

## **Psalm Twenty-Nine**

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;  
worship the LORD in holy splendor.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD, over mighty waters.  
The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.  
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.  
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,  
and strips the forest bare;  
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.  
May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

When it comes to storm chasing – the practice of tracking and then approaching severe weather systems – the most obvious, and often-asked question is “*why?*” When such a storm is forecasted, we are taught that we ought to take shelter, or, if that proves insufficient, leave as quickly as we can, in the opposite direction. And so why would anyone in their right mind choose to go the other way – towards the very heart of the storm?

It is a drive that most of us do not understand. And yet, to see what they are able to see, to view their footage and photographs, is to be filled with a sense of beauty, terror and wonder, truly. Writing about storms and storm chasing in *The New Yorker*, Alan Burdick suggests that “few other things on earth still present us with a power larger than ourselves.”

We feel that pull in both directions, when we read Psalm Twenty-Nine. Here is a God of wild and unpredictable power - The Sacred Storm. God’s voice is thunder that is heard across the land (vv.3-4). God’s voice is lightning, setting fire wherever it touches the earth (v. 7). God’s voice is hurricane-force wind, snapping cedars like matchsticks (v.5) and causing the world’s foundations to shake (v.8). God’s voice twists trees and strips the ground bare of its covering (v.9). Who would dare risk their lives to stand in the presence of such a God?

Like the storm chasers, however, there is also something – something mysterious and inexplicable - that draws us in and holds us there, at the edge of it. We grab our rain gear, run to the car, and drive towards the thing. We want to see it. To feel the wind and the water on our faces. We want to be near to it, even though we know the force of it could kill us in an instant.

The Hebrew poets and prophets had language for this being pulled in two directions at once – this wanting to get both as far away from God and as close to God as one can. It is reverence in relationship to the Divine. It is to locate oneself as among the smallest of creatures in God’s vast cosmos, and yet also as one who is given strength and blessed (v.11). It is the fear of the LORD.

It is true that “few other things on earth still present us with a power larger than ourselves.” Burdick, in his article, goes on to describe how humanity has long ceased seeing creation as the arena of the supernatural, and have settled on just “natural,” when it comes to the weather.

His observation, of course, is true of life in general. And so, the psalm-writer invites us back to a view of God as One who holds the power to undo all of creation with a single word, having brought it thus into being. One who is all-mighty, full of majesty (v.4), and in whose presence we cannot help but cry “glory” (v.9). We have good reason to be cautious, then. We have good reason to call reckless those who, like amateur meteorologists, barrel headlong towards the Holy.

To be in the presence of a storm, Burdick writes, is to be left feeling “awed and merely human” once again. The psalmist is a storm chaser here, capturing and showing us glimpses of God’s greatness, wanting to leave us feeling precisely that way, as well. – NS<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For this meditation, I relied on James H. Waltner’s commentary on the Psalms, and the above-mentioned article, which can be read at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com).