



On a cloudless mid-summer night when I was twelve, I was lying on the little hill in my backyard, watching the star-filled sky slowly move above me.

We had learned in school that the sun was a star, no different really from the hundreds, thousands of other stars I could see above the high pine trees. Those tiny, tiny spots of light— even the dim ones I could only see out of the corner of my eye — they were as big as, maybe even bigger than, the sun!

I knew that if I was standing on a world circling one of those stars that I could see in the sky, and if I looked in the same direction from that world, the field of stars would still continue on and on and on. I imagined myself shooting off of the earth, passing constellations, planets, supernovas, moving through the universe into new territory on the edge of what I could see with my naked eyes that night.

I closed my eyes, and tried to feel the earth spinning under me, faster and faster and faster. My fingers dug into the earth, my heels pressed down, making divots in the dirt, holding tight. I wondered how it was that I had walked on the earth every day of my life, and never noticed how *big* it all was!

My teacher had said that beyond the thin layer of breathable air around the world, in between us and the moon, in between the moon and the sun, there was... nothing. No air. Nothing to breathe, nothing to hold on to. And she said that the universe was endless, that it had no boundary, no end. Boundless, never-ending nothingness, punctuated by bursts of light and hard rotating rocks. I couldn't think about what "endless" meant either. Another word that was just too much to understand. No matter how far I went, there would always be more. How could that be? And even if there *was* an end, what would be on the other side of that boundary?

It was the first time I remember experiencing awe. We use words like awesome and awful pretty frequently without thinking about what they originally meant. Awesome: awe-inspiring. And awful: full of awe. Awe is an overwhelming feeling of admiration, reverence, even fear when faced with something much bigger, much more powerful, much more glorious than us.

Many years later, I read Psalm 19, and it made sense to me. Verses 1 through 4:  
*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world."*

"The heavens declare the glory of God."

As I lay on that grassy hillside as a child, imagining myself sliding past the smallest star I could see, the nature of the universe gave me a way of wrapping my head around the



eternality of God. A God who has no beginning and no end, who has always been and always will be.

God is revealed in our fabulous universe, from the largest to the smallest. But it is a visual reveal, not verbal. It is possible to *look* at it, and not really *see* it.

Friends of mine have a son named JJ. I've known him since he was 3, and he consistently makes me laugh every time I see him. You just never know what that kid is going to say or do. His parents and I worked in a church together, and JJ would wander in and out of our offices after school. It was a second home for him. One day, his teacher had been explaining to the class about perspective, and they had watched a 3D movie. I didn't know this. All I knew was that when JJ wandered into my office that afternoon, he had on his blue and red 3D glasses.

He didn't say a word to me. Just walked right up to my desk, staring intensely. He looked me up and down, moving his head from side to side. Then, as he walked back to the door, pronounced with great solemnity: "Nope. You're not 3D."

We can look at something, but not really see it. We can examine it, but not really understand it. We can see the pattern, but not the design.

It is possible to look at the beauty and complexity of the universe, and never understand its purpose.

In his book *The Four Loves*, CS Lewis wrote: "Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and of infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word glory a meaning for me. I still do not know where else I would have found one."

God is revealed through vision. But that is not enough. We needed more. God is also revealed through word.

The first time I read the Old Testament, it was as an English student in college. I was taking a course called "The Bible as Literature."

I was inspired by the beauty of the poetry I read in the Psalms. I loved the stories of Genesis, especially Moses and Joseph. I was deeply confused by Leviticus and bored to tears by Numbers.

Many years later, when I began my journey with God, I saw something very different, and much more powerful in our Old Testament. I wasn't looking any longer – I was *seeing*. Those Jewish scriptures tell the story of a God who created out of self-diffusive love. It is the story of the created that rebelled against God's love. It is a story of God's working within the human family, constantly reaching out and pulling us back to God's love. It is a story of wrongdoing, of consequences, of grace and forgiveness.



I realized that the Laws found in the scriptures gave structure to the daily life of the people, setting them apart as an example of how to live a God-honoring life. It told the people how to be in relationship with each other, how to treat the environment around them, what was healthy to eat, and, most importantly, how to share God's blessing with the people around them. It told them how to be in relationship with the God who created all that exists.

I fell in love with the Old Testament. I came to understand that just as God is revealed through the majesty of creation, God is also revealed in the scriptures we've been given.

God revealed through vision. God revealed through *word*.

And it was into a Jewish community formed by that word that Jesus was born. And later, after Jesus' death, it was through a strict community of Law-followers that our Apostle Paul came.

