

## "It All Depends on Your Perspective"

Psalm 104:1-5, 24; I Corinthians 13:8-13

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

July 27, 2014 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Rev. Ronald Botts

It's July and a great time to be outdoors. The world is a lush green with the bright pastels of flowers. Days this summer have been pleasantly warm | with only occasional ones really hot. So in my sermon today I think its timely to lay out why it makes sense to go on vacation.

First of all *vacations give us a change of pace from our normal activities*. They vary our routine and move us out of the ruts we get into so easily in life. On vacation we're out of the house, out of the workplace, and away from the activities that constitute most of our time. We even take lots of pictures so we don't forget.

*Vacations also allow us to see new places and do new things*. When we look back on our life, most days simply run together; yet, our vacations almost always stand out. We note the unusual and different. Those special times are with us forever.

I can still clearly remember the boiling springs at Yellowstone, the majestic mountains of Grand Teton, the red sandstone formations in the Garden of the Gods. I can also recall the good times I had with my parents and my grandmother on that particular vacation out West. It was the only long trip the four of us ever made together. Now that was years ago, but I'll never forget it. I suspect that you have such treasured times as well.

*Vacations are times of rest and relaxation*. They're opportunities to sit in the sun with a good book and a tall drink by your hand. They're occasions to stare into space, to watch a tree blowing in the breeze, or a bird making lazy circles overhead. *Vacations allow you to recharge your inner battery* so that you're better equipped to come back to face the challenges at home or work.

*Vacations are, importantly, a time to gain some perspective*, and that's really my point this morning. One of the things I'm always struck with when we go to the beach is how far I can see from the deck of the house. We're right on the ocean. It's as if you can look out forever. That may not be literally true, but you can see as far as the horizon, as far as the curvature of the earth will allow, to a meeting of sea and sky.

Perspective, though, is more than just what our eyes can discern at a given moment. We tend to get so caught up with the things at hand that we often can't take in what's going on in the bigger picture of life. One poster assesses it accurately: "When you're up to your rear end in alligators, it's hard to remember that your original intention was to drain the swamp."

When we're so engaged with the ordinary tasks of living, it's hard to know just where we are in life. For the most part we don't seem to have the opportunity to step back long enough to get a full perspective.

To use an analogy from filmmaking, the director has three basic choices about camera placement when shooting a scene. He can chose a close-up, a medium shot, or a long shot.

The latter, the distant view, conveys the general setting and puts the actors in a context. So, perhaps, the movie opens with a couple holding hands as they stroll along the edge of a lake, a backdrop of maples in autumn reds and golds, and a deep blue sky overhead.

The medium shot places you in a more intimate relationship to the people on the screen. You feel as if you're in the same room as they are, on the same sofa with them, around the same breakfast table. The surrounding environment is still apparent, but now more limited and secondary.

The close-up takes the intimacy a step further and places you face to face with a character. Her eyes meet yours, her nose twitches, the corner of her mouth curls up as if to express a thought. Close-ups are revealing, but they can be so intense that the director has to resist overusing them.

A movie that is photographed too closely fails to convey the situation and surroundings in which the characters live and move. You're cut off from seeing what it is they're aware of. Conversely, a movie shot too distant from the actors fails to pull the audience in close enough to develop a sense of relationship and caring. The choice of angle and distance is crucial when filming.

Think for a moment about the three basic camera positions and how the Scriptures are presented. Psalm 22, for example, confronts us with the intimacy of close-up when it opens with the plaintive words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Those words echo later from the cross in the same way.

Jesus at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the dozing of his disciples, his arrest by the temple guards is more in mid-shot. We are there with Christ in the darkness of the Jerusalem countryside and witness the forces closing in around him as he prays for strength and acceptance.

Both our scriptures for today, however, are long shots. The Old Testament reading from Psalm 104 steps back from the smaller details of life to give us a broader look at creation.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariots, you ride on the wings of the wind... O Lord, how manifold are your works... you have made them all..."

It's as if the writer may have started with a single leaf, then backed up to see a limb, and then the tree, the forest, and then the entire countryside, back and back until the world can be seen as a single object of creation. It's like those pictures that came back from the first space explorations, haunting views of a blue and white and green earth floating within the blackness of space.

It reminds me, too, of the letter received by one of the characters in Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*. It is addressed to "June Crofut, Crofut Farm, Grover's Corners, Sultana County, New Hampshire, United States of America, Western Hemisphere, the Earth, the Solar System, the Universe, the Mind of God."

The writer of Psalm 104 surely sees all of creation in those expansive terms. His perspective is the broadest possible view of life. It puts us in the position of backing up just as far as we, in our imaginations, are able to go. And then it asserts in response: "O Lord, how manifold are your works! I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being."

This psalm reminds us that the world has not come forth out of a void, but has originated from divine plan. It is an intentional act which has led to the creation of everything, from the smallest to the greatest, from a single seed to the blazing sun. The psalmist asks, "How can we not praise the One who brought the worlds into being?"

Our New Testament reading today is from I Corinthians 13. We immediately think of those verses as emphasizing the qualities of love, but the passage also speaks of human limitations. It likens our comprehension to looking into a mirror with a poor surface. You can make out an image if you're at the right angle, but the details are elusive.

What we know now of the greater mysteries of life is only partial; but Paul says there will come a time for us, later, when we will understand with completeness. It's like trying to use a clear pane of glass in place of a mirror. You can make out your image if you look closely, but the details aren't clear. A day will come, however, when what is perceived so vaguely now will then be seen directly. On that day everything will become evident.

During WWII a soldier sent a letter from Guadalcanal to his father, "Write and tell me who's winning," he said. He and his buddies were caught up in the immediacy of the conflict, so he had to turn to family half a world away to give some kind of perspective. There was no satellite connection to CNN back then.

Daily living commonly presents us with a succession of immediate situations, to the extent that they can seem overwhelming. If our life were a movie, we might often feel like we're thrust into a perpetual close-up. We're so caught up with what's directly in front of us that we can't see beyond where we are. We realize this most often when we are faced by major challenges and long for the perspective needed to make important decisions.

When the alligators are snapping at your rear end, that's exactly the time for a vacation or just a drive into the country. Getting some of our perception back may come as the result of a long walk or taking personal time at home where we stay to ourselves. Sometimes going to a movie, listening to music, or reading a book will help to bring about the same results.

True friends can also help provide perspective. They assist us in seeing what we're missing and encourage us along the way. That's what a valued counselor does as well.

Finally and importantly, the gift of perspective is something that God can provide for us... if we take the time to ask and then open ourselves for what may be revealed. Most often our prayers ask God to intervene on our behalf, but perhaps we should say instead, "God, show me the way so that I can know what to do."

We need to have the long view of life to realize where we are and where we need to go. Successful living is most often the result of having the right perspective and then doing what

is obvious. It's a simple lesson, but we still need to work on it as we try to make sense of the ups and downs of life.

Vacations are not just for enjoyment, but they are also for learning about ourselves, what we really need, and how to surmount the obstacles that seem so high before us. We all need such opportunities, even if short, to stand back and gain perspective. And if you feel guilty about taking a vacation, just call it a "holy retreat" and enjoy it. Remember, after six full days of creating even God needed a day to rest!