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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
April 28, 2013
Scout Sunday
5th Sunday of Easter

Psalm 98:4-9; Luke 6:43-45
“Hearing God in Nature”

This sermon is for everybody and it's particularly for the young scouts gathered here today.

You see the title of my sermon. It is “Hearing God in Nature.” I have called it that because scouts and their leaders spend a lot of time in nature and when you are in nature I want you to know that you can hear God there. Why is that important?

For us in the church it's very important because God is the absolutely most important event in our lives. How so?

We believe that God is the ultimate goodness in the universe. The Bible tells us that God is love. God is mysterious, wonderful and awesome. God is the energy force that holds everything together. We believe that God showed us how to live by becoming a human being in Jesus. And now that Jesus is gone, God has given us the Holy Spirit to inspire us to live like Jesus. That's God in a nutshell.

We listen to God because God has awesome things to tell us. We listen by reading God's holy word, the Bible, we listen when we pray, and we listen when we walk in the woods, sit by a stream, stroll on the beach, or hike in the mountains. I listen to God in all these ways and when I am surfing.

There are many wonderful lessons told by God in nature. Remember when I said that God is ultimate goodness in the universe. Well, we hear God whenever we experience goodness in nature. We don't hear God when there's a destructive storm that kills and harms people. God is about healing and not hurting. However we see and hear God in people who help in times of trouble. It gets kind of complicated.

What was God saying to me when I encountered a family of baboon in a mountain in South Africa?

When I was in college a hundred million years ago my friend Dave and I decided to spend some day's way up in the Drakensberg Mountains which is called the “barrier of spears.” We parked our cars at about 9,000 feet and hiked

another four thousand feet to the top of the berg. We walked for about 10 miles before finding a neat site to sleep at the edge of the escarpment.

The following afternoon I had to leave Dave and return home for an important engagement. Dave wanted to stay a few days longer. It had just rained and the air was clear and bright.

We know in South Africa that monkeys come out when the sun shines during and after a rain. I set out with my pack on my back and after a few miles I turned a corner and entered a path with a ridge on my right and a verdant valley on my left and there in the valley super close to me was a family of baboons at play. There was a dad (about four feet tall), a mom (about three feet tall) and four children ranging in sizes.

They were rolling and running and having the greatest fun but as soon as they saw me, they stopped exactly where they were, and standing super still watched me as I walked about 50 yards before rounding a bend. The only movement was their eyes following me. I kept on walking pretending that I wasn't scared and when I rounded the bend I was super relieved and grateful for the experience.

What was God saying to me in this story? First, a family that plays together is a fun family. Second, there was nothing to fear. We can live peacefully with our animal friends. The baboons didn't mess with me so long as I didn't mess with them, although we need to be cautious if animals are dangerous predators. Third, what a gift to see these animals in their natural habitat enjoying life as much as we enjoy life and I thank God for giving me the pleasure of experiencing this. This happened about 40 years ago and I remember it as if it happened yesterday.

What story can you tell about being in nature? When you recall the story, can you find something that God might be telling you in the story? Make it a meditation. You'll be glad you did and the next time you are in nature think about what God might be saying to you in what you see and experience.

The writer of the gospel lesson today says no good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. He sees it by looking at good and bad trees. But then he says: "the good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it's out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks." You look at trees and you can figure out what God might be saying about human beings. It's a pretty good exercise.

I want to close with a letter written by the founder of the Scout Movement, Robert Baden-Powell. Baden-Powell spent many years in my other home, South Africa. Much of his teachings on scouting were written in South Africa.

At the 5th World Scout Jamboree in 1937, Baden-Powell gave his farewell to Scouting. In his final letter to the Scouts, he wrote:

“...I have had a most happy life and I want each one of you to have a happy life too. I believe that God put us in this jolly world to be happy and enjoy life.

“Happiness does not come from being rich, nor merely being successful in your career, nor by self-indulgence. One step towards happiness is to make yourself healthy and strong while you are a boy, so that you can be useful and so you can enjoy life when you are a man.

“Nature study will show you how full of beautiful and wonderful things God has made the world for you to enjoy.

“Be contented with what you have got and make the best of it. Look on the bright side of things instead of the gloomy one. But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people.

“Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best.

“‘Be Prepared’ in this way, to live happy and to die happy — stick to your Scout Promise always — even after you have ceased to be a boy — and God help you to do it.” (Baden-Powell, Sir Robert. “B-P’s final letter to the Scouts”. *Girl Guiding UK*. Retrieved 4 August 2007)

This is a fitting conclusion to this sermon and another fitting conclusion is for the scouts to come forward and read for us the Scout Law. I found it online with biblical passages. The biblical passages were written in one of the older versions of the Bible. For today’s reading I used a modern translation called *The Message* written by a Presbyterian pastor Eugene Peterson.

Will the scout readers come forward at this time.

The Scout Law is a guiding light to millions of boys and young adults throughout the world today. The principles of the law have been brought to us from ancient days.

No lies about your neighbor. (Exodus 20:16)

A Scout is trustworthy.

If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things. (Luke 16:10)

A Scout is loyal.

There are always going to be poor and needy people among you. So I command you: Always be generous, open purse and hands, give to your neighbors in trouble, your poor and hurting neighbors. (Deuteronomy 15:11)

A Scout is helpful.

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it...Be good friends who love deeply.

(Romans 12:9-10)

A Scout is friendly.

Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift. (Ephesians 4:29)

A Scout is courteous.

When you're kind to others, you help yourself; when you're cruel to others, you hurt yourself. (Proverbs 11:17)

A Scout is kind.

Children, do what your parents tell you. This is only right. "honor your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise attached to it, namely, "so you will live well and have long life." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

A Scout is obedient.

A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face; a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day...A miserable heart means a miserable life; a cheerful heart fills the day with song. (Proverbs 15:13 and 15)

A Scout is cheerful.

You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two. Nobody has to tell it what to do. All summer it stores up food; at harvest it stockpiles provisions. (Proverbs 6:6-8)

A Scout is thrifty.

Be strong. Take courage. Don't be intimidated. Don't give them a second thought because God, your God, is striding ahead of you. He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

A Scout is brave.

Who can climb Mount God? Who can scale the holy north-face? Only the clean-handed, only the pure-hearted... (Psalm 24:3-4)

A Scout is clean.

Love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy...and...love others as well as you love yourself. (Mark 12:30-31)

A Scout is reverent, he is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties and respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion.

Amen.