

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer
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What Color Are Polar Bears? **Psalm 139: 13-18**

About every ten years or so, I like to rattle your cage by asking a question: what colors are polar bears? I suppose you think the answer is white. You would be wrong! Sure, to the naked eye polar bears appear white. But what we see with the naked eye is not necessarily what is. You see, in the 1970's, when researchers were trying to count the arctic wildlife population through aerial infrared photographs, scientists were puzzled because polar bears never showed up on the infrared pictures. Just as strangely, polar bears showed up dark on ultraviolet photographs, though white objects normally reflect rather than absorb ultraviolet light. In 1978 an Army researcher solved the mystery. Polar bears hairs are not actually white, but transparent, clear. An electron microscope shows polar bears hairs to be hollow tubes without pigment. Each hair acts like a tiny fiber optic tube trapping the sun and funneling that warmth to the polar bear's body. The fur provides such efficient insulation that a polar bear's outer temperature is virtually the same as the ice -- which is why polar bears do not show up on infrared photos.

My point is this: what we see with our eyes and what actually is does not always correspond. Reality is often more wondrous and complex than we can imagine. On the table beside me are mere crackers and juice. But the naked eye cannot see everything about them. Nor, for that matter, could an electron microscope, which might reveal a number of interesting facts but would prove unable to discern these elements' meaning as seen through the eyes of faith. Only the eyes of faith can look upon these crackers and juice as expressions of the nature of the living God, symbolizing the very brokenness and bleeding, costly love of our Creator and Sustainer. Only eyes of faith can perceive such a depth of meaning.

This supper is one we hold in honor of a Friend, a Friend who has loved us in the past and will bless us in the future. Through this supper we honor a Friend's nature, recognizing that our celebration is Janus-faced, looking backward to our Lord's giving of the divine love in the past, but also looking to God's giving of grace in the future, acts of love that we cannot foresee.

The complexity and functionality of polar bear hairs suggest that our Designer is wondrous, careful and surprising. Indeed, it is said that you can uproot and transport polar bears a far distance from their home, but their homing instincts are so amazingly developed that they can travel hundreds of miles through a trackless, icy terrain to return to their origin. Our design is no less wondrous. We are designed by God for God. We are designed to hunger for food, to thirst for water -- and we are designed to search for God. We are designed in love, for love, to receive love, to give love. Indeed, the Supper is a statement not only about the nature of God, but about our human design, about how we are created. Design has given polar bears thousands of tiny fiber optic tube hairs designed for a healthy life in a cold world. Likewise, we are designed to survive a cold world through communion with our Designer and with each other.

God is in this place. God is in our midst. As we eat and as we drink this day we honor the very nature of the God who creates and infuses the world. Through this Supper we answer the call of our own divine design as we commune with God and with those around us who communicate to us the reality of grace.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer
February 5, 2006, Communion Sunday