

NATURE – GLORIOUS AND DANGEROUS

Have you ever laid back outside on a summer's night to ponder the stars? I sure hope so.

- I was shocked a couple of years ago when only a handful of my confirmation students said that they had ever stargazed – 8th and 9th graders who had never seen the Milky Way.
- Parents, here is a great and safely social-distanced activity to do with your kids this summer. Get out from the city lights some night and take your kids to see the stars. Lay out on a dock or rock or on a blanket in a field and look up to ponder awhile.
- Has your child ever seen a shooting star?

Nature is God's first book.

- Romans 1:20 declares, *"For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."*

God's second book, the Bible, eventually was needed to help in ways nature alone cannot.

- The vexing issue with God's Book of Nature is that it reveals some truths about God but obscures others just as much.
- Like when you zoom in with your fancy lens and one thing becomes clearer but everything else gets fuzzier, but when you refocus on those other things, the first thing gets fuzzier.
- So, we ponder nature for what it teaches and teases us with but get our more complete picture of God from the Bible.
- You won't find the gospel in nature. Love? Yes, sometimes. The value of ethics and morality? Yes, sometimes. But not the gospel.

The natural world is glorious. It can also be dangerous.

- The Bible teaches both of these truths. Nature teaches them as well.

Last Sunday I preached on freedom.

- God said to humanity, "I'm going to give you a gift, but it's going to hurt if you use it foolishly."
- That gift was freedom. Freedom is both glorious and dangerous.

"Glorious and dangerous freedom" also applies to creation itself.

- Old science saw nature as determined, not free at all, but a closed system.
- Then a bunch of fresh-eyed renegade scientists arose, theoretical physicists with bad haircuts, saying, "Wait a minute! Don't get stuck in that kind of old-fashioned, close-minded science."
- They had discovered the wild world of sub-atomic physics and that chance and freedom are woven into the very invisible fabric of creation itself.
- Much of it seemed to make no known sense, but it was still true!
- Nature is not a closed system but open.

Suddenly, even some of the previously unconvinced agreed that there was something for God to do after all, rather than just sit by the side and watch.

But nature's freedom also means that there's something for nature to do as well, to live out its freedom to be and to become.

- In Genesis 1:24 God delegates to nature this power, *"Let the earth bring forth living creatures,"* a creative freedom to continually bring forth new and previously unseen and untested things of new creation.
- Wow! How has earth fulfilled this calling! Glorious!
- Yow! How deadly nature sometime is with this freedom! Dangerous!

Ponder this! What does it mean that God Himself created dangerous animals?

- Genesis 1:21, *"So God created the great sea monsters."*
- In Job 41, God speaks positively of the Leviathan: *"Who dares open the doors of its mouth, ringed about with fearsome teeth,"* and *"If you lay a hand on it, you will remember the struggle and never do it again! Any hope of subduing it is false!"*
- Job 40:15, *"Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you; It is the first of the great acts of God."* God's first great act was to create something dangerous!

Human suffering is used by some as reason to doubt the existence of a good God.

- That's an important and serious conversation that always needs to be carefully pursued with someone who is deeply troubled by it.
- Yet, here we have God creating dangerous creatures that could easily cause human suffering.
- Some think to defend God's honor by saying before the fall into sin, creation wasn't dangerous.
- I disagree! I think creation was already mighty dangerous from the start... all that primordial "tohoo va vohoo" chaos that needed taming.
- I see Eden as a safe spot in an otherwise very dangerous neighborhood.

But then the fall into sin did come, plunging the already dangerous creation also into sin. That's what the Bible teaches. So, there seems to be some kind of distinction in creation between "dangerous" and "fallen."

It makes your head spin, doesn't it? You see why we should really be having this discussion while sitting back pondering the stars.

Where am I going with this?

- Well, if earth was endowed with the freedom to bring forth new life,
- And that same nature is fallen,
- Then the natural world just might start coming forth with some nasty creations such as viruses.

Fallen Humans do things with freedom that are not God intended or God pleasing.

- Fallen Nature sometimes does the same with its freedom.
- And when free but fallen humans clash with a free but fallen natural world, how can suffering not result?

Is there a neat way to tie this all up and tame it for you?

Nope!

It is for all of us to ponder... but in faith.

What a dangerous gift God has given, freedom.

- Clearly, we must use our freedom wisely when others are using theirs dangerously.
- But remember, too, that your comfort, your faith, your ultimate security comes not from this world but from Christ Jesus, the one who walks with you also through this storm.

Ponder God. Rest in Christ. Amen.