
The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

A meditation by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The First In-person Evensong at the Cathedral of St. Philip in 18 Months

*The heavens declare the glory of God, **
And the firmament shows the handiwork of God.
*One day tells its tale to another, **
and one night imparts knowledge to another.
*Although they have no words or language, **
and their voices are not heard,
*Their sound has gone out into all lands, **
and their message to the ends of the world.
*...Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, **
Oh LORD, my strength and my redeemer. – Psalm 19: 1-4, 14.

It is one of the most dramatic inaccuracies in the movies, in one of film's most famous scenes. It is dramatic because it occurs in the opening frames of one of our all-time great movies, *Star Wars*!

It is not actually a mistake, but it is definitely inaccurate. It's the kind of inaccuracy that science fiction nerds enjoy. You will recall, of course, the movie's opening, and the words that crawl under the black, outer space scene. Then, a great starship comes in, from above our view, and we hear the sound of it swooping by.

We hear the sound of it. We hear the sound of the starship swooping by. Do we? Can one really hear in outer space? No, according to most science. Sound does not carry in a vacuum, like the vacuum in outer space. Sound actually needs matter in order to vibrate into our ears.

No matter, of course. It's a fantastic opening scene, and we need to hear those sounds. Hey, there's no way we should be able to hear any music in that scene either! There is no John Williams music playing in outer space either, but our movie experience sure needs it!

Psalm 19 tells us that, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." Yes, the heavens are telling the glory of God! But is anybody up there actually hearing what the heavens are telling? There is no sound in space. Not even by Gustav Holst.

Of course, we all realize that God is not just "up there" where we imagine heaven is. Surely, God is as much present right here as God is present miles up into space. Still, when we say, "heavens," we probably refer to the skies, space, outer space, the deep sky. Does anybody hear up there, or even down here?

We are here today, at Evensong in the Cathedral, rejoicing in the opportunity, the mere and splendid opportunity to sing, in person. We rejoice in the opportunity to hear each other again. Maybe the sound is a bit muffled. Safety still requires that we wear masks – just like they do in outer space, actually.

But we are rejoicing. We can see each other. We can hear each other.

I know that many of us have been watching, and listening to, the livestream events of the past year and half. And some of us have been able to enjoy some fine sound reproduction equipment in our own homes.

But we all know that it's not the same. Sound, and sacred sound in particular, is not the same when we are cooped up by ourselves. Sacred sound is meant to be shared. When the heavens tell the glory of God, we are supposed to be in community.

Thank you. Thank you for being with us even when we could not gather together, in the past year and half, for the benefit of sacred sound. Thank you for sharing what energy you could, via screens and Zoom meetings and mail and recordings and such. Each of your messages and sounds of support were sounds of love.

Yes, it has been eighteen months that we have lived out those verses in Psalm 19. "One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another, although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard" (Psalm 19: 3). We have lost a lot in these eighteen months, and maybe—as I said in this morning's sermon—our losses have taught us something more about ourselves and about God.

Still, however, our voices have not been heard. Our voices have not been heard in the space for which they are supposed to be heard. For, our voices, and our sung voices, are meant to be heard in community, in complex gathering, in holy community, in sacred space.

Sure, we have spoken to our own selves, and meditated in our own hearts, but something else happens when we pray, and sing, together. Something else happens. When we gather together for music and singing and community, our space becomes sacred. We hear in a different way. We hear in such a way that God is truly present.

God is present, not just in the wonders of outer space, and the heavens. But God is present in the wonders of inner space, and the heaven that we experience right here, inside this sacred Cathedral of St. Philip! With sacred sound, this place becomes truly transcendent! And, truly, the sacred sound that is produced here is glorious enough to reach into the heavens, to be heard in heaven! The heavens here, on earth, declare the glory of God!

Thank you for being here today. You and your music are what makes this place holy and sacred. Thank you for being heard in this space.

Of course, of course! Of course there is sound and music in outer space! And in inner space. Because sacred sound goes out into all the lands; sacred sound sings out wherever God's people come together in space!

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip