

There's a new world coming

Romans 8:12-25

A Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Sometimes we have a mountain top experience, and everything is beautiful, and we say with Browning in his famous little poem: "God's in his heaven, and all is right with the world."

What a wonderful world. We have that sense sometimes, as we look at this magnificent creation, and we say that tells us something about God.

That has been traditionally summed up in what are called the five proofs for God. (It goes back to Aquinas.) It's useful for us Christians to know about these. They are like games that lead you astray. No need to caught in them. They don't really work.

The first "proof" for God goes something like this: There must be a God because there must have been something that started it all. (That's called "First cause.")

Second, then because it is going somewhere (the second law of thermodynamics, things are running down) there's a final end. That tells us that there has to be something directing it.

And third, because there is a certain type of order and beauty. There is that structure in creation. That's the cosmological argument.

Then fourth, there's the ethical argument. There's something about right and wrong. We know about something called "conscience."

And finally, number five, there is "isness," there is being, and therefore there must be that one who "is," who "is behind it all."

But looking back at these five arguments for God, what do we really have?

Is God the first cause? Is that all? Is God the final cause? Is that all? Is God order? Is that all? Is God right and wrong ethics? Is that all? Or is it that there is some kind of "isness," some kind of being? Is that all?

Frankly, when you look at it, it's not so simple. Joseph Heller, in *Catch 22*, says: "How can we talk about a Supreme Being when there is tooth decay." What in the world?

We can do something about tooth decay. We can do something about forest fires. We can do something about cancer.

But there are some things that we simply can't deal with, like earthquakes, volcanoes, tornados, drought, hail storms, tsunamis. Then there is the fact that there is an ice age every so often.

The Rocky Mountains went up 70 million years ago but there was nobody around to see it. It must have been very destructive. There was a meteor that hit the earth about 65 million years ago and wiped out a large part of the earth. The point is that there's another side to nature. It's like Tennyson's famous line: "nature red in tooth and claw."

Frankly, if you're going to claim that there must be a God by looking at nature, then the God you find there is a monster. In fact, this is what you find in Hinduism, in Kali, the nature goddess. She is often depicted with four arms symbolizing the cycle of creation and destruction. If we are going to claim that God is seen through nature, then God is a monster.

With that we see something about this text in Romans 8:18-25 because there it says that creation is subject to futility and decay. Creation is fallen. We know that that's the case.

With sin, not only did we fall into death and sin, but so did nature. That creates a problem for us because people would like to say that there must be some way that who we are and what nature is says something about God.

The place in Romans where that all comes out is in Romans 1:19-20, where Paul writes: "What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them."

The question is: What is there in nature that tells us about God? You remember the famous account of Moses who said he wanted to see God, and God said, "No, nobody can see God and live." All you can see is God's behind. Even that was such that no one could look at Moses afterward because his face was such a burning reflection of God's glory.

What is there that one can know? If you look at what it says here, it says: "his invisible nature." Obviously, "invisible" is what we can't see. John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, said: If you find an atheist, you've found a man who has no visible means of support. You get the question of: What kind of support is there?

There are very few atheists because it's hard to be an atheist, because it's hard work. Most people are agnostics because that doesn't take any work at all, and that's what Paul is talking about. Agnostics are those who say: I'll manage it.

As a result, when this happens, people create idols. Idols are a way of managing the future, managing God. Today we don't have idols made out of stone, wood, and metal as in ancient times, but we are still idol-making machines.

One of the most popular idols of our time is scientism. That's being caught thinking that no matter the problem, we, with our reason, our great scientific minds, will solve it.

What can be known of God? His invisible nature, but that's invisible so that doesn't help. His eternal power and deity, but that's redundant because we don't know what deity is. We end up then with his eternal power, meaning: Hey, it's beyond us.

We keep thinking, because we think of ourselves as if we were gods, we keep thinking that we'll make up some degree of God and forget then about his holiness.

What are our gods today? Mostly that which makes us feel superior to others or gives us power over others. That becomes "God."

Anything except the true God is an idol.

What Paul writes in our text from Romans 8 today is similar to what he writes on the same subject in Galatians 4:8-9. There he says: "Formerly when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?"

There is no way of knowing God except in Jesus Christ, and even then, we say: "We know God," but it's really as Paul writes that he knows us, that he makes himself known to us.

We're tempted to say "we know," "we can know." We can manage. That's what sin is about. That's what sin is. That we can manage God. In the old days it was called idols, and it's really the same today.

But, of course, he has made himself known. He has made himself known in Jesus Christ and then the text in Romans 8 goes on to that remarkable note of hope.

It says that creation was subjected to decay and futility in hope just like us, as human beings, waiting for our adoption. And then in Romans 8:21 there's what's coming: the glorious freedom of the children of God, which we can look forward to, and even now it is already begun. The Lord is at work in creation and in us, but in a way that is hidden because we don't perceive it right, and we and the world are caught in the process of decay and sin.

What is it going to be like? What is the hope as it is described? In the Book of Revelation, it says that nobody goes to heaven because what happens is that God comes to dwell on earth with us.

In Isaiah 11 and 65 it talks about a peaceable kingdom, restoring nature, a world where the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the lion shall eat straw. Everyone can be together. You get all of this description of what it's going to be like.

The Lord is going to restore it, and he's already working; it's begun even now in this decaying world because he has begun in Jesus Christ, bringing you to him in Baptism and everything is now already in hope, even though the final hope is yet to come, that glorious freedom, the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Amen