



A few weeks ago, someone asked me a question that I didn't think all the way through before answering: a knee-jerk response that may not be...whole-heartedly accepted by many in the geographical vicinity. So, I confess before you and the whole company of heaven that I believe I broke the 11th commandment for O-H-I-O land; because, when someone asked me which state I would like to visit, I said the one to the north of Toledo. In so doing, I'm sure I

thoroughly trampled on the dignity of every scarlet-and-gray stronghold not just here, but throughout the world.

Except, the problem is the first congregation I served with out of seminary was...well, you know where. And back home in northwest Ohio, they all thought it only served as further evidence that God did, in fact, have a most wonderful sense of humor, which was easy for them to say. The other problem is there turned out to be some pretty decent children of God up there. They read the same Bible as we did here. The same Holy Spirit was rushing through them just as much. There was the same passion for serving God and the world, the entire world that God still so loves, by the way.

But the other problem was there were some absolutely breath-taking sights up there. Now, with all due respect to the Great Lake just to the north of us here, Lake Michigan is a whole 'nother level of pristine blue. And if you headed up that coastline on the western part of the state, you would eventually come to Sleeping Bear Dunes with its majestic bluffs and forests and beachfronts. Keep going north and you would come to the bridge to get you across to their upper peninsula. Now, most people would be fascinated by that island to the east with its Grand Hotels and chocolate fudge and horse and buggy rides, but if you keep going a couple hours to the north, you'll come up on the Painted Rocks National Lakeshore.

Now, as someone who has next to zero interest whatsoever in rocks or stones or anything related to the supposed art form known as geology, even I was taken aback by the sight. But the people who are the actual experts in the field say that the various colors spring to life when the groundwater flows out of the cracks from the cliffside and trickles down the rock face. So, for those of you who have even the slightest interest: the rocks that turn to red and orange are because of the iron present in the sediments, blue and green from copper, brown and black from manganese, and white from limonite. And I only know that because I copied and pasted it from the National Park Service website, where you are invited to navigate your phones and other technological devices to for your own learning and entertainment purposes later.

However, the scientific experts also believe that these Painted Rocks date back to hundreds of millions of years, which, of course, causes a fair share of...consternation, let's say, to some children of God in the state up north as well as here in O-H-I-O land and many others more throughout the world, because some would prefer the age of the planet earth to be in the thousands of years as opposed to the millions. All well and good: everyone is entitled to their own conclusion on that front and good discussions can be had as long as we keep those actual commandments dealing with loving our neighbor as ourselves and all.

But, for me, I don't mind if the Creation has... a little more life experience than humanity. I don't mind if the Creation has its own most breath-taking story to tell: a majesty that has been shaped and molded over a length of time that is well, well beyond our understanding. I don't mind if the natural world has its own most precious portion of the Gospel to share with the rest of us. After all, whenever I hear this Palm Sunday story, with that line from Jesus, "I tell you, if [the disciples] were silent, the stones would shout," I always think of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

Because I like to think that for this week ahead with all the celebrations about to go on throughout the world: that they almost blend into a most breath-taking tapestry of marching forward into a seemingly insurmountable cliffside of sin and death; that these children of God with varying levels of interest in Bible and science and different interpretations of them and all forms of discipleship living-out in their faith journeys; but that they are all united by a hope of what lies on the other side of a Calvary hill. They're all united by a Gospel that's so overwhelming with a most beautiful grace and love that by no means could humanity on its own fully proclaim the utter depths of it all.

Yes, the Creation continues to shout in spite of all that has happened to it throughout its way-beyond-our-comprehension history: with the breath-taking beauty that is still out there to be awed over, and also providing one of the most intimate ways for us to experience the vast depth of God. So, yes, as humanity will do its fair share of celebrating this week, truly I tell you, the Creation will be doing its own shouting of hope as well: as if nothing can happen to separate us from the most captivating love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*For more information, please visit the respective page from the National Park Service:
[Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)*