

**James 1:17-27      Psalm 24, "The Earth Is the Lord's"      October 22, 2017**  
*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

**LIVE THE VISION  
A CONFESSION THAT TRANSFORMS LIFE**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

Look at your bulletin insert, at the bottom of the page with the music printed on it. When you read the fine print, you find this information about the song we sang for the Old Testament lesson this morning: Words and Music: Graham Kendrick © 1986 Thankyou Music, admin. EMI CMG Publishing. You will also see that we are using this musical resource with permission from CCLI, which stands for Christian Copyright Licensing International. Our church's license number is 11505713.

According to their website ([www.us.ccli.com](http://www.us.ccli.com)), "CCLI began as a ministry of the church and a service to the church, in order to better educate and equip the church about copyright laws, to protect the church from the consequences of copyright infringements and to encourage greater utilization of copyrights in church services. Our charter honors and celebrates the creative works of the world's greatest songwriters, publishers, and labels. We wholeheartedly believe that they are entitled to fair and equitable compensation for their gifts of music and film. CCLI occupies a unique position in both enabling the legal use of creative content while at once establishing new channels for connecting our customers with our partners."

What's the big deal if we just make 140 copies of "The Earth Is the Lord's" to use in worship? Aside from the fact that it's illegal, it's also not the right thing to do. Graham Kendrick made his music available for believers to use in our worship of God. In return, he ought to be fairly compensated for that work, and CCLI helps that happen.

Our niece, Georgia Stitt, is a composer/lyricist, pianist, and music supervisor. She works on Broadway and in TV and film. She is also the chairperson of the Copyright Advocacy Committee of the Dramatists Guild of America which was "established for the purpose of aiding dramatists in protecting the artistic and economic integrity of their work."<sup>1</sup> I sent Georgia an e-mail on Tuesday that said, "I'm working on a sermon on Psalm 24, 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' The controlling theme of the psalm is that the Lord owns the earth because he made it. Intellectual property, etc. came to mind as I was reading the psalm. Will you send me some thoughts about the importance of ownership rights in your work/business (e.g., proper acknowledgment of work, copyright, etc.)?"

Georgia sent me links to eight different websites on the topic, with a concluding note, "I fear I may have stolen your whole afternoon. Good luck!" The issue about which Georgia is so passionate is people swapping/trading/selling her and others' copyrighted material to which they don't own the copyright (especially online). She has been actively involved with this issue for at least eight years, if not a whole lot longer,

and many other artists share her concerns. Georgia admits it was flattering at first to find out that lots of people were circulating her music, until her manager called her attention to a website that included a download of a piece of music she had never released to the public.<sup>2</sup> At the risk of simplifying a complex issue, and, at the same time, putting words into her mouth, Georgia might say, “The piece of music is Georgia Stitt’s, and all that is in it, for she has written it upon the sheet music.”

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.” (Psalm 24:1)

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. . . And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.” (Genesis 1:1-2; 2:2)

“O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95:1, 3-7)

Several years ago I was at the Little Chapel on the Boardwalk Presbyterian Church at Wrightsville Beach. I noticed an 8 x 11” piece of paper stuck to the wall on which someone had written, “There is a God, and it is not you.” That’s a rather direct way of summarizing the fundamental confession that God is sovereign, that God rules over all, that God is not only the Creator, God is also our Redeemer and our Sustainer. Psalm 24:1 proclaims that perspective on reality and life — it all belongs to God because God made it all.

If we are willing to make that confession about God, God’s creation, and our place in God’s creation, what are we supposed to do after we’ve confessed? In other words, how are we to live as people who worship and serve the one true God who owns everything there is?

I told the Wednesday morning Bible study, “If Eleanor Walker were here today, she would surely mention Jimmy Stewart in the movie *Shenandoah*.” Eleanor loved that movie! We could respond to God’s providence and sovereignty and goodness in the same way as Charlie Anderson, a Virginia farmer trying to keep his family out of the Civil War. Near the beginning of the movie, after Charlie’s wife has died, the family is gathered around the supper table, with an empty place setting for his dead wife. Charlie tells his gathered children, “Now your mother wanted all of you raised as good Christians, and I might not be able to do that thorny job as well as she could, but I can do a little something about your manners.” When they all bow their heads, Charlie prays, “Lord, we cleared this land, we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. We wouldn’t be here, we wouldn’t be eatin’, if we hadn’t done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just same anyway, Lord, for the food we’re about to eat. Amen.” In the same way, we could

respond to God's goodness and provision as Timothy Dexter, an 18<sup>th</sup> century businessman described, "An ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree eating acorns, but never looking up to see where they come from."

