

March 20, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

Psalms: Honest to God
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Psalm 8

New Revised Standard Version

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!

So, I have a secret. I love to sing, but I'm not the best at getting all of the words right to songs. I often sing the wrong words, but I don't mean to. There is a small select group of songs that I know all of the words to. Songs like Kokomo by the Beach Boys, If I Had a Hammer by Peter, Paul, and Mary, or many songs that I sang in youth group. One of the songs that I love to sing, usually in the car, is an old youth group song, "Our God is an awesome God. God reigns from heaven above. With wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God." I always think of that song when I read Psalm 8.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of praise. I wonder how you show God thanks and praise? Famous musician Johann Sebastian Bach said, "All music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul's refreshment". Bach put "J. J.," at the top of all of his compositions. The initials for the Latin words, "Jesus Juva" which means "Jesus help me." Bach ended his compositions "S.D.G.," the initials for the Latin words, "Soli Dei Gratia" which means "To God alone be the glory." Bach took the time to praise God on each composition. How do we make time each day to praise God?

Praise is something that we all want. I love the story of the little boy playing darts with his father. The little said, "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say, 'Wonderful!'" Praising God is something that we do with our whole being and at all times. In 1 Thessalonians Paul says "in everything give thanks." (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). The first Methodist, John Wesley, was about twenty-one years old when he went to Oxford University. He was speaking with a porter and he discovered that the porter had only one coat and didn't have a bed. The porter told John Wesley, "I thank God that God has given me my life and being, a heart to love God, and above all a constant desire to serve God." Many years later when John Wesley was on his deathbed at the age of eighty-eight, he began singing the hymn, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath." "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath; and when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall ne'er be past while life and thought and being last, or immortality endures." Can we praise God for the life we are given? Can we abandon our resentments and expectations to praise God for what we have?

Psalm 8 tells us that when we look to the skies, God is there. When babies open their mouths, they cry the name of God. We gaze into the starry night, with God's glory splashed across the skies, and we wonder who am I? Why do I matter? What are human beings that God is mindful of them, mortals that God cares for them? We bear the image of God; we are not God. The Psalms tell us that human beings are like a breath, that our days are like a passing shadow (Psalm 144). We are less than specks of dust in God's universe. We have existed less than a second in the great clock of creation, yet God chooses us as God's partners. God trusts us to look after the earth, on God's behalf.

Psalm 8 reminds us of the smallness of humans in the grandeur of the cosmos. But humans have given God-dignity and power, with the earth as our charge. We are fragile but also so powerful. We have God-given authority and responsibility to order and care for God's world, but it is a gift and we are accountable to God for how we care for the earth. Psalm 8 tells us to use our power with humility and dependence on God the Creator.

We are in the season of Lent as we journey with Jesus towards the cross. As Christians we believe that Jesus took the form of humanity as a servant, humbling himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Jesus teaches us how to rule by serving, by helping, by obedience. The Latin origin of the word *obey* is *to listen to*. How can we listen to what Jesus is telling us today about caring for one another and caring for our world? We think that we have power when we are in charge, but Jesus flips power on its head. Jesus shows us that we have power through serving others. I love the hymn, *Jesu Jesu*, "Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you. Kneels at the feet of his friends, silently washes their feet, Master who acts as a slave to them. Loving puts us on our knees, silently washing their feet, this is the way we should live with you."

Reinhold Niebuhr gave us what we call the Serenity Prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." What is yours to influence? The weather has been so nice lately that I have been sitting on my back patio as much as possible. My dog Lily loves to come outside with me, for about five minutes. Then, she is ready to go back inside. So, I let her inside, and when she realizes that I am not coming inside with her, she wants to come back outside. If I want Lily to stay with me outside, I have to pay attention to her. I can't make Lily the dog do what I want her to do. As an aside, that may be a commentary on my dog parenting skills. But, Lily teaches me to embrace what is mine to influence. The world around us is there and we are called to pay attention to it and to care for it.

To be human is to stand with our fellow creatures and to be responsible for them, and we must take that responsibility with the utmost seriousness. We depend on creation for our well-being. I love to read Young Adult novels because they are always exciting. They are usually dystopian, meaning that there is great suffering or injustice in the described future because of the way that we treat God's creation right now. Caring for God's creation can't mean that we place ourselves over and against the creation. Psalm 8 is addressed to God "O Lord, our Sovereign". When someone professes their faith and joins this church, we ask them, "Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?" God is a Lord and Sovereign who is a servant of creation because God provides for us, God desires our good, and God enables us to seek that good. Our faith calls us to love God, to love people, and to love the planet. What can we do today to love God, to love people, and to love the planet? How can we use our influence to make a difference in this our world? Amen.