

“Who Are We to God?”

Genesis 1: 26-31, Psalm 8, Matthew 21:1-16

South Highland Presbyterian Church, June 26, 2011

Unlike Ed and Jim, I am a pastor known more by my spiritual side in lieu of my theological side. This doesn't come as a shock to anyone but what does surprise people is to find out that in seminary I was somewhat of a Hebrew scholar—who would have thought. I think it was that whole Hebrew requires you to read backward—apparently a natural for me. I loved Hebrew and actually took four semesters of Hebrew. My fourth semester of Hebrew was the study of the Psalms entitled “Hebrew Poetry”. We studied different Psalms from the original Hebrew and it awakened in me a passion for certain Psalms. As we were reading Psalm 8 last week, I knew that I wanted to share this Psalm with you in hopes of awakening this passion for some of you. Hear this reading of God's word.

Psalm 8—the only Psalm of the 150 Psalms that is directly addressed to God. The Psalmist speaks directly to God because only with direct address can he celebrate not only the glory of God but also the God given glory of human beings. *“O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”*

Now if you were going to directly address God, as we all do and should do every day, how would you begin? Our Psalmist begins by calling

God by his proper name Yahweh, or in English, “LORD”. There were many gods present at the time this Psalm was written but Yahweh is the term applied to the personal God of the Hebrews. It was not a name common to all tongues and religions, and was and is still not a name which may be translated from one language to another. It is the same as trying to translate a proper name from one language to another, there is no substitute. Matter of fact, the actual word Yahweh was so sacred to the Hebrews that when it appeared in a Hebrew scroll, the priest was not allowed to even say the word. The word was simply too sacred.

There are many Hebrew words for God in the Bible but Yahweh or LORD in the English was the intimate term used by the Hebrews for their God. You can always tell in the English when Lord is actually a translation of the word Yahweh because the English will always have Lord in all caps. Whenever you see LORD in all caps in your Bible you will know that it refers to Yahweh the personal and intimate name for God in Hebrew.

The first time this word appears in the Hebrew in the Bible is in Exodus. This word is used in the Hebrew text for the first time when God reveals himself to Moses at the burning bush. God gives this name to Moses to be used. It is sort of like when you form a friendship and you say just call me Susan. God gave to Moses a personal name, the name of Yahweh.

The Psalmist now does something very strange, he tries to further describe and glorify God by contrasting him between babes and infants and the enemy and the avenger.

***“O LORD our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.***

Enemies immediately symbolize for us human strength while babies on the other hand, symbolize human weakness and humility. But these babes have strength greater than that of God’s enemies. They have a strength greater than that of God’s enemies. They have a greater strength when they take the name of God on their lips. That is, in speaking the name, they acknowledge and in some sense understand the majesty and revelation of God, which is implicit in that name. With the name of Yahweh on their lips they are indestructible. Our Psalmist is telling us that God can and may utilize the weak of this world, even the child to carry out his purpose.

One evening a little girl went to her father with a troubled heart, and quivering lip, and said “Papa, is God dead?” He was a Christian man, but had grown cold in his Christian life. One evidence of this was the family prayers in which at one time he had been faithful but had now been omitted

entirely. When the troubled face looked up into his with the strange question, he was surprised, and said, “Why no dear, why do you ask such a question?” “Because you never talk to Him any more the way you used to do.” The startling result was the father recommitted himself to a life centered in God. All any person needs, even a child, is the name of God, Yahweh on their lips.

In our New Testament passage today, children are shouting to Jesus, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The chief priests and scribes criticized Jesus for this apparent acceptance of the behavior of the children shouting. The authorities were indignant and expected Jesus to calm this juvenile chorus. But he responded by quoting Psalm 8:2, “*Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have brought forth perfect praise.*” In his rebuke to the authorities, he brought out the contrast in this Psalm: the children take the name upon their lips but the authorities are indignant and complain—in effect, they are the foe and the avengers of the psalm. But, as in the Psalm, it is the children who have the truer perception, not the arrogant enemies.

The Psalmist continues this praise of God in verse 3 and 4:

*“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?”*

The great thing about being a pastor is that you don't have to study math or science. You know the numbers three, seven, and forty and you have it made. So avoiding any scientific jargon, as a human, when I stand on the ground and look up at the heavens, it is overwhelming to me. It simply does not end, the heavens go on forever in any direction and it is indeed beautiful. As a human, to look up at the heavens I am simply overwhelmed.

