

The Cornerstone, sermon by Rev. R. Randy Day, October 4, 2026
Scripture Reading: Psalm 19 and Matthew 21:33-46

I just love Psalm 19. It's so beautiful. From the very first, it's called the commandment to give light to the eyes. Light to the eyes. "The heavens are telling of the glory of God." Now, sometimes we just read Psalms and move right on. That should be a full stop. A full stop.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork."

Now, firmament is the translation of what the Hebrews saw as that whole sky. You could say sky, all that covers the earth, the universe. Especially thinking about it at nighttime, that's the firmament.

There is no speech. There are no words. In the end, as the heavens have set a tent for the sun, etc., etc. And then it goes on down to say, "The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes," enlightening the eyes.

So I did some digging around commentaries. I ran across this most beautiful article in the Christian Century, written by an Episcopal priest. Her name is Kit Carlson, Carlson with an L. And she tells the story, which I just think is so beautiful, that she and her husband lived for many years on the outskirts of Washington, D.C. Sandy and Paul lived there. Others have been around.

So, on the outskirts of this big city, where there are lights all the time—okay, not so different than Boston or New York—lights all the time. And on a really good night, the darkest night you could find, they would sit on their porch and maybe see three stars, four. One time, they saw five or six. That's all you could see.

But every summer they went to a cabin the family had in the North Woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I know some of you have been there.

So they developed a routine with their children. The children would go to bed. They're small children. The children go to bed at the regular time, but around midnight, or just before midnight, when it's finally, finally dark on the northern peninsula of Michigan, they would go in and they'd each pick up one of those kids, still wrapped in the blanket, and they would go outside, and they would whisper in their ears, "Look up at the sky."

And they would look up, and they were just astounded, astounded. There's the Milky Way, going from the northeast to the southwest. There's the Big Dipper, which I pointed out to all of our children on camping. You know, find the Big

Dipper, you find the Little Dipper. You find the Little Dipper, go to the handle. There's the North Star.

The North Star is not the brightest one up there, but that's the one that's going to get you out of the woods if you get lost. So they would show them.

So they would see all that, and this is how she wrote it. They would say, "Come see, come see the stars."

Now I'm quoting her:

"And as they blinked slowly, looking up into the black night, there it was, a firmament, a spangled light. There was the Milky Way, a ribbon, a radiance winding from the northeast to the southwest. There was the Big Dipper, etc.

"The heavens indeed were telling the glory of God, and that was a story we wanted to inscribe into our children's memories, year after year, summer after summer."

Beautiful.

She goes on to write.

"Decades later, a friend from the city came up to that very same cabin, and so they went out at night to see the firmament. And this friend said she could not take all the light in the night sky, and all that silent sound, and so she went inside and flipped on all the lights."

So the pastor is saying, "How could you not see God in all these stars, in all of this majesty?"

Sometimes we just don't see what's right in front of us, and Jesus goes on to say that just shows what an awesome Creator we have. Who else could create all of this? Who could create all of this?

But you know, a lot of people don't see the firmament anymore. In a science magazine, she quotes: "80 percent of the people in the United States can no longer see the Milky Way because of light pollution."

That is very sad, very sad.

Light pollution, as she says, has erased much of our birthright. But if we go out there and we look up the way the psalmist did, the heavens are really, really telling the story of God Almighty.

So keep Psalm 19 near you. Mark it in your Bible. Turn there now and then.

So, if we were somewhere in that galaxy and suddenly we came down and we landed on this ball that we call Earth on World Communion Sunday, let's reflect a bit.

So we're landing in Zambia, one of my favorite countries in Africa. And we all know in this congregation that Africa is a continent. It is made up of 54 sovereign nations recognized by the United Nations. Zambia is one of them.

Long time ago, as a British colony, it was called Northern Rhodesia. It's been independent since the '60s.

And there in Zambia— I'm quoting one of the pastors who works very closely with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church. I found it in one of our journals. —

So Reverend Dr. Michael Calito is the executive director of the Theological Education by Extension in Zambia.

He says that when Paul was writing his letter to the church at Corinth, we know that story about the whole body; they're different parts, and we're all part of that, as we talk about on World Communion Sunday.

He puts it in an African context, and he says the African philosophy of Ubuntu, Ubuntu, which is translated, "I am because we are."

"I am because we are."

Everything is done in a sense of community, which certainly is the theme of World Communion Sunday.

