

Column

Have you ever got a song in your head and couldn't get it out? Well, this happened to me after hearing world-renown bass-baritone Oral Moses sing "What a wonderful world." Made famous in 1967 by Louis Armstrong, the lyrics begin: "I see trees of green, red roses too. I see them bloom for me and you, and I think to myself, what a wonderful world!"

As I drove around the following day, I saw not only the green trees of which he spoke but also crape myrtles emblazoned in hues of red, pink and white. They had been there before, but now it was as if I were seeing them for the first time.

But it was not just trees that caught my attention that day. As I walked around the building that houses my office, the tomato plants overflowing a raised garden took on a new significance. Reaching up half way to the roof, the branches were laden with fruit of various stages of ripeness. Words of another song – this one a hymn – came to mind: "The ripe fruits in the garden. He [God] made them every one."

It IS a wonderful world. Not only do we find beauty in trees and shrubs, we see God at work in providing for the needs of all things living. Small seeds grow into huge plants, which in turn provide food.

But there is more. The God who did not settle for a world of drab plainness and who provides daily bread for man and beast is also the author of human friendship. And so Louis Armstrong's song continues: "I see friends shaking hands saying, 'How do you do?' They're really saying, 'I love you'."

The beauty in nature, the provision of food and human friendship all go together and cause us to say – if we have our eyes open -- "What a wonderful world!" Even so, we must celebrate the present order with caution. The natural order is beautiful and provides for our creaturely needs, but at times it can be cruel and destructive. The world of flowering trees and tomato plants is also the world of floods and storms. In like manner, friendships which are a source of great joy can go awry and cause much sorrow.

Does the Christian faith provide any insight into this conundrum? Yes, it does. It tells us that God created the world good, but also that something went dreadfully wrong. God's image-bearing creatures, right from the start, tried to dethrone God and enthrone themselves. Known as 'The Fall', the story is written

up in Genesis 3. Disorder and disintegration, both personal and societal, followed and can still be seen today.

Further, the apostle Paul in the New Testament says that man's revolt has affected more than himself. In Romans 8:22, he writes, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." The natural order, no less than humans, needs a new beginning.

The good news is that God's rescue brought about in Jesus includes both. Humans and creation are to be put right. Death itself is to be destroyed. New heavens and a new earth are coming at our Lord's Second Coming (Revelation 21).

Thinking again of our song, until this rescue is fully realized, can we really sing, What a wonderful world? Absolutely, all that is lovely and true and good in this present world is a foretaste of that one that is to come.

Thank you, Louis Armstrong and Dr. Moses for not only putting a song in our heart but pointing our eyes both outward and heavenward.

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. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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