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Our Bible in a Bible: The Marvel of Creation

Psalm 8

This actually happened from what I can remember, yet the footnote documentation is something I've lost and haven't been able to find. In the South Pacific during World War II the Japanese had a particular concentration camp for allied prisoners of war. Since the Japanese weren't inclined to follow the Geneva Convention articles for the treatment of war prisoners, those held captive endured very depressing conditions. The ranking officer among the prisoners came to the commander of the camp with a request for Bibles so the men could observe their faith. For his insolence the officer was sentenced to thirty days in solitary confinement. The rest of the prisoners decided to do something to surprise their superior once he served his time.

Using Yankee ingenuity they gathered dried palm fronds and wove them into notebook sized sheets. They then bound them together into a book and experimented with what could be used as ink. The best candidate was their own blood diluted with whatever it was they received to drink during mealtime. Then they sent out the message to their comrades. *"What passages, psalms, and stories can you recall from the Bible? Our plan is to collect them in the company book we've created."*

Prisoners began to come forward with scriptures imbedded in their hearts and memories. Some they'd learned in Sunday school, others they'd come across on their own for whatever reason. Some had been read at their wedding, others at the funerals of loved ones. Out they came and soon the makeshift Bible was filled from beginning to end. When the ranking officer was finally released, the men presented him with the palm paged heavy book. *"What's this?"* he asked. *"We call it our Bible in the Bible for it represents everything we could remember contained in the scriptures."* For those prisoners the Bible within the Bible became something very special to help them through their ordeal.

Accurate or not, true or not, the story sits within the realm of possibility. If we were in a similar situation and challenged to remember what passages could be pulled from the reservoir of experience and memory--an Old Testament story of adventure; a psalm or proverb of wisdom; the doom and gloom of a prophet; a parable of Jesus; some teaching of Paul--what would be found? This is our focus and theme during the Lenten season, to think about what might be our contribution to a palm paged heavy book meant to get us through both the ordeal and joy of life. I'll get at that idea by sharing with you some of what would constitute my offering...what I would label as my Bible within the Bible.

First out of the box is a passage that would fall into the category of marveling at creation. It's one of my favorite psalms and was discovered in a high school Sunday School class when the teacher challenged us to read one psalm each day. When I reached Psalm 8 I was stopped dead in my tracks. This psalmist was writing about the very things I was beginning to question: God's creative actions and our place in the universe.

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

²Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

⁷all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

To appreciate a passage that emphasizes the creative aspects of God illustrating the tendency we humans have to look up and marvel at the wonders of the universe I think we need to possess a particular attitude about life. This morning we'll look at what that might be.

One requirement is to hold a conviction that appreciates the sanctity and specialness of life.

The current soup de jour about what is wrong in America is the Hip Hop culture among our young people. Baggy pants, hats turned sideways, bling jewelry, and expensive tastes are just a few of its characteristics. But that's not the problem--it's the disregard for others and violence it cultivates and encourages in people that has caused so much concern. It teaches that it's easier to solve a dispute with a gun rather than a conversation. People absorbed in this kind of life aren't going to be the kind of people looking up to the heavens with wonderment.

I'm not suggesting that it's only the religious who are capable of appreciating the specialness and sanctity of life. One need not be a person of faith to be humbled by the universe and our place within it. In 1990, Voyager 1 turned to take a photo of earth 4 billion miles away. One of the pictures showed a grainy looking pale blue dot literally hanging in a sunbeam. The famous astronomer and atheist Carl Sagan was so touched by what he saw that he wrote these words. *"Look at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religious, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there - on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam."*

Both Sagan and the Psalmist, one religious the other nonreligious, sensed the uniqueness, specialness, and sacredness of life. The difference is that the Psalmist looks up, Sagan looks back, but for both what they write is an exercise in appreciating what we have and what we are in the larger scheme of things.

To marvel at creation we also need a sense of stewardship for all that is around and about us. *You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

The soup de jour in environmentalism these days is global warming. Pick your side, politics, and science. But if we look past the silliness of the people on the extreme edges of each side, those who believe that climate change is a direct result of human activity and those who don't, most people agree that we need to do more when it comes to the stewardship of our planet. Everyone wants clean air and water. People who understand this are going to be people who look up and marvel at the heavens and look down to enjoy "whatever passes along the paths of the sea."

The last attitude or mindset essential for an ability to marvel at creation is the capability to maintain the memory or harbor the hope of what life can be and should be. Stargazers are stronger optimists than pessimists.

When I first read the story about the *Bible within the Bible* my first thought was, what happened to it? Is it tucked away in the closet or attic of some descendant of a veteran? Did the Japanese find and destroy it? Was it left on the island prison when the Americans were liberated? What happened to it? My next thought was, which scriptures did it contain? What kind of passages do you suppose those prisoners remembered and offered?

I like to think that one would have been a scripture about creation, perhaps even Psalm 8. They might have included a creation passage because they remembered what life could be and should be and held onto the hope that it would one day be that way again. From the miserable conditions of their situation they still had the freedom to look up at *the moon and the stars that You have established...*and marvel.