

“To Revere and Adore”

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First Parish in Wayland

Music Sunday Homily

March 26 2023

Today we will hear the wonderful music of “*Missa Gaia*”—a piece that draws from the form of the traditional Christian Latin Mass but then also departs from it in creative ways. As one example of creativity, some of the “singers” are whales and seal pups, wolves and loons. In this way, the voices and instrumental sounds of human animals will mix with the wider web of living beings of which we are an interwoven part.

Tumbling throughout the lyrics of the mass are expressions of praise and adoration. In classical Christian theology, these exclamations emerge from a belief in God as Creator. As source of such wonder and beauty in nature, God becomes the focal point of gratitude.

This month at First Parish we have also been focusing on Islam as part of a year-long exploration of world religions. While today’s music is clearly rooted in the Christian tradition, Islam shares many of the same beliefs in a singular God as Creator. [As I preached](#) about earlier this month, the very word “Islam” means “to submit” to the one God, Creator of the world, of us. From this shared commitment to offer praise to God as Creator of a beautiful world, I imagine that many of the lyrics of *Missa Gaia* would resonate with a Muslim listener.

But what if we do not believe in a Creator God. Must that render *Missa Gaia* less meaningful? I do not think it has to—even for the most staunch atheist among us. For one, music, in my experience, begins first with what we hear and feel in the music. Music is its own language—one that often can connect with us in ways that the spoken word fails to do. And music is particularly adept at conveying strong emotions as well as immersing us in the felt experience of beauty. Simply by listening to, feeling, and experiencing *Missa Gaia* we too have a sense of the wonder of the world in which we dwell.

And even if you are someone who will be reading along to every word sung, the lyrics read more as poetry than scientific text. Once again the words, like the music, strain to express a sense of reverence for the beauty of this earth and gratitude for the gift of being alive amidst the wonder of it all. Yes, much of the framework uses language of God. But broadly understood, God—or Allah—is language pointing to a mystery bigger than us all. The Offertory song “Mystery” points to this in the chorus which sings:

*Oh Mystery, you are alive, I feel you all around.
You are the fire in my heart.
You are the holy sound.
You are all of life. It is to you I sing.
Oh, grant that I may feel you, always in everything.*

In this hour together, my hope is that we all lean into this mystery. May we open ourselves to revere and adore not just the beauty of the music, but also of this wondrous world to which the songs give so much praise.

Amen?! Amen!