Sermon for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost/Wildfire Recognition Sunday

September 5, 2021

Psalm 8

When I was young, my grandmother told me that I could find the answers to life’s questions in the Bible. How do we know God loves us? We read the third chapter of John. How do we know God cares about us? We read the 4th chapter of Deuteronomy, where we hear that God gives us words to live by — the Ten Commandments — that are fair and just and designed to create a community where all people can thrive. And we read Psalm 139, which tells us we are lovingly and wonderfully created by a God who knows us better than we can ever know ourselves.

The psalmist tackles another big question in our Psalm today: What are we humans that God bothers to take notice of us? That God bothers to pay attention to us?

When we look at creation — the vastness of the universe, the ocean depths, the brilliance of the design of every living thing from an ant to a redwood tree to a star — this should be the question on every tongue:

What makes us important *at all* to God?

What is it about humans that leads God to declare love of the world to such an extent that God sent God’s only Son so that *we humans* might know God’s love and receive the gift of salvation and eternal life with our Creator?

And who are we that the God who created all that has ever existed or will ever exist would bother to give *us* dominion over that creation?

Asking these questions ought to be an exercise in humility for us. When we pay attention to creation, when we ponder our own place in the universe and our role in God’s creation, it *ought* to give us pause. There are estimates that the observable universe is at least 93 billion light years in size, and the entire universe even greater than that. And, since most of us don’t remember how big a light year is…it’s nearly 6 trillion miles long.

The universe is unimaginably, unfathomably, large. And we occupy space on a planet in the midst of all that.

In the grand scheme of the universe, we’re pretty insignificant.

But in God’s eyes, we’re not.

Because the God who created the universe and everything in it, set the stars in the heavens and created a planet that has *exactly* what we need to live….created us in His image.

And God created us as beings capable of faith.

As beings capable of placing our trust in a deity we cannot see.

As beings capable of wisdom and discernment.

As beings capable of creating, capable of joining in the work that God is doing to bring creation into fulfillment.

As beings capable of praising the God who created us and all that has or ever will exist.

But. We are also capable of destruction. At least 200,000 acres in Oregon burned last year in fires started by people.

The God who created all that is by speaking created us as beings who can destroy not just with fire, but with the words we speak. Beings who can carelessly — and intentionally — destroy the creation we were given dominion over.

We need to unpack that word.

*Dominion*.

Because how we understand that word goes a long way to how we understand what our role in God’s creation is.

The Hebrew word is *mashal* (maw-shal). It means to rule over someone. And it’s usually used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to a king ruling over a people.

But before we head down the path of thinking that God giving us dominion over creation means we *rule* creation, we need to consider the Biblical model of leadership.

God is clear throughout Scripture that the first, the highest loyalty of a king should be to God. Time and again, we hear of kings who did not follow God’s teachings, and their people suffered.

The model we’re offered for leadership in the Bible is that of a shepherd. One who cares about those whom they are tasked to lead. One who provides a place for them to live that is safe and peaceful. One who treats all people with equity and justice. One who ensures that those who are vulnerable, those who are unable to care for themselves, have what they need to live. In short, one who creates conditions conducive to creation’s flourishing.

It is clear that the biblical model of *dominion* is not ruling as a tyrant, but leading as a shepherd.

By God’s infinite wisdom, we have been invited into a biblical role of dominion over God’s creation.

Creation does not exist for the sole purpose of our comfortable lives.

Creation does not exist so that we can use what we want, do what we want, without consideration of the future, without consideration of the impact of our actions on others — particularly those who are vulnerable, those whose voice is not easily heard.

Weare a *part* of creation. Endowed with gifts from our Creator so that we can join in God’s work of creating.

“We need the humility to know ourselves as creatures within creation, not gods over creation. The humility of knowing that only God is God.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We humans, created in the image of God, are to act as God’s representatives here on earth. God has given us the honor of representing God by caring for what God has created.

And we are called to praise the God who created us with every word we say, in everything we do, with every fiber of our being.

My long-suffering husband does most of the cooking in our home. Now and then, I’ll do something to help — stir a pot, help prepare ingredients. We joke that that means I get to say I helped. But we know who did the heavy lifting.

God’s doing the heavy lifting of creation, but we are invited to take part and, unlike my usual efforts in the kitchen, we’re invited to take part in a meaningful way.

We, whom God loves so much to send God’s only Son, not so the world would be condemned, but so that we might know eternal life with our Creator…*we* are given the job of taking part in the creation process. We, whom God has offered salvation and forgiveness of our sins, out of sheer love for what God has created…*we* are called to share the Good News of God’s love and mercy, to live our lives in praise of God, and to serve our God by caring for God’s creation.

May God bless our efforts, big and small, and may God bless us and all of God’s good creation, now and always.

1. Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology”* 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)