But God's Word and our faith show us another way. James 1:17-18 reminds us that "every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

There are three things stuck to my computer monitor in my study. From right to left: a Davidson College magnet; a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon; and a sticker from a Gideons dinner from a few years ago that says, "But be ye doers of the word" (James 1:22a). That is James' advice to all of us who confess that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. God's goodness, God's generosity, God's sovereignty, God's Kingship all call for our response.

That's why Psalm 24 is a confession that transforms life.<sup>3</sup> The psalmist asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?" In other words, what kind of people are we to be, those of us who confess that God is the owner of the world? "Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation." (Psalm 24:3-5)

Before you think that excludes you and me (because, honestly, which of us truly has "clean hands and pure hearts,") realize the psalmist is calling us to worship **and** to serve. The confession that God is sovereign and the owner of everything there is can transform our lives and shape how we live. So you see the vital connection between our worship of God and our ethics as people of faith, the vital connection between our faith and our actions, the vital connection between our thankfulness to God and, in turn, our generosity to our neighbors. In an article on Psalm 24, Rolf Jacobson point out, "If entering into God's sphere requires one to leave something at the altar, as it were, one also leaves the altar with something sacred: a blessing from the Lord . . . One does not take up my life falsely and when one leaves, one will take a blessing from the Lord . . . The blessing is bestowed not for the sake of the individual per se, but for the sake of the neighbor."<sup>4</sup>

Almost sixteen years ago, I preached a series of sermons from January 13, 2002 through March 31, 2002 on The Apostles' Creed. The first sermon was called "I Believe . . . The Good News of Creation." In my sermon, I said, "We begin our affirmation of faith in the Apostles' Creed with these words: *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.* Is that all we have to say about God? Can't we think of anything else to add about God? Why such a short statement to begin with? As someone said in Bible study on Wednesday, '*That says it all!*' We affirm our faith in God — but not just **any** God. We affirm our faith in the God who made everything there is — and we affirm our faith in the God who has been revealed through Jesus Christ."

Today's Opening Sentences reflect that vital connection between our worship and our right living — "Let the words of God's own Son, Jesus, enter our hearts and trans-

form our lives! Come, let us worship this great God of abundant mercy and love! Gracious God, let our songs, our words, and our thoughts reflect God’s healing and restoring love.” As one writer has put it, “The psalm also announces that the Lord ‘comes’ to us . . . Unless he were there for us with his blessing and righteousness, we would have nowhere to go to find help to sustain and set right our lives. Our existence depends on his creation; our blessing and righteousness depend on his coming. . . In [Jesus Christ] God comes to us and for us to bring blessing and righteousness.”<sup>5</sup>

In the weeks to come, you will hear more from the session about a new approach to giving in our church, beginning with what we’re calling “faith based budgeting.” The session is asking all of us to re-examine our financial situation and look for opportunities to move out in faith, reaching further, and digging deeper in supporting God’s work here at, and through, Wallace Presbyterian Church (I’m quoting Elder Nick Baker, chairperson of the Stewardship & Finance Ministry Team here).

Last week I mentioned reading Mark Allan Powell’s book, *Giving to God: The Bible’s Good News about Living a Generous Life*. As I read Mark’s book, I jotted down several pages of notes and thoughts and bullet points. As I have reviewed those notes a number of times, one thought in particular sticks out — “Give from your heart, not to a budget.”<sup>6</sup>

On behalf of the session, I encourage all of us to re-examine our financial situation and our contributions of time and talents in light of our confession of faith, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” How will that confession transform our lives and our ministry here at the Wallace Presbyterian Church?

***Let us pray: Lord, make us mindful of all your gifts, that we may be content and grateful, giving our love and lives to you all our days. Fill us with grateful hearts. Remind us constantly of all you have given us that we may never take for granted your love and your generosity and your goodness. Amen.***

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>[www.dramatistsguild.com](http://www.dramatistsguild.com)

<sup>2</sup>Georgia Stitt, “This Issue of Piracy,” May 2, 2009 at [www.georgiastitt.com](http://www.georgiastitt.com).

<sup>3</sup>The phrase/sermon title “A Confession That Transforms Life” is taken from a sidebar in comments about Psalm 24 in the book *Psalms* by Walter Bruegemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 129.

<sup>4</sup>Rolf Jacobson, “Commentary on Psalm 24,” November 1, 2009 at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org).

<sup>5</sup>James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 124.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Allan Powell, *Giving to God: The Bible’s Good News about Living a Generous Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006).