

Psalm 19 His majesty's voice

Tim Anderson 12/6/22

You can't really know much about what someone is like unless they speak to you.

I could watch Ash Barty play a whole tennis tournament, at least I could have earlier in the year, no longer sadly,

but I watched parts of her win in the Australian Open.

And it didn't tell me much about her.

But then if I watch a press conference and she speaks, then I get some understanding of the person.

You get to know a person when they speak.

And God is a person.

You get to know God by listening to his voice.

Well our psalm today gives us two ways that God speaks to us.

And they are really very different ways.

One tells us a little bit.

The other tells us a lot.

To head back to my Ash Barty illustration,

When she talks in a press conference you get to know her a little bit, but when she talks with you personally over a long period of time, like for example she has done with her fiancé Gary Kissick, then he would get to know her a whole lot better.

The two ways God speaks are through creation and through his word.

Creation tells us a little bit about God.

His word tells us a lot about God.

Let's start with creation and then move to God's word.

Verses 1-6 of the psalm are about creation.

¹The heavens declare the glory of God;

the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

I'm not sure if you've ever been to an observatory.
One time our family were on holiday
and we visited an observatory near Coonabarabran in NSW.
These were not the giant telescopes at Siding Springs,
we had a look at those too,
but that was very arms length.
These were just a little observatory
that one of the astronomers who worked at the main observatory
had set up in his back yard.
He put in 4 or 5 telescopes.
Ones that are big enough for you to sit inside.
And he trained the telescopes on beautiful features of the night sky.
And then he charged the tourists to come and have a look.
And it was so successful, he quit his job at the main observatory
and turned it into a full time business.
And the images of what is up there in heavens are breathtaking.
But what is it telling us?
Well 'The heavens declare the glory of God'.

Two words: glory and God.

When we look at creation we see God's glory.

Astronomy in particular has a way of keeping us in our place.

This nebula that I'm looking at
is thousands of light years away.

It's light years across.

And I who am looking at it am just incredibly small by comparison.

How does that declare God's glory?

Well that nebula that is so immense and beautiful is God's artwork.

So when I look at the nebula,

I'm seeing some small reflection of God's glory.

The breathtaking is just a glimpse of God's glory.

Why did God make the nebula?

Just for fun.

His main purpose in creation was human beings.

We are the pinnacle of creation.

We are the ones who relate to him personally.

We are the ones he calls friends.

And he makes the nebula like a chef might sprinkle parsley.

A bit of an afterthought.

A garnish.

That's what intricate and enormous beauty of the night sky is.

How glorious must God be,

if he makes a nebula as a fun afterthought?

I said there were two words, glory and God.

You might not have realised that God is an important word here.

The word of God that is used in the first six verses of the psalm
is the generic word for God.

It's the word you could use for any old god.

The word is El.

It's in lots of the names in the OT.

Elimelech.

El i melech.

My God is king.

Elijah.

El i jah.

My God is Yahweh.

Elkanah

El Kanah.

God has purchased.

Elisabeth.

El i sheva.

My God is a promise.

Presumably a promise keeper.

So the Hebrews would use the generic word for God,
and then say stuff about their God that was more specific.

But they could also use that word for the gods of the nations.

The gods of Egypt or Canaan or Babylon.

They would all be called 'El'.

But there was another word for God.

That is 'Yahweh'.

Yahweh is the personal name of Israel's God.

No other God could be called Yahweh.

It's like saying who am I?

Well you could say I'm the minister.

That's true.

But it's generic.

It doesn't actually distinguish me

from the minister of St Thomas' Langwarrin or St Mark's Balnarring.

If you call me the minister,

you know what my job is but not much else about me.

But you could also say that my name is Tim Anderson.

Well that tells you a lot more about me.

Tim Anderson is married to Cherida.
They have five kids who are rapidly becoming adults themselves.
Tim likes riding his bike and playing chess.
There is lots of personal stuff you could say about Tim Anderson.
No need to fill me in after the service
The name 'God' in the first six verses of the psalm is like minister.
It's a generic word for a deity.
The name Yahweh in the second half of the psalm is like Tim Anderson.
It's his actual name,
and if you know him then it tells you lots about him.

Why does the name for God change half way through the psalm?
Because when we are talking about creation,
we find out generic things about God.
But when we read his word,
we find out about who he is personally.

What does that tell us?
The kind of knowledge of God that you get from creation
is not enough to know God personally.
In creation we see God's glory.
He must be magnificent to have made all this.
But we get no sense of what he likes and dislikes,
what he approves of and what he disapproves of.
What his desires are.
The reason why he made the universe.
You can't discern those from looking at creation.
We only find those out from reading his word.

What is the knowledge of God we get from creation useful for?
The apostle Paul writing to the Romans says this,
Rom 1:20-21 "For since the creation of the world,

God's invisible qualities,
his eternal power and divine nature -
have been clearly seen,
being understood from what has been made,
so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God,
they neither glorified him as God,
nor gave thanks to him,
but their thinking became futile,
and their foolish hearts were darkened."

What does creation tell us about God?

Well it shows us his eternal power and divine nature.

You might not be able to know God personally from creation.

But you can see that he's eternally powerful to have made this universe.

Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping can't make a universe.

Doesn't matter how powerful they think they are.

You have to be divine to do that.

Paul says, if you look at this universe,
you can see enough to know that there is a divine being,
and I need to glorify him and give thanks to him.

Creation gives you just enough knowledge of God
that you have no excuse for ignoring him.

You can't say, "Nobody ever told me about God."

