

When the Word of the Lord promised Abraham to bring salvation through his Descendant, he pointed Abraham to the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. Just as God had created every single star and every grain of sand, he would make Abraham the father of many nations. He would bless multitudes of people with the same promise of salvation he gave to Abraham. Their faith would cling to the same Word Abraham's faith clung to. They would enjoy the same forgiveness of their sins and the same righteousness of the Lord. The Word of the Lord who spoke to Abraham was the very Descendant promised to Abraham. Nearly two millennia after this, this same Word of the Lord became flesh, born of the family line of Abraham. He then came to a multitude of people, proclaiming to them the mercy of his Father. And just as he had pointed Abraham to the stars in the sky and the sands on the shore, he now points us to the birds of the sky and the flowers of the field as signs of his mercy toward us.

No one can see God. Only his Son, his only begotten Son, can see him. And he has made him known to us. Jesus came to reveal his Father to us. God doesn't make us know him by leaving it to our own reason and senses to figure him out. We can look up at the stars and down at the landscape of the earth, and we can conclude that there is a God, an intelligent designer. But he remains beyond our comprehension. We can't know him just by studying the birds in the air and the flowers of the field. Instead, he must reveal himself to us through his Word. He speaks to us the promise of his Son, just as he first did to Adam and Eve. This is the promise of the Seed of the woman who would be bruised in his heel as he destroyed the power of the devil. This is the same Seed promised to Abraham who would bring salvation for all people. He is the Word who was in the beginning with God and was in the beginning God. By him and for him all things were made, and in him all things hold together. He is the Son sharing the same life and substance of his Father from all eternity. It is only through him that we can know something beyond the fact that there is a God who created everything. Through Jesus, the Word made flesh, we know God personally. We know him as our Father through faith in his Son.

This is why Jesus points us to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, just like he pointed Abraham to the stars of heaven and the sands of the earth. We can't know the mercy of God by our own investigation of stars, dirt, animals, or plants. But when Christ, the Son and Word of the Father, points us to these things, then he gives us a completely new insight. Now the stars are not just balls of gas trillions of miles away. They are the handiwork of the God of lights who sent his Son as the bright Morning Star to save us from the darkness of our sin. Now the sand isn't just trillions of grains along the water. They are put there by God to confirm that his salvation is for all people living on the earth. Now the birds of the air aren't just random animals who make all sorts of sounds. They are God's creatures sent to teach us to praise God with freedom and peace in our conscience, knowing that it is God who gives us our daily bread. And the flowers are not just pretty designs. They are signs of God's promise to clothe us in his pure garments of righteousness and salvation.

After God created man, both male and female, in his own image, he told them to look at what he had created for them. "See," he said to them, "I have given you every plant that has seeds anywhere on the earth and every tree that has fruit with its seeds. They will be your food." He then points them to the animals, both the beasts of the land and the birds of the air, and he says that he has provided for them as well. This was paradise. It was knowing that God provides. He pointed them outside of themselves and to his good work of mercy, teaching them to find all they need from him, their gracious God. And this is what they did. They looked at what God told them to look at. They held onto God's Word as they saw his creation as nothing but a constant sign of his goodness and favor toward them. Their eyes were so fixed on what God gave them, that they weren't even ashamed that they had no clothes on. Wearing

clothes wasn't even an afterthought. It was obvious in every way that God was their shelter. God was their nurturer. God was their Father. They knew him. And they were not ashamed. That was paradise.

Of course, we know that they lost paradise. Their sin led them to look at their own nakedness and obsess over clothing. Adam had to eat bread by the sweat of his brow. Eve was to give birth with pain and sorrow. And to this day, we need to wear clothes and work for our daily bread. But Jesus has come to show us the Father again. And he doesn't do this by doing away with the pains of this life. He doesn't just say, "Hey, you've been fine this whole time! Now throw away your clothes and don't bother gathering food!" Instead, Jesus came to bear this pain in our place. He let his sweat run down his face, even while shedding his own blood. He suffered hunger. He was stripped of his clothes and shamed as he hung on the cross. This is what he came to do. He came to be crushed for our iniquities, save us from guilt and condemnation, and give us peace with God.

But before he does any of this, he tells us to look. Look at what God has made. Look at his creation. Look at the birds in the air and the flowers of the field. Look at how they don't sow or cut grain. They don't gather into barns. They don't labor or spin or sew or knit. But they are fed. They are clothed. They are decked out with beauty and freedom. By whom? Who does this to them? Your Father – that's who! Before Jesus walks that road of sorrow, before Jesus bears on himself our own sins, our own misery, and our own worries, he teaches us who our God is. He is the one who made all things for you. And he makes all things new for you.

Aren't you worth more than the birds? Aren't you worth more than flowers? Didn't God make all of these things for you? Look at how he cares for them? How much more will he care you for? You can't learn this by your own investigation. Only the Son of God can make this known. Only the Word, through whom all these things were made and in whom all these things hold together, can make this known. Only his Spirit who gives you new life in the Son can teach you that the God who created all these things is the God who knows you, who created you, who redeemed you, and who claims you as his own forever.

Jesus attaches his Word and promise to created things. He says of the bread and the wine in his Supper, "This is my body given for you . . . this is my blood shed for you." He joins his Word to the washing of water when he says, "Baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit . . . and I am with you always to the end of the age." He joins his Word to our afflictions when he says, "Pick up your cross and follow me," and he promises that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He joins his Word to the red sky in the morning to remind us of his return to judge the living and the dead. And all the while, he joins his Word to the stars, the sand, the birds, and the flowers to give us the assurance that he has established his throne in the heavens, that his kingdom rules over all, and that he himself is our food and our clothing.

Before God called him to faith, Abraham had likely studied the stars already. Pagans have been looking for signs in the stars for thousands of years. Unbelievers look at creation all the time. But they don't know the Creator. They devote their lives to serving the created things of this world, hoping to get some kind of benefit from them. They are often successful in doing so. But no matter how well they know how things work, they can never find peace with the one who holds all things together.

Jesus doesn't say that being hungry or naked are signs that your faith is weak. In fact, he uses these things to strengthen our faith, causing us to rely on his gracious Word of salvation. Instead, Jesus says

that worrying is a sign of weak faith. Why do we worry about what we will eat and wear? It's because we have a hard time believing God. But Jesus doesn't say this to discourage us. No, he is directing our faith to its true object. Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, Jesus says. Here he is showing what our faith rests in. Our faith does not rely on our ability to provide for ourselves. Our faith doesn't rely on how good we are at making use of the creation. No, our faith relies on the kingdom of God's grace. Our faith rests in the righteousness of our Savior, which covers up our sin. Our faith clings to the Word of the Lord who became flesh, was obedient in our place, and saves us from hell. Our faith rests on him who comes to us today in his Word and sacraments, who baptized us into his own body, and nurtures us by his own Spirit.

If God gives you his kingdom, if God declares you righteous in his sight, if God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, if God says to you right now today that you are his child and he is your Father, then certainly he will give to you everything you need today.

Therefore, hold onto his promise today. Don't worry about what trials and temptations might be around the corner. As Jeremiah says, his mercies are new every morning. His gospel promise, which will remain tomorrow and forever, helps you face this day. So let his kingdom and righteousness protect you against the temptations that are bothering you right now.

Our heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask for it. He knew us before we knew him. And through his Word – through faith his Son – we know him as our gracious Creator. So rejoice in the works of God's hands! Because though your flesh is like the grass, which perishes, the Word of the Lord endures forever. Amen.