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Pastoral Nature Notes
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The Son's Dogs

One day during the week of Christmas I was driving across the frozen prairies of western Minnesota. The wind was moderately up and coming out of Northwest. As it hurried along the flat landscape it was stirring the snow that had fallen the night prior, and as the broken snowflakes tumbled along the earth and up through the air, they obscured the rising sun.

The result was sun dogs created by snow. I had never seen this phenomenon before. I have seen many sun dogs on very cold days, but never one on a warmer day created by broken snowflakes driven by the wind. Sun dogs are: when seemingly two smaller suns appear on either linear side of the sun, and from them extending in halo fashion around the sun with two perpendicular rays of light bisecting the sun to meet the sun dogs. The sun dogs are created by an abundance of ice crystals in the atmosphere, either by extreme cold which freezes even atmospheric moisture or in the present case by wind driven suspended ice crystals. These ice crystals are like raindrops that act as prisms and refract the sunlight. As a result of being frozen, and the water molecules being perfectly aligned, they form a perfect ring around the sun. This ring makes all the colors of the rainbow. Sun dogs are somewhat rare and often we miss them because they appear on the coldest days of the year when we hurry though the outdoors to seek indoor warmth.

Sun dogs are a profound phenomenon that can reveal so much if we are willing to endure a few minutes of cold to contemplate their beauty. The rainbow colors caused by the refraction of the ice crystals are a winter reminder of the covenant made with Noah (Genesis 9:11-13). God promised never again to destroy all human kind with floodwaters. I wonder if His promise also includes a promise to never destroy all mankind with a massive blizzard? The only difference is, it would be frozen water droplets...? While not as colorful as rainbows- the full ring that encapsulates the sun and accompanies sun dogs is reminiscent of the vision of Daniel.

As I watched, Ancient of Days took his throne as the thrones were set up... His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool; His throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A river of fire surged forth, flowing from where he sat; Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him, and myriads upon myriads stood before him (7:9-10).

We also see Christ actually showing this glory to his Apostles before his Passion- when on Mount Tabor he was transfigured before them Mark 9:1-4. Mark points out his garments became dazzling white- whiter than any fuller on earth could bleach them! Two men appear

glorified with Jesus: Moses and Elijah. Both men had plenty of trials. Moses who suffered much in leading God's people out of Egypt. Elijah who suffered greatly at the hands of the evil King Ahab and the cold-hearted killer Queen Jezebel. He called the people to return to God from worshipping Baal. Both men persevered in faithfulness to God and appear glorified with Jesus: One on either side of him.

The Winter sun: a fiery ball called the sun/Son at the center with the white snow like his hair reflecting his grand Glory. With his throne: the cross at the center. The sun dog acts as a halo for the sun and reveals the Son's Glory which he won in the resurrection. It could be said that the promise never to flood the earth and destroy human beings is taken even higher in the sun dog where God reveals not only his promise not to destroy humankind again but his promise to glorify those who are willing to endure the cold passions and sufferings of this present life.

So often the winter landscape is barren and lifeless. The cold creates a kind of seasonal desert. Void of plant life and other life is looking to escape winter's harsh elements. The sun dogs quite literally are a natural sign of the resurrection in the midst of the frozen desert.

For many of us who live in the frigid north, we have experienced the cold and desolate nature of winter. Our lives can be like winter, they can seem cold, numb, and lifeless. Yet even the cold is not without its signs of Glory. The Son's dogs are a good reminder of his Glory and the suffering he endured so that he didn't just have to promise not to destroy us but he could promise to glorify us like he was glorified in the Glory of the Resurrection!