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The Voice of His Word

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Recommended Citation

Schaap, James C., "The Voice of His Word" (2017). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. 724.
http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/724

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The Voice of His Word

Abstract

"Lake Michigan still leaves me in awe, too full of the touch of its presence to explain it clearly."

Posting about the power of God in nature 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/the-voice-of-his-word/>

Keywords

In All Things, lectionary, voice, Word of God, Lake Michigan, creation

Disciplines

Christianity

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In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

The Voice of His Word

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May 27, 2017

James Calvin Schaap

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 93](#)

[2 Kings 2:13-15](#)

[John 8:21-30](#)

All the adulation of Psalm 93 got me to remembering my own mighty waters.

I didn't grow up on Lake Michigan, literally. My ethnic ancestors first set claims on the western Lake Michigan shoreline, and called their first American town their own "Amsterdam," hoping, perhaps, that the name would provide security in the new country.

Today there is no Amsterdam, Wisconsin—no town, no streets, no church. When the railroads came twenty years after its founding, the pioneers' oxen lugged Amsterdam up and away from the shoreline on long tamarack boughs and set it carefully down a mile away, close to the new shiny rails, sure that growth was inevitable over there, adjacent to the freshly cut path of the great steam locomotive.

So today, 160-some years later, the shoreline belongs to people whose names once seemed foreign to the Veldbooms, the Wilterdinks, and the Eernisses, the later generations of the first settlers. In 1850, the first Dutch immigrants knew nothing about real estate, so they turned their backs on the shoreline, moving west into soggy marshlands, where they put to use their old-country propensity for tiling and draining swamps and turning it all into productive farmland.

So when I say I grew up on Lake Michigan, I mean I grew up close enough to hear its continuous roar through my open bedroom window, close enough to ride my J.C. Higgins down to the beach and go skinny-dipping, one fairly comfortable mile from the steeple of the Dutch Calvinist church where I went to catechism on Saturday mornings.

I grew up on Lake Michigan the way some people grow up on meat and potatoes. In high school we'd pair off, snuggle up in our cars at the end of the lake roads, and "park" —a wonderful teenage euphemism, probably archaic usage today. Every spring we'd seine for smelt in chest-high waders, and in winter I remember driving old cars down miles of frozen sand. For a few golden weeks in August Lake Michigan would warm to a tropical 68 degrees, and everyone would go in. For just a moment in time, Bermuda had nothing on our own big lake.

On hot summer nights, we'd barefoot the wet shore, the continuous ebb and flow of lake waves firm and reassuring. Often a walk like that pulled out the best of us, for you can't talk trivia when your footsteps have been forever erased a moment after you've left them. That kind of mystical presence makes me say I grew up on Lake Michigan, as if she, or he, shaped me as surely as the driftwood it offers up every season of the year.

It was that kind of presence I wanted my children to feel when I brought them to the shoreline years later, a time when too much of the beach was outfitted in bright yellow "No Trespassing" signs. But we went anyway, even in the middle of winter.

In winter the beach is desolate, from the sharp grass of the sand cliffs to the hem of ice chunks the lake wears until March. The sand runs smooth and true as plate glass, and the tiny footsteps my children made seemed remarkable, the paths they formed, poetic.

In the winter the beach belongs to the wind that uncovers stones as round and flat as silver dollars, and rolls the soft sand into flowing drifts unmatched in elegance by anything manmade. Just the seagulls are there midwinter—and the

deer. I remember my daughter putting two little fingers in the cloven prints the deer leave behind.

Lake Michigan still leaves me in awe, too full of the touch of its presence to explain it clearly. When I visit today, it still tells me things I've always known but never really taken the time to believe. Its size mocks my smallness. Its eternal rhythms reveal the transience of my own life and mock my ambitions.

And yet it strengthens me despite all this humiliation. I am reminded, Calvinist that I am, of the interdependence of the sand and the water and the gull and the deer and the sky; and within it all, myself, man, God's final creation during that first incredible week, this lake, somehow, still remembers.

We all need our Lake Michigans. Novelist John Fowles says he feels it most in the forest, this inescapable sense of having to measure oneself and one's ambitions in the face of the eternal. I was brought up on the lake; I feel it there, but here too, where the sky opens forever over a horizon that melts in sheer heavenly presence. Years ago, I watched my father-in-law's eyes sweep up over 40 acres of soybeans and scan the horizon of Iowa farmland and I knew he feels it too.

This is what Calvin thought: "We need not stare above the clouds to find God. He meets us in His world and is everywhere we look, offering us scenes that rob us of the breath we might use to describe them."

"The Lord on high is mighty"—that's what the psalmist saw and claimed, the powerful voice of the sea in his ears and in his heart.

Listen for yourself to his world.