

PSALM 8

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.

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. 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.

O Lord, our sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

ROMANS 12:9-20

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love
one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.
Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be
patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the

saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ECLIPSE

Psalm 8 Romans 12:9-20

The hunger this nation feels for a sense of unity and peace was exhibited in the recent eclipse. When was the last time CNN, Fox News,

NBC, ABC News were all on the same page and heralding a singular event with a singular message? There were no divisions or screaming matches. It was all so wonderful. And the glow actually lasted for the rest of the day as we smiled and shared our good feelings about what we had experienced. By the next day, of course, everything went back to normal and like a bunch of cats we began hissing and clawing at each other's throats.

And so here we are living in a country in which the rifts between us grow deeper, wider and more defined each week and in a world where other countries too are wobbling on the balance beam between stability and chaos, peace and war. What is it that can possibly unite us? And what role does our faith ask each of us to play in the endeavor to spread the peace which Christ offers?

Let's go back to the eclipse for a moment. Precisely what was it that made everyone put aside their differences in spite of their political, racial and cultural divisions and come together to stand in awe? By definition, an eclipse occurs when something obscures either the brightness or the importance of something else by comparison. So, when the moon's shadow got between the earth and the sun, which is 4000 times larger than the moon, it was temporarily eclipsed. That means the sun's importance

was momentarily suspended, obscured by the moon which has much less impact upon our planet.

From another angle, think of it this way. What got emotionally obscured during the eclipse for us humans was our self-importance. It was the awe in something so much greater than ourselves that united us. We saw in motion the majesty and vastness of the universe before our very eyes and understood on a very deep level just how small and insignificant we really are in the grand scheme of things. Our egos were relegated to sideline status.

And our egos are the main problem here, are they not? If we did not see ourselves as so righteous, so important, so utterly correct about all of our points of view and our standards of behavior and our purely arbitrary belief systems, how many divisions would we actually have? The awe put us in our place and gave us a needed sense of humility.

That humility is expressed in our lesson from Psalm 8 this morning:
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?

Humility changes our perspective. Once you get your ego out of the way, it is amazing how different the world appears. As it was about to

depart the solar system in 1990, the Voyager spacecraft adjusted its cameras for a final backward glance at the earth. It was just a tiny pixel of light, a pale blue dot in an otherwise sea of emptiness. Renowned astronomer Carl Sagan put it this way: *We are on a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena...We live on a hunk of rock...that circles a humdrum star that is one of 400 billion...that make up the Milky Way galaxy...one of billions of other galaxies. That is a perspective on human life and our culture that's well worth pondering.*

But does that mean we have no worth, no more significance than a moth flying around our porch light on a summer night? I suppose the answer is both yes and no. Yes, we are a miniscule part of the universe and we should not forget it lest our heads grow large and we consider ourselves to be more magnificent than we are. Arrogance will ultimately lead to our destruction. But no, for God's own reasons, our faith teaches us that we were created *a little lower than God and crowned with glory and honor.* So saith the Psalmist.

But what are the implications of this? Are there responsibilities that accompany that crowning? This is where we get snagged. While the Psalmist also tells us that we have been given dominion over all the works of God's hands, we have too often interpreted that to mean we can exploit

and plunder them for our own needs. I interpret that to mean just the opposite—that we are to be mindful stewards of all the earth's resources.

And what is the most precious resource of all? Each other. The Psalmist in no way suggests that white people have been crowned with glory and given dominion over others or that any particular race, culture, nationality or gender is superior or inferior to the rest of humanity. *You have made **them** a little lower than God...* **Them**, my friends, is inclusive!

Paul jumps right in and tackles the chronic problem of discrimination and the violence to which it leads that was plaguing world cultures in his day and continues to do so in disturbing fashion in our own. *Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.* There it is, the sense of humility. It is actually a great irony because once we understand that God has crowned us with glory, our self-importance is eclipsed by the awesomeness of that factor.

Why is this so difficult to grasp? And don't we imperil ourselves by our failure to get it? Continuing on with Sagan's commentary: *Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner...Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory*

and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot...There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world...It underscores our responsibility...to preserve and cherish this pale blue dot.

Yes, we are crowned with glory. Yes, we have been given dominion over this obscure planet which is indescribably beautiful and designed to sustain us all in abundance. And, yes, there are people who willfully desecrate it in the name of higher profits and stock prices. And, yes, there are members of hate groups who wish to elevate themselves by whatever means they deem necessary over others they consider inferior.

And there we are on the cusp of our response to all of this. Paul puts it right in our laps where it belongs: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.* And then he shows he completely understands how difficult this is when he says, ***If it is possible...that's a mighty big If, isn't it? Live peaceably with all.***

These are the challenges we face. Does not love always eclipse evil? Does not love diminish the hatred and provocation of those who violate the sanctity of others? There is strength in numbers. We cannot do it alone. As individuals, we are eclipsed by the Community. We are part of something much bigger than ourselves. So let us join with millions

of others to grow in our love and our resolve to stand fast in the Spirit of Christ.

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