Someone who enjoys science and math more than I do came up with this trivia information. Someone has figured out that if it cost one cent to ride a thousand miles, a trip around the world could cost 25 cents, to the moon \$2.35 cents, to the sun only \$930 but a trip to the nearest star would cost \$265,000,000 (million)! Indeed, the heavens do declare the glory of our God. The cosmos is so huge that we cannot comprehend it. However, this body as enormous as it is was created by the tip of God's finger. Compared to God the heavens are nothing.

The Psalmist has set this stage for us. Here is God pointing a finger and creating the heavens. In comparison to God's finger, the heavens are nothing to God. In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but here are we looking into the vastness of the heavens and compared to this we are nothing. The

spontaneous reaction of any being as it was for our psalmist—as it was for me in studying this Psalm so many years ago—is to ask the question at this point, “What are tiny humans to God?”

***“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?”***

The question of verse 4 is phrased in such a manner that it evokes from the person without revelation this answer, “Nothing!” In such vastness, it is inconceivable that human beings have significance or meaning. It is inconceivable that God could remember each human being or give attention to each person. From an objective perspective, human beings are but the tiniest fragments in a giant universe; it is not believable, that we could have significance or a central position in that universe. Yet our Psalmist tells us differently.

***“Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”***

We have been created just a little lower than God and God has crowned each one of us with glory and honor. We are just a little less than God and mastery over the rest of God's creation has been given to us. That makes us the crowning act of his creation in this world.

The Psalmist goes into some detail to emphasize our importance to God. God's role for us is that of master over all living things. Human mastery is to extend over all created things, but it is specifically living creatures that are singled out in verse 8 and 9. Both domestic and untamed creatures are all beneath human mastery, and both fish and birds will be set beneath our dominion.

Our Psalm now concludes with the same words as it started only now the words have deeper meaning and significance. ***“O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”***

We conclude with the praise of God's name for it is the name that has revealed to us the transformation from being that little insignificant creature marveling at the heavens, to being created in the image of God. And not only that but being created a little less than God. And our being created a little less than God does not apply just to humans universal but to every individual human being of the face of this earth. There is not a person in this

sanctuary that is not significant to God no matter how unimportant we feel. God made us in God's image and made us just little less than God himself and there is nothing anybody can say or do that is going to change this remarkable revelation.

As sinful as we may be, there is a divine spark in each and every one of us and no matter how big the obstacles in this world may be and no matter how hard it may be to face each day, and no matter what anyone else may say, as long as we carry the name of God on our lips, we will overcome all that we must face. What a wonderful revelation. And with this revelation like the Psalmist how can we help but shout and sing the great name of God.

***“O LORD our God—Lord, our sovereign
How majestic is thy name in all the earth.”***

In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Ice Cream Social this Wednesday

Special Sunday School classes beginning Sunday the 10th. These are short term six week classes and will lead up to Rally Day the last Sunday in August.

Sympathy:

Jim Truesdell—death of his father

The Seadler family in the loss of Bill Seadler

Congratulations to all the grandbabies and great grandbabies that have been born in the last few weeks.

Our flowers today are in memory of Molton Williams by Hope Williams and her family and our radio broadcast is in thanksgiving to the life of Glenn H. Davis Sr. by Chris and Glenn Davis.

Our Book of Order states and I quote, “After the session has received them as active members they shall be presented to the congregation during a service of public worship. In that service the church shall confirm them in their baptismal identity. They shall reaffirm the vows taken at Baptism and so we ask these questions:

Do you profess your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If so say I do.

Do you renounce evil and affirm your reliance on God’s grace? If so say I do.

Do you declare your intention to participate actively and responsibly in the worship and mission of South Highland Presbyterian Church? If so say I do.

It thrills me to be able to say, welcome to South Highland Presbyterian Church.

As these new members have reaffirmed their Baptism vows, let us as the body of Christ confess what we believe...

It thrills me to be able to say for the first time for me, “welcome to South Highland Presbyterian Church.”

Let us pray: We give you thanks dear Lord for these brothers and sisters in Christ who have joined us this day. May we remember to love and pray for them as they will love and pray for us. In the name of your son we do pray, Amen.