace and confusion, know your purpose is to praise God. This New Year, in all circumstances, join all of Creation and “praise the name of the Lord” (148:13).

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.