

## September 8, 2013

*Have you ever asked yourself, sitting in church on a Sunday morning; who am I? Why am I here? These are, perhaps, the most important spiritual questions we have to ask... and discover the answers to. Our readings today point us to the fundamental conviction of believers: that God is the creator and we are God's creatures.*

### **Jeremiah 18: 1-11**

*In a time when the Israelites were entertaining the ways of pagan gods, Jeremiah the prophet is given a stern warning to communicate to the chosen people. It's a story of tough love. If the Israelites don't change their ways, there will be consequences. God's love for them does not mean they can get away with bad behavior. To help them understand, they are taken to a potter's house. The skill of the potter is set against the powerlessness of the clay. We should listen carefully to the reminder that God, like the potter, does not abandon a misshaped bowl but, rather, reshapes it lovingly into something of beauty and usefulness.*

<sup>1</sup>God told Jeremiah, <sup>2</sup>"Up on your feet! Go to the potter's house. When you get there, I'll tell you what I have to say."

<sup>3</sup>So I went to the potter's house, and sure enough, the potter was there, working away at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>Whenever the pot the potter was working on turned out badly, as sometimes happens when you are working with clay, the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot.

<sup>5</sup>Then God's Message came to me: <sup>6</sup>"Can't I do just as this potter does, people of Israel?" God's Decree! "Watch this potter. In the same way that this potter works his clay, I work on you, people of Israel. <sup>7</sup>At any moment I may decide to pull up a people or a country by the roots and get rid of them. <sup>8</sup>But if they repent of their wicked lives, I will think twice and start over with them. <sup>9</sup>At another time I might decide to plant a people or country, <sup>10</sup>but if they don't cooperate and won't listen to me, I will think again and give up on the plans I had for them.

<sup>11</sup>"So, tell the people of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem my Message: 'Danger! I'm shaping doom against you, laying plans against you. Turn back from your doomed way of life. Straighten out your lives.'

### **Psalm 139: 13-18**

*This psalm of thanksgiving tries to put into words the mystery and awe we come to know in our souls about our relationship with God.*

<sup>13</sup>Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;  
you formed me in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup>I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!  
Body and soul, I am marvelously made!  
I worship in adoration—what a creation!

<sup>15</sup>You know me inside and out,  
you know every bone in my body;  
You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,  
how I was sculpted from nothing into something.  
<sup>16</sup>Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;  
all the stages of my life were spread out before you,  
The days of my life all prepared  
before I'd even lived one day.  
<sup>17</sup>Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful!  
God, I'll never comprehend them!  
<sup>18</sup>I couldn't even begin to count them—  
any more than I could count the sand of the sea.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**

## **Sermon – “I am a creature... but not like Yoda”**

When I've done research in the past, the subject of most concern to academics, business people is “who am I?” usually posed in the context of: “who am I beyond my job?”

The late great American Theologian/ethiast Reinhold Neibuhr declared in the 1950's that “sermons should be preached with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”

This was proven once again for me on Thursday morning – having wrestled with the readings – looking off in a multitude of tangents but not finding something that grabbed me – THEN CBC radio was on – Jian Ghomeshi's show “Q”.

His guest was former NY Times science and technical writer, now Yahoo news writer, Virginia Heffernann – what has she done to merit an interview in our national pop-culture podium?

She announced in an article on July 11/13 “Why I'm a Creationist” yahoonews.com – the fallout, the outcry has been deafening!

“I have never found a more compelling story of our origins than the ones that involve God” - she wrote reflecting on science, which offers hypothesis about evolution, big bang.

She closes with: “All the while, the first five books of the bible are still hanging around. I guess I don't believe that the world was created in a few days, but what do I know?” Seems as plausible (to me) as theoretical astrophysics, and it's certainly a livelier tale. As Life of Pi author Jann Martel once put it, summarizing his page-

turner novel: "1) Life is a story 2) You can choose your story 3) A story with God is the better story."

What Virginia Heffernann discovered, to the shock and chagrin of her critics, is the same magically comforting, sustaining, joyous, trusting belief that God Created us.

We are creatures – the mysterious product of a being so powerful and loving that we are left to fumble along with metaphors to explain God.

=> like the "potter" story in Jeremiah we find it easier to talk about God as being "like" something we can actually see, touch, experience.

Virginia Heffernann has been called: "dreamy, borderline hippy" Hamilton Nolan [gawker.com](http://gawker.com) "Heffernann is simply wrong" Laura Helmuth [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com)

A more constructive criticism of her article came from Michael Schulson on [www.religiondispatches.org](http://www.religiondispatches.org)

He argued that people of faith needed to stand up to what he suggested was Heffernann's portrayal of faith as 'an attachment to stories' => he says: "Incuriosity may be a flaw in a journalist, but Heffernann's bigger sin is to speak flippantly (not humourously, or cleverly, or angrily but flippantly; with intellect but no care) about ideas that matter deeply to people."

This is the point where I thank Virginia Heffernann for crystallizing my thoughts on our scriptures today but, to warn that she and I may not be in agreement on everything!

As Jeremiah spoke in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Palestine, the psalmist in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC => I too understand myself to be a creature – the work of a marvelous, powerful, mysterious creative force.

This does not mean I reject evolution, science or technology BUT it means I have not found that my faith in my creatureliness has been destroyed / contradicted by science.

In my own personal mission statement that I nearly 20 years ago – having gone through many, many drafts, I finally found contentment with the opening "Created by God, I am called to live in relationships of love..."

Having listened to the compelling interview on Q in the morning on Thursday, the mailman arrived early in the afternoon with my latest copy of The Christian Century.

That night I read Carol Zaleski's reflection: "What is it like to be a creature?"

Faith forms identity: If I accept the religious teaching that I am a creature made by God rather than a man (or lab mouse) produced by impersonal mechanisms, it changes everything.

Yet it is fundamental to all three traditions that there is something that it is like to be a creature; that every attainment of reason,

goodness and beauty is a loan from our creator, and that human life has meaning.

This is what I believe – it is who I am – a creature of God – mystery – wonder – faith - I have no inner turmoil with science and its facts.

Andrew Brown ([www.the guardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)) sums his response to Virginia Heffernann's creation revelation with this sage conclusion.

Heffernann seems confused by what she calls "creationism." She is certainly not a young-earth creationist or someone who takes the biblical account literally. But she wants stories where people find hope and courage in the events of the world around them, and she finds them in religion, not in science.

May the God who blesses us with curious minds and believing souls keep us confident of who we are.