

## LOVE SONG TO ALL GOD HAS CREATED

Psalm 8

Kelly Boyte Brill  
Avon Lake UCC  
7 June 2020  
(online worship only)

I chose this scripture, Psalm 8, as today's reading over a week ago. It is the suggested Psalm reading for this day in the lectionary. Right after I selected it, Jim Kotora surprised me with another recording, and I was delighted that it was a song that fit right in with today's scripture. I asked Kim and Linda to read this passage, which praises all that God has created, from their boat on Lake Erie. Today's service began to come together in my mind.

But then, one news story after another. I read article after article. I answered phone calls and emails from parishioners who wanted to talk and reflect about the events in our nation. I heard from members of our church family who attended protests. I heard from members of our church family who are police officers, and I heard from their loved ones.

Every day I spent time thinking and praying, "What is the appropriate response to this week's news from our church?" Should I change topics? Should I find another scripture? And I found myself going back to the words of Psalm 8 and its profound question, "What are human beings?"

What is our purpose? Or as one version puts it, “What is this thing called a human?”

Psalm 8 begins by praising God for the wonders of God’s creation, and then praises God for the particular wonder of the creation of human beings and human **consciousness**. And the psalm specifically raises the question, “**Why did God create us?**”

Out of the billions of creatures in the universe, we are bold to claim that God knows our names. We make this bold claim that we are children of God, not because of who we are or what we have done but because of who God is and what God has done as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. This claim is both a wondrous discovery and, at times, a frightening awareness.

This self-awareness and the ability to transcend ourselves leads to powerful experiences like the joy of love, the thrill of music, the adventures of learning and travel. But human consciousness brings with it pain as well. We are not the only creatures who grieve, but we are, as far as we know, the only creatures who are aware of our own mortality. And we are, as far as we know, the only creatures who ask ourselves, “Who am I? Why do I exist? What is the purpose of my life?”

Psalm 8 doesn't only ask the questions; it also provides an answer. God gives us work to do; work that will bring into our lives a sense of meaning and purpose. Our job is to take care of everything else that God has created, and our job is to take care of each other. We are given a special responsibility to be in the world as God's servants, precisely to serve as **caretakers, not owners**, of the world around us.

It's a beautiful psalm, a beautiful hymn of praise for all that God has created - a wonderful world - it causes us to think of our favorite places in nature. We remember times when we have seen a brilliant night sky, unspoiled by light pollution, a sky ablaze with stars and the breathtaking smudge of the Milky Way. This psalm is a love song to the gifts of creation - birds in the sky, fish of the ocean. And **we**, out of all that has been created - **we** are given the incredible gift of helping to care for it all. We have the privilege of being born with enough understanding to see the wonders of creation and tend to each living thing.

So what went wrong? It's a perfect plan, a magnificent plan. Why are things so wrong?

The problem is right here in the psalm. In the **words** that are used and misused. Our language matters; it makes all the difference. Oh, most of the words of this psalm are gorgeous, but there are a few phrases that

can be so easily twisted to fit the needs of the human ego. I wince when I read them, knowing what I know. Once your eyes have been opened to the results of human sinfulness, once we know words like “climate change” and “slavery”, we see the problem. Once you study the Holocaust, or see a melting ice cap, you don’t forget the problem. We’ve taken a few words and defined them to mean what we’ve wanted them to mean. Verse 5 says, “God, you made humans only slightly less than divine.” And it’s followed by verse 6, “You’ve let them rule over your handiwork, putting everything under their feet.” Another version of the Bible translates it this way, “You’ve given them **dominion**.”

Oh, how we have taken that concept and run with it, and we’ve run far, far away from what was intended. It’s like we went to the thesaurus and exchanged “domination” for dominion and we have acted like the whole world is under our control. Instead of lovingly caring for the earth, we’ve treated it like our private property, to be exploited for our own pleasures and comforts. Instead of seeing one another as brothers and sisters, each of us given the enormous privilege of being called children of God, we have used and abused each other.

It’s crystal clear what the psalmist meant. The word “dominion” is also used in another psalm, a psalm that describes the job of being a king.

Psalm 72 says that the purpose of royal dominion is to "**defend the cause of the poor**" and to bring "**abundance**", "**righteousness**", and "**peace**" to all.

The writer of Psalm 8 knows that dominion is entrusted as a **sacred responsibility to be stewarded wisely, NOT as a *privilege* to be exploited for personal gain.**

You see, Psalm 8 is not just a hymn of praise, it is a passage of scripture that tells us how much God loves us. God loves us so much that God gives us the most meaningful work of all to do. It is an honor to be given a job of great responsibility. What more meaningful way is there to communicate that someone matters than to tell them, "You matter because what you do in life matters." God calls human beings to participate in God's work of ordering, shaping, stewarding, and caring for life on the planet earth.

AND God calls us to serve as thoughtful champions for - and neighbors of - all others whom God has also called. Every other human being.

Of the many news stories I heard and read last week, this is one that sticks with me. An interview with a Georgia police officer named Patrick Skinner. Skinner entered the police force after a career in the CIA where

he was involved in the war on terror. Skinner believes that words matter; that they make all the difference. He is opposed to using the language of war to describe policing. He doesn't think police should call citizens "civilians" as some do. He said to the reporter, "We're not in a war. We are neighbors." He always calls the citizens with whom he comes into contact his neighbors. Not because he's soft or naive, but because he is reframing his work and his relationships. He is finding commonality instead of dividing into sides.

Friends, our world is breaking apart. This world, which God asks us to care for, is crying out. Sometimes the wound appears as a fire in the Amazon rain forest. Sometimes the wound appears as rage in the eyes of someone who is tired of being treated as if her life does not matter.

We are being sent to bandage up the wounds, and THEN to figure out what we can do to prevent the next fire, the next indignity, the next injustice. We are being called to do the work of neighborly love, the very job God asked us to do in the first place, before we mistook dominion for domination.

Mother Teresa said that all of the problems in the world can be understood by this: we've "forgotten that we belong to each other."

The answer is what the answer always is. The answer is love. Are we not being called to hold this world as gently and tenderly as we would if God placed in our arms a newborn baby? Are we not being called to look each of our brothers and sisters in the eye and see in them the potential we would see in our own children and grandchildren? Are we not being called to listen to one another's stories, to truly try to understand what life is like for people born into different circumstances than we were?

Doug and I have relatives in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania area with whom we're very close. His first cousin Ed is like a brother to him. Ed and Bev have three daughters who all still live in the area. We've spent many wonderful times with them, summer visits and Thanksgiving holidays - and last year we traveled to Israel and Jordan with Ed and Bev. Their middle daughter Morgan just had her third daughter last week. She reflected on what it was like to have a child in the midst of pandemic, a daughter born on June 1, 2020, right after the events of last weekend in this country. Before they were discharged from the hospital, Morgan wrote this: "My daughter enters the world at a time of health and social crisis. As I filled out the application for her birth certificate, and checked white for her father and mother's race, I couldn't help but think about the implications of what this check mark means. Her life journey will be that of a white woman and the

challenges she faces will not be because of the color of her skin. Though she will never truly understand the adversity others face, she will be raised to love herself, love life, love the world, and all of its people.”

Psalm 8 tells us that God is handing us the world and all of its people. We are to care for all of God’s creation, including all of our brothers and sisters, with loving compassion, holding it all gently and carefully, the way our cousin is holding her newborn baby.

God has given us work to do, and God will nourish us for the task of healing this very broken and very beloved world. Amen.

References cited:

[Feasting on the Word](#) commentary

commentaries on Psalm 8 from [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)