All through this summer, we've been looking at the way that Paul, the author of the Letter to the Romans, references the Book of Psalms from the Old Testament.

In our Romans reading for this week, it is chapter 10, verse 18, where we find the Psalms quotation: *"But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'"*

That is from Psalm 19: *"There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."*

Paul's argument in our section of Romans for today is summarized in verse 4 of the chapter: *"For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."*

This verse has been a tough one to translate into English, mostly because of the word that we render "the end" here: "For Christ is the end of the law."

The word in Greek is *telos*. T-e-l-o-s. *Telos* can mean termination, limit, end. But, like many of the beautiful words in Greek, it has a broader, deeper meaning. It also means goal, outcome, culmination, utmost, fulfillment.

Romans 10:4: *"For Christ is the culmination, the completion, the accomplishment – the fulfillment – of the Law."*

John 19:30: *"When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."*



It is finished. That's one word in the Greek: *tetelestai*. *Tetelestai* is the perfect tense of *teleo*, the verb form of the noun *telos*.

*Tetelestai*. It is finished. It is completed. It is accomplished. It is consummated. There are many ways that this word is translated into English.

One way it is not translated is: It is ended.

Because at that moment when Jesus breathed his last, it may have seemed as if it had all ended. But we know the end of the story. It was really just beginning. This was the goal toward which everything had been moving. *Telos*.

It is important in this contemplation of *telos* to consider how, during his ministry, Jesus answered when he was challenged to name the most important commandment in all of the Jewish scriptures. This is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 22, verses 34 through 40:

*When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

That was an incredibly bold statement! "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

You see, Jesus was telling them that the law and prophets were not an end in and of themselves. The Jewish scriptures were not *telos*. The Law was not the goal. No, the law and the prophets were meant to bring the people into right relationship with God. Loving God and loving neighbor – that is the *telos* of the law.

Jesus lived out these commandments with everything he said and did. He showed us what a *telos* life would look like. He taught with understanding, touched with compassion, challenged with power, and gave with grace. Just as the creation demonstrated God's power and majesty, just as the scriptures demonstrated God's care and guidance, Jesus' actions demonstrated God's grace and self-giving nature.

Let me say that another way. Just as God is revealed through the beauty of our universe, and just as God is revealed through the story of the Jewish scriptures, this same God is revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

God revealed through **vision**. God revealed through **word**. God revealed through **action**.



And it didn't end with Jesus. It didn't end with the disciples, or the authors of our New Testament. We – you and I – get to be a part of God's continuing action in the world. But it's our choice to participate... or not.

If we live in the way that Jesus summarized, we will be living, breathing *telos*. If we love God with everything in us – heart, soul, mind – and if we love those around us in the same way that we love ourselves, we will be living a *telos* life.

But what does that look like?

Psalm 23 is arguably the most famous of the 150 psalms in our Bible. It is read at just about every funeral I've ever attended, and many people who've never stepped foot inside a church or a synagogue know the basic structure, or enough, at least, to mumble along.

I have found myself falling on that psalm in times of trouble, and have found great comfort in the familiar words. Because Psalm 23 is, in many ways, an affirmation of faith. It is a resting on the promises of a God who will not let us down. A God who has been revealed to us in Jesus, and a God who invites us to be a part of the redemption of the world.

I would like to ask you today to consider what it would look like for us – as individuals and as a congregation – to live out the words of Psalm 23 in a *telos* life. Here's what that might look like:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

As a shepherd loves and cares for his flocks, so help us to recognize and meet the needs of those around us.

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.*

Let us give respite to those who are overwhelmed by life and offer refreshment to those thirsty for God's love, so that their faith might be renewed.

*He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

Let us faithfully follow and share God's wisdom, and allow ourselves to be guided by God's love, so that everything that we do and say would bring honor to God's name.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff — they comfort me.*

Let us have the courage and strength we need to walk together with people through the dark valleys of their lives, bringing support, accountability, and comfort.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

Let us make the conscious decision to work even with those who consider themselves to be our enemies, showering them with the same grace and forgiveness that God has so freely



given to us.

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

Let our lives be so filled with your mercy and grace and love, that we might unstintingly give of ourselves without seeking reciprocity, and that we might unconditionally offer your goodness and unfailing love in our every interaction.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

May we live this way, every day of our lives, with every breath, until together we meet our Lord face-to-face, and abide in God's presence forever.

I'm asking you today to think about, to pray about, to wrestle with this: What would your life look like if you were to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself? What actions would you take this coming week? What would people see in you? What would be different about you?

If we live our lives with the end goal in mind, that changes everything. *Telos.*