

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

**On Psalm 33**

The Psalmist says: *By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...* (33:6) Creation. It all comes back to creation when I think of the awesome power of God. The care and the love that God put into every perfect detail - all of the stars in the sky, the moon and the planets and all of the vast celestial universe!

*The word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made!* (33:6). Think of it! God spoke and it came into being!!! All matter of being was created in faithfulness by God, and God called his creation *good*.



And the Psalmist continues: *Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.* (33:8-9) And so, from the largest tree right down to the smallest virus, God created them all with a purpose. We don't always know that purpose - or see the good of it - because we are not God, but we trust that everything that was created has purpose, and that it is a *good* purpose? And if that is so, then I ask myself: What is the *good* of this virus that has killed so many people?

Can we see it as a way to show us how precious life is? Is it a metaphor for how easily life can be taken away by an invisible enemy? I wonder, how many other invisible enemies steal our lives away? For each one of us the enemy takes different forms depending on our backgrounds and our family ties, which all shape our social, psychological and political perspectives.

I am always fascinated by the way people think, and the way they express themselves particularly when they are passionate about something. Did you know that hundreds of years ago "the passions" were described in negative terms? The seven deadly sins were once referred to as "passions."

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When I think about a *passion* in this way, as a *sin*, to me it says we just need to be very careful about what we are *passionate about* to make sure that our *passion* does not become our *deadly sin*. For example: *peaceful* protests turn violent, *pro-life* people end up bombing abortion clinics or killing those who perform abortions, those who profess to be the most righteous end up in national news as having hired a male prostitute. I could go on but I hope you can see the irony - not to mention the hypocrisy - in these examples. I'm sure you can come up with your own.

I began this reflection with God, and how the scriptures, like Psalm 33, remind us of God's awesome power and ultimate providence over this created world - these created persons. The Psalmist says: *All God's work is done in faithfulness, God loves righteousness and justice, the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.* (33:5). *Let all the inhabitants stand in awe of God.* (33:8). The Psalmist goes on to say that *the Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.* (33:10). We are definitely frustrated by our lack of control over many things, but even as we accept that there are many things outside of our sphere of control, we can acknowledge the awesome power of God and trust that, in the end, things will be ok. I once had a parishioner who - in the most tumultuous days of my ministry said to me: *It will be ok, Wendy, the church will be ok.* Those were words of grace to a new and struggling pastor in her first church.

And so I remember that in the midst of a plague that struck Europe in three different waves, Julian of Norwich prayed, complained and argued with God about how things could not possibly turn out well, but God assured Julian: *All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.* Sometimes we just have to let go of trying to control things. Sometimes we have to let go of everything that we don't know, all of the frustrations we have, and trust that GOD IS in control, and that all work will out for the Glory of God.

I began this reflection by exclaiming the awesomeness of God in his perfect creation. How everything is so uniquely formed for God's purpose. We don't always know for what purpose God created certain things, or why he allows plagues and viruses to proliferate to pandemic proportions; we can only trust that within God's plan there is saving grace, and provision for humankind to move forward always seeking a closer union with God, trusting in the faithfulness and mercy of God's everlasting grace.

*All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.*

Amen

Image: LeCompte, Rowan and Irene Matz LeCompte. Beauty of Creation, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57016>

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