The sun, the moon and the stars were shouting at you.

The mountains, the rivers and the forests were calling to you.

Ps 19:3-4 "They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

Yet their voice goes out to the ends of the earth,
their words to the ends of the world."

You don't have any excuse for not knowing God
because creation has been calling to you.

How will I get to know him then?

The answer is through his word.

You get to know God by listening to his voice.

His voice speaks to you through his word.

And unlike creation which gives you a generic knowledge of God, his word gives you personal knowledge of him.

That's why the name changes to Yahweh or 'the Lord' in our translation.

Psalms are poetry

so instead of talking about God's word in one way, it gives us lots of descriptions.

The Law of Yahweh,

The statutes of Yahweh,

The precepts of Yahweh,

The commands of Yahweh,

The fear of Yahweh,

The decrees of Yahweh.

The Law of Yahweh is not a list of rules.

It's everything we read in the Old Testament.

There are rules.

But there are also stories of how God has dealt with humans in history.

You get to know someone well when you see how they treat other people.

The Bible gives us lots of stories of how God has treated people.

The precepts of Yahweh are his instructions on the details of life.

If you were living in OT times,

then Yahweh had detailed instruction

for how you were to live every aspect of your life.

From what kind of food you could eat

to what kind of clothes you could wear

to what you needed to do if you did the wrong thing,

to what kind of behaviour was appropriate in various situations.

Now as Christians the instructions are not so detailed for us.

But there is still plenty we can learn about what pleases God by reading the details.

There was a reason for all those details.

The reason might still be very meaningful even if the precise detail no longer applies.

The fear of the Lord is an interesting way to refer to God's Word. Of course it's not God's Word itself that is the fear of the Yahweh. But in reading God's Word, the fear of the Lord grows in our hearts.

What is the fear of the Yahweh?

It's not shaking in your boots.

Like Issy might have been shaking in her boots before I put her under the water.

How long is this fellow going to hold me under for?

No, the fear of the Yahweh is respect for the Lord.

As we read his word,

we come to realise that he made us so he actually owns us.

We belong to him.

So we need to take account of his desires for our lives.

We come to realise that he will judge us at the end of our lives, so we better make sure that we come to him as a forgiven person.

It's no good trying to live without ever breaking one of his commands.

No one can do that.

So we better make sure that when we meet him, he has already forgiven us.

I was in court this week appearing before the magistrate.

I needed to treat the magistrate with respect

because at the end of the day,

the magistrate had the power

to make a ruling that might inconvenience my life.

God is far more powerful than the magistrate.

That is why we fear the Lord.

Well the Psalmist provides us
with more than just descriptions of God's Word,
he tells us what it is and what it does.

It is perfect.

It refreshes the soul.

It is trustworthy.

It is right.

It gives joy to the heart.

It is radiant.

It gives light to the eyes.

It is pure.

It endures forever.

It is firm.

Every part of it is righteous.

It is more precious than gold, sweeter than honey.

It warns us.

And when we follow it, it rewards us.

Let's choose a couple of those to expand on.

God's word is perfect.

That means it is complete.

Does God's Word tell you some of the things you need to know about God
and then you have to find out other things from somewhere else?

Maybe the minister will whisper the other secret things in your ear.

Or maybe the church has other teachings about God
that aren't in the Bible,

and you had better find them out by listening to my sermons.

No. None of that.

My sermons are to try to make it clearer to you
what God's Word is telling you.

If I make up stuff and tell you it is from God
but I'm not getting it from the Bible,

I'm what is called a false teacher.
And you should run away as fast as your little legs will carry you.
God's Word is perfect.
It contains everything we need to know about God.

God's Word is trustworthy.
God's word doesn't just tell you stuff,
it also makes promises to you.
But can you trust the promises?
Sometimes people make promises to you,
and they are telling the truth,
that is they believe what they are saying.
But in the end they can't follow through.
Someone says, "I'll always be there for you."
They mean it.
But if they get sick and die,
they aren't there for you.
But the promises in God's Word are backed by the creator of the Universe.
Yahweh is powerful enough to keep every one of his promises.
And his character is of one who always stands by his word.
People sometimes change their minds.
If God makes a promise,
that promise stands until the end of time.
Some of the promises we read about in God's Word,
God spoke them to Moses or David,
and they were about the coming of Jesus more than a thousand years later.
God doesn't forget his promises.

God's Word is pure.
I've has people say to me,
"How do you even know that what you are reading in the Bible
is what was originally written?"

It's been changed by Chinese whispers over the years.
The church has got to it and changed it to suit themselves."
Well that kind of talk is bandied about by people
who want to disregard what God says.
The evidence is overwhelming
that the Bible we read is a very faithful translation
of what was originally written by the human authors.
God's word is pure.
It hasn't been contaminated by people over the centuries.
The original authors didn't get mixed up about what God wanted to say.
The Bible tells us exactly what God wants us to hear.
It's pure.

Well today is Issy's baptism.
What does Psalm 19 have to say to Issy?
Baptism is important.
God's Word instructs Christians to be baptised.
It's not something the church made up.
It was a command given by Jesus
and written down by Matthew in the Bible.
But baptism is just the start of a life following Jesus.
It's when you nail your colours to the mast and say,
"I've decided to follow Jesus.
No turning back."
As you follow Jesus, you want to get to know God better.
And the way you do that is by reading his word.
God's Word is what will help you grow in your faith.
It will help you keep trusting in his promises to you.
You will find that it is sweeter than honey,
and in follow God's word there is great reward.
So God bless you, Issy, as you live for him.