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Believing in Creation

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Believing in Creation

Abstract

"Give praise to the Creator for what will be, but not before cherishing the wonder of creation that already is."

Posting about God's promise of a new creation from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<http://inallthings.org/believing-in-creation/>

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Believing in Creation

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Howard Schaap

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 146](#)

[Isaiah 42:14-21](#)

[Colossians 1:9-14](#)

Isaiah must love the natural world. I say this because he writes about it so beautifully. At least two of our most beloved nature images, soaring on wings like eagles (40:31) and the wolf laying down with the lamb (11:6), come from the pen of Isaiah.

Isaiah also writes about nature in at least two different ways. Consider those same two beloved passages. The first uses an image of power and grace that we *recognize* from creation to show what happens when we wait upon the Lord. The second gives us quite a different vision. Whereas we know what the flight of an eagle is like, we have a hard time imagining a lion laying down with a lamb. This second image is a vision of *new* creation, of what will be.

That brings me to Isaiah 41:14-20. The passage opens with God addressing his people memorably, as “worm Israel” and “little Israel”—strange terms of endearment that suggest this is written for Israel in exile, when God’s people are at their lowest of low points. He follows this up with promises of victory, or perhaps judgment upon the surrounding nations, in verses 15-16.

It’s verses 17-20 where things get freaky as far as nature goes. “The poor and needy search for water,” this section begins, “but there is none.” The “poor and needy” here are probably the same as “worm Israel”: that is, Israel in exile. However, the promises God makes for these thirsty people sound a lot like the lion and the lamb passage, like *new* creation, by pairing things we don’t usually think of together: desert and water.

“I will make rivers flow on barren heights,” God promises,
and springs within the valleys.

I will turn the desert into pools of water,
and the parched ground into springs.

I will put in the desert
the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive.

I will set pines in the wasteland,
the fir and cypress together. (vs. 18-19)

Normally, I love the stories of the Bible where nature plays a starring role—the ten plagues, water from the rock, Daniel in the lion’s den, Jonah. As a fisherman, I especially love the fish Peter catches with a coin in its mouth so that he can pay the temple tax (especially in tax season!) and the miraculous catch of fish (especially in fishing season!). Honestly, when I think about life after death, I don’t think about praising God forever in heaven, which for me still conjures the image of playing a harp on a cloud, but rather, I think about praising God forever among the creatures and plants—the lions and lambs and the acacias and olive trees—of that new earth.

But passages like Isaiah 41:18-20 make me uneasy. Many experts say that we live in a time when the rate of extinction of species is going up rapidly—and that it’s caused by us. Some Christians wave this away as the paranoia of a certain group of scientists, but passages like Isaiah 41 force us into a contradiction. If we as Christians look forward to *new* creation but allow elements of *creation* to go extinct, isn’t that a faithless vision rather than a faithful one? Isn’t it just the latest version of us being “so heavenly focused that we’re no earthly good”?

Part of the problem may be that we read these passages of new creation incorrectly. When we see trees in the desert in Isaiah, we must not get ahead of ourselves—we must believe in *creation* before we can believe in *new* creation. We know what a lion is, and we know what a lamb is. We know what a cedar is, and an olive. Isaiah's visions of new creation depend upon us seeing what's before us now, in creation as we know it.

This is how the passage closes, too. God promises to put these *recognizable* creations in the desert to glorify himself,

so that people may see and know,
may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lord has done this,
that the Holy One of Israel has created it. (vs 20)

For Christians, it doesn't take new creation for us to look around and marvel at the creator. We can do that already. In fact, for people of faith, when it comes to the natural world, seeing *is* believing.

Today, look around at the creation, listen to the trumpeting of returning geese, consider the fragile eggs in a nest, consider the uniqueness of snowflakes in a late season squall, and marvel at the wonder of it all. Believe in creation, in order to hope in new creation.

And give praise to the Creator for what will be, but not before cherishing the wonder of creation that already is.