

**“Lift Up Your Eyes on High and See”**  
**Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c**

**Psalm 147**

<sup>1</sup>Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God;  
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

<sup>2</sup>The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

<sup>3</sup>He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

<sup>4</sup>He determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.

<sup>5</sup>Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.

<sup>6</sup>The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.

<sup>7</sup>Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre.

<sup>8</sup>He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth,  
makes grass grow on the hills.

<sup>9</sup>He gives to the animals their food,  
and to the young ravens when they cry.

<sup>10</sup>His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

<sup>11</sup>but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

<sup>20c</sup>Praise the Lord!

**Isaiah 40:21-31**

<sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you  
from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of  
the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is God who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are  
like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and  
spreads them like a tent to live in; <sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught, and  
makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. <sup>24</sup>Scarcely are they planted,

scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? <sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. <sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

### **Mark 1:29-39**

<sup>29</sup>As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup>Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup>He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup>That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup>And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup>And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup>In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a

deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup>And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup>When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” <sup>38</sup>He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” <sup>39</sup>And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

### The Sermon

At the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, according to Mark, he cured someone in the synagogue, after which Andrew and Simon brought Jesus to their home, where Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. He took her by the hand, and lifted her up, and she was made well, and her first response to being restored to health was to get up and start looking after *them*.

That evening, practically the whole city gathered around their door, with people who were troubled in mind, body or spirit.

That night, he brought healing to many people who, if you look at Simon’s mother-in-law as an example, were then able to start taking care of each other.

Sometime before dawn, Jesus got up in the dark, and went out to a deserted place to pray.

As the early traces of sunlight reached out across the sky, Simon and his companions woke and saw that he had gone, and went looking for him.

When they found him, they said to him, “Everybody is searching for you.”

And he said, in the Greek used by Mark, “Let us go *another way* (ἀλλαχοῦ), let’s go *somewhere else*—into the neighboring towns, for me to proclaim the message there, too: for this, I have come forth.”

When you're in the midst of a personal crisis, no matter how small or momentary it may be, that crisis looks like the biggest thing in the world.

When the world is in crisis, it can be very hard to see any glimmers of hope.

When the message of crisis is being blared around the clock, it can be hard to hear anything else through the constant ringing of alarm bells.

And when we or our loved ones are unwell—physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually—*and* the people in our city, town or village are also hurting in any of those ways, *and* the world is going through something on the unusual scale and disruption of a pandemic, *and* there are vested interests—whole industries—whose job it is to make sure we are all as riled up as possible against each other, it can be hard to maintain perspective, and easy to lose our bearings.

*It is God who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.*

*Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these innumerable stars in the heavens  
and knows each one intimately, by name?*

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth,  
who gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.*

Those who were there in 1968 will remember that by the end of that cataclysmic year, the world felt like it was being torn to shreds.

The social fabric had already been run through the mill so thoroughly that one of the two mainline Presbyterian denominations had issued a statement, the Confession of 1967, speaking out unambiguously on the side of justice and equality, while making an urgent plea for reconciliation among people with a theological argument for it based on the Biblical truth about who God is and why Jesus “came forth.”

And now, in late 1968, American cities were burning. The Viet Nam war was raging. Martin Luther King had been assassinated in April and then Robert F. Kennedy barely two months later; I suspect the full horror of that may never have been adequately appreciated by those of us who weren't there and aware of things at the time (I turned one the day before we lost RFK). And the defining backdrop to every world event was the cold war, an existential state of fear and distrust between the nuclear powers of the United States and the Soviet Union.

In December of 1968, right at Christmastime, Frank Borman, James Lovell and William Anders were launched in a tiny vessel to become the first humans to reach another astronomical object, to orbit the Moon and return safely to Earth.

As they would later say, nobody involved in the mission ever mentioned anything about taking a photograph, or thought anything about what it meant to see the earth from that distance.<sup>i</sup>

William Anders said, “It was only when...we were able to turn around and catch our breath and float over to the window, and I said, Wow—look at that...”

He thought to grab a camera, and started taking pictures of a sight no human being could ever have seen before.

Jim Lovell would later say, “You don't see cities, you don't see boundaries, you don't see countries, you don't see people...”

“I suddenly realized, everything in life is relative. When you’re in a room, the world revolves around those walls. When you’re outside, then your world revolves around what your eye can see. Suddenly when you’re in a spacecraft you think in terms of oceans, of islands...

“When I was around the moon and saw the earth, I realized suddenly how insignificant we all are, just tucked away in space around a normal star, the sun...just one of billions of stars in the universe.

“I personally thought that everybody would like to have that view, as we did: to see the earth as it really is.”

Frank Borman recently said, “We’d been spending all these revolutions looking at the moon. Then as we come around this uninviting place, we look up, and there’s the earth...

“It was small enough, you could cover it with your thumbnail. And everything we held dear—our families, our country, everything—was back on that blue planet....”

He said, “When I...had time to be a little more contemplative, [it] got me thinking, really for the first time: we’re just a small piece of an almost infinite universe.

“...I got to thinking, ‘Is that really the center of the universe?’”

That Christmas of 1968, in a world defined by tragedy, and calamity, and agonizing division, with the foundations of stability being rocked to their core, Borman, Anders and Lovell, and the thousands of scientists behind them, gave the people of earth our first portrait of our home, a photograph called Earthrise, that changed the world by showing us our world,

and reminding us that, although what is right in front of us often looks

like it must be insurmountably huge,

from a wider perspective, it becomes clear that everything we experience and endure takes place within a greater context—a context in which we are all just people sharing this space and trying to do the best we can;

a context into which, 20 centuries ago, Jesus came forth to show us who God is, to embody God’s power and God’s love, and to teach his *followers* to embody what God wants for us all: kindness, compassion, mercy, justice, peace, abundant life and unconditional love.

*Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God”?*

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth...*

*He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.  
Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Keith Grogg  
Montreat Presbyterian Church  
Montreat, NC  
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<sup>i</sup> The quotes from the three astronauts are all from the 2018 documentary short *Earthrise* (Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, director. Go Project Films in association with The New York Times Op-Docs and American Documentary (POV Shorts))