

Column

“The world is a canvas on which God paints,” remarked my cousin Alyce Adkins. She went onto explain that whether it is sunrise or sunset, whether you are at the beach or on a mountain top, the scene is always changing. The picture on God’s canvas – not unlike His mercies – are new every day.

The Old Testament psalmist would agree. In Psalm 19, he exclaims: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handy-work. One day telleth another; and one night certifieth another. There is neither speech nor language; but their voices are heard among them” (1-3).

The beauty in the natural world along with the regularity and order found within it might well be seen as post-it notes left by the Creator. They point to God and cause all but the most brutish man to look out and up in “wonder, love and praise”.

No doubt you have experienced something of the sort in your life. I know I have. One particular scene comes to mind. Looking through the woods towards Lake Blue Ridge early on a winter morning the sun was just peaking its head over the horizon creating red and gold shafts of light surging upward to the sky. The whole forest appeared to be on fire. It took my breathe away. God was near at hand.

There is, however, a danger in celebrating God in nature. It is possible to so co-mingle creation with the Creator that no distinction is left. God is the sunset. God is the rainbow. God is the newly ploughed earth bursting with earthworms. The term for this is pantheism, a noble but incomplete view of God and the world.

The more robust view found in the Bible is that God can be seen in the works of His hands; yet, He is above and beyond them. If they were to cease to exist, He would remain. But even as we say this, we must affirm that He is not a God afar off . . . a celestial absentee landlord. St. Paul says as much when he addressed the learned men on Mars Hill in Athens: “In him we live, and move, and have our being.”

Putting all this together, the canvas on which God paints brilliantly and daily must not be separated from His self-revelation found in Scripture and ultimately in Jesus. Both are needed if we are to know and enter into a right relationship with Him.

But there is a problem. In today's world, with all its busyness, it is possible to miss the signs God has given us. I know I am guilty of this at times, and it took an elderly person to point me in the right direction.

On occasion I used to pick this person up for a doctor's appointment. Invariably, she would see things along the roadway to which I was oblivious. It might be a new calf in the field, a flowering tree or some daffodils along a fence row. Whatever it was she would point and thank God for them.

She saw the canvas and the majesty of the Great Artist. I saw the tarmac and the clock on the dashboard. What do you see?

O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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