

Sermon – June 4, 2023

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Psalm 8

How often in your life has something made you feel small? That can be in a bad way *or* a good way. Perhaps it was a bully, or a boss, or even someone in your own family who kept finding ways to grind you down, to make you feel weak, puny, insignificant, worthless. On the other hand, maybe it was the first time you stepped foot in the ocean and felt the current of a planet much vaster and older than you will ever be able to imagine. Maybe it was the sight of the Rocky Mountains, or the sound of the wind in the trees in the center of a deep green forest, or your first glimpse of the milky way on a moonless night... or a near-miss with a bull moose on the interstate. Or maybe you failed, someone else or yourself, and you just shrunk down deep inside. For good reasons and for bad, it is easy to be reminded... that the sea is so great, and your boat is so small.

That's why I've always found verses 3 and 4 of this Psalm one of the most relatable sentiments in the Bible for me: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

Who am I, in the face of all *this*? How could God even give me the time of day, when there's galaxies and subatomic particles and blue whales and interconnected root systems? In the wonder of *all* Creation, I am *insignificant*, and that is beautiful and terrifying and... terrifyingly beautiful.

And *yet*.

Because this Psalm knows... when you feel *small*, something should *remind* you just how special and valuable and beautiful and important you really *are*—and when you feel too *big*, something should remind you you're not as big as you think.

In today's readings, the psalmist recognizes that there's something *special* about us, about *you*. "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." Despite our smallness in the grand scheme of things, there's something *different* about us humans. Something God-given. Something that makes us stand out, only just a little lower than *God*. Something so special that at our birth God charged us to be *stewards* of God's creation.

"You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet," which is *huge* for what are essentially hairless apes. We *are* just animals, separated from the rest by only a few percentage points in our DNA and a few extra wrinkles in our brains. Even Genesis says that God made humans *and* beasts on the

*same* day, and yet *we* have within us the... power and the permission to exercise some kind of *control* over the world in a way that... termites and beavers could only dream of. You, each and every one of you, has the *ability* to *shape* this world... from the small to the really very big.

You can decide, *today*, to grab a shovel and *redirect* a stream, or destroy an ant colony of thousands, or plant a tree or burn down a forest or breed a new mix of puppy or fish trash out of the river. You can just *decide* to make a change in the world... and you can *do* it. For better or worse, that's *unique* in the animal kingdom. What *power* is at our fingertips, that we don't even really *think* about day-to-day? God gave that to you, and any day that you feel small, I want you to remember that God made you so so much bigger than you think.

Now *dominion* is "the power or right of governing and controlling; sovereign authority." You could look at a word like *dominion* and think, oh, that must mean we can do whatever we want, right? *We're* in charge. But we're not, really. We're still a little lower than God.

God has granted us the ability to affect the world around us in ways that nothing else but God could. But that ability and the right to exercise it still comes from God. Our choices, our actions, and the *consequences* of our actions are *answerable* to *God*, the Most High, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

Our *dominion* is not that of a tyrant or a dictator. We are God's steward, God's regent... we're middle management, Vice President at Creation Incorporated.

We *are* truly special, but we have to be careful not to get too big for our britches. Because for all the amazing things humankind has *done* since God gave us controlling interests in the company, our *pride* in our own *power* can lead us to, slowly but surely... run the whole thing into the ground.

Now "pride," there's a complicated word. Many of you might know it as one of the "seven deadly sins," though it's worth noting that "the seven deadly sins" aren't actually *found* in the *Bible*; they're a later development from within the Catholic Church. I say that because, even the Bible *itself* has a *nuanced* relationship with the concept of pride.

Pride when you're big and powerful... *is* bad, it's narcissistic and dangerous to others and judged harshly by God. But pride when you're *small*... can keep you *alive*. Again and again, we see Christ himself demanding *humility* for the *proud*, and yet he would *bolster* the pride and self-worth of the *lowly*.

Many celebrate the month of June as Pride Month, a *celebration* of the *resilience* of LGBTQ people in the face of historical and ongoing oppression and violence. And, this time

of year, I hear some Christians *demonizing* those celebrations because “pride is a sin.” And sure, if Pride Month were celebrating the pride of *dictators* or oligarchs or trillionaires, I’d say yeah, *maybe* you can stand to let the wind out of your ego just a little bit—like, we *get* it, you’re *powerful*. No need to brag about it.

But *gay* pride, *trans* pride? Taking pride in who God *made* you underneath, and the simple fact of *survival* against the odds... pride when you are power-*less*, when it’s maybe the only thing that’s keeping some people from ending their own lives... *that* kind of pride is not a sin. I might even call that pride *holy*.

There is so much about *you*—who you are, and things you’ve done—that God is proud of. *You* have so much to be proud of, not the least of which is that you are beautifully and wonderfully made. Psalm 8 is a *reminder* to us when we feel *small*... to hold our heads up high. And, conversely... when our *power* makes us feel too *big*, God *constantly* reminds us to *humble* ourselves. It’s always the proud *rulers* in the Bible—even the ones working for God—who are torn down from their thrones. It’s always those who are too full of themselves that God teaches a lesson. And... there’s one *big* example of the “humility of the powerful” that we as Christians should be particularly aware of.

Humans are made in *God’s* image—we share in God’s creative spark, self-awareness, free will, and the potential to do great things.

And then, two-thousand years ago, God walked among us in *our* image, in the person of Jesus. And not as the highest, most powerful *example* of a human, either. The Divine did not come to us as an emperor or a billionaire or a successful televangelist or a CEO or a great general or a slaveowner. Jesus was born a humble baby in a donkey’s food-trough, the son of an unwed teenage girl and a simple carpenter; and he would be put to death by the Roman Empire before he could *ever* amass anything *approaching* what we would call “power.”

There’s something beautiful in that cycle. God made us in *God’s* image, great and powerful... and then God walked among us in *our* image, small and humble. That meeting point, that place where we live: “a little lower than God.”

Never let anyone make you feel like *dirt*, because God *made* you to be so much more, and God *loves* you for all that is special within you. *And* never let yourself grow too *large* in your eyes, so large that you look *down* on those around you, and your self-importance starts to eclipse the sun. *No* one gets anywhere in this life on their own. We all stand on the shoulders of giants, and we are there but for the grace of God.

All that makes you special comes—in the end—from God, and it *is* worth celebrating. *And* you were made *just* as special, no more and no less, as any other human being that has

ever lived, from paupers to princes. Let that knowledge keep your head held high, keep you *alive*, and spur you to greater things... but do not let it cause you to demean others, oppress others, to cheat others or deprive others. *That* kind of pride goeth before a fall.

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” When you feel small, those words should remind you how big you *are*—and when you feel too *big*, they should remind you that you’re not as big as you think.

Thanks be to God. Amen.