And he says that if we're to share bread together and the cup together, then if God gives greater honor to the weaker members of the family, then we must do the same in our communities, giving special attention to the orphans and vulnerable children, valuing the voices of women and youth, honoring those who serve quietly.

His illustrations are church cleaners and church ushers, advocating for justice where the poor are exploited, whether it be the mines, the farms, or the markets.

"In Zambia, when a village celebrates a harvest, everyone shares. Even the poorest household receives some of the abundance from that harvest.

"That is how the church should live every day, not by hoarding honor for the strong, but by lifting up those considered weak."

Beautiful statement by the pastor.

Zambia is full of beautiful people, and today we want to relate to people in different parts of the world, and I think also to the rest of creation, being the animals.

So I'm going to tell you an animal story.

When we were in Zambia six years ago, it was our family and another close family.

So, our first stop in Africa, our first night in Africa, was in Zambia, which is very near Victoria Falls. So we flew in there, and we "Land Roved." We went up to this place that we'd reserved, a very small, modest kind of cottage.

Down the road, maybe a mile or so, there was a woman who owned this area, and she took us up there and gave us a key and said, "There'll be a guide here in the morning, to cook breakfast. Otherwise, you're on your own, and be careful because the elephants often walk through here."

Okay, well, they're elephants. There could be other animals, too. So it's just—we're in the savanna, right?

It's really dark, talking about the sky, and so we did our evening thing. We had our supper and all that, and there was a swimming pool that was probably the exact size of this chancel. It was long and narrow. My goddaughter took a dip in it. We wanted to eat, and then later, right after dark, someone said, "Look!"

And at the end of the pool, there was an elephant drinking water out of the swimming pool.

And so that was fascinating. And then when we looked, you'd hear a little crunch. You'd hear a stick break.

Well, there were two other elephants, even bigger, and the place we were staying was sort of attached with a hallway. One of them came through an open hallway. One of them came right through there. Another one went up on a veranda.

We looked later because we heard a lot of noise. It knocked over every potted plant that there was. Plants were everywhere.

They destroy a lot of trees, you know. They eat the bark, and so a lot of farmers, a lot of people aren't too fond of elephants because they trample things, they eat stuff they're not supposed to eat, etc.

That is my Zambia story.

I want to wind up by saying that this is so beautiful this morning. (Pointing to a bouquet of bread on the altar) We have breads from all around the world.

You did it many years ago. The photos from there, and Susan kept the photo, so you see the photo. But I hope you can get a good look at what the committee put together at the table for us. It's really, really beautiful.

We're going to touch on that.

One of my favorite places for bread was in Pakistan. So we're in Zambia. We would just go east across the Indian Ocean. We don't often think of Asia and Africa being so connected, but for centuries, people from Asia came across the ocean right into East Africa.

So in Pakistan, I was traveling, you know, on church business, and I remember they make the bread into kind of these patties, and then they were going to cook it. So they said they invited me to go with them.

Went outside, and there are open ovens, really big ones, with a fire down in there, and there's no top, no cover. So they take the dough and they slap it against the inside of that oven, right up against the wall. Whack like that, whack like that.

When they're done, they take them off like pancakes, take them inside, and a big plate of—oh, so delicious, so warm, so delicious.

And I remember when I studied in the Philippines, they had coconut bread, not that white stuff that we get, whatever it was—the raw coconut oil chopped up, and they put it inside the bread.

And there was one bakery. If you went there really late at night, they were already baking bread for the next day, and you could buy some coconut bread.

Oh, the best bread in the whole world.

So I could go on and on about bread.

I want us to see this with our eyes. I want us to incorporate the whole world into our being this morning because we are breaking bread with sisters and brothers all over the world.

When we started the service this morning at 10 o'clock, I just want to remind you that it's already 11 p.m. in Seoul, Korea. It's 10 p.m. in Manila, the Philippines; 6 p.m. in Tehran, Iran; it's 5 p.m. right now in Jerusalem; it's 4 p.m. in Maputo, Cape Town, and Paris; it's 3 p.m. right now in London, and right now it's 4 a.m. in Honolulu, so don't call any of your relatives on vacation. They're still asleep. It's 4:00 a.m.

We have a God who's the God of all the time zones, a God who's the God of all the people, and this morning we are very pleased to be part of a universal church, and to break bread with our sisters and brothers in all these parts of this earth.

And who knows what else is going on up there in the firmament?

But we do celebrate on earth today, World Communion Sunday.

Amen.