

Sunday Dec. 6, 2020
 Lesson 1: God and Human Beings
 Scripture: Psalm 8: 1-9

Context:

Our new series focuses on God's hope for humanity. For the season of Advent and Christmastide, we will look at "God with us," in scripture. The first lesson comes from the book of Psalms with Psalm 8. Our purpose today will be to explore what it means to be made in God's image.

Psalm 8 comes at the start of the long collection of psalms. The psalm is the first hymn of praise and interrupts the prayers of salvation to say something important about the God to whom prayers are addressed.¹ Psalm 8 is also the first and only hymn in the Old Testament composed as a direct address to God.² Both the beginning and end of the psalm focus on the adoration of God.³ Unlike other psalms with confession and supplication, the psalmist focuses solely on God and the work of God.

The entire psalm also provides the understanding of who God is and what God does. The psalm is an expression of the sovereignty theology of the book of Psalms with the Lord as the divine cosmic monarch to whom the earth and all that is in it belong because the Lord has mastered chaos and founded in the world.⁴ With this exclamation, the psalmist also provides their understanding of humanity as a royal servant in the Kingdom of God.

The psalm also provides us with an understanding of stewardship. The psalmist names all the things God has created from the skies to the moon and stars, to all the animals, birds, and fish. In the midst of these creations, God has made human beings. These human beings are also given a royal lineage. However, the dominion of the human corresponds to and is subordinate to the reign of the creator.⁵ The power given to humanity is not to be abusive of those in God's creation. There is a duty given to those caring for God's creation. They are to share the wonder and exuberance at the majesty of God but know fear and trembling at the disparity between the vision of humanity and the reality of human culture.⁶ If God's majesty is throughout the earth, humanity is to revere what is present.

¹ Mays, James L. "Psalms," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 65.

² *Ibid.*, 65.

³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

Application

How appropriate for the second Sunday of Advent we begin with a psalm of adoration for God. The Advent season is an opportunity for us to reflect and give thanks for our God who is the creator of all things and who came in the flesh to be with humanity. While not a typical Advent reading, this psalm is an excellent scripture to explore who God is and how God acts.

Adoration is perhaps the one spiritual act of prayer Christians struggle with the most. We are very good at supplication and thanksgiving, praying for those in need and thanking God for our blessings. In certain seasons of the church life, we thrive with confession as we can pour out our heart to God and ask for forgiveness for what we have done and what we have not done. Yet I've noticed in prayer said aloud, we have lost the art of adoring God for who God is, what God has done, and what God continues to do.

To adore something or someone is to give great affection and praise. Perhaps it seems unnatural to us because there is an element of vulnerability to come with adoration. We have to express love and praise unabashedly and to a degree, state the obvious.

Our text today reminds us that praising God is a gift we are given to share with the world. It is enough in a prayer to state: God you are mighty or majestic and leave it there. For ministers and lay speakers, it is a gift to have some sermons where maybe you don't tell people what to do or what to think; but instead you simply praise God during a sermon for who God is and what God has done.

I think at times, even if it seems excessive or superfluous, to simply sit and adore God. It's the sitting on the porch at sunset or in the evening to see the skies. Or it is walking in the neighborhood and seeing all the wonderful critters God made from the beautiful butterflies to the neighbor's cat trying to entice the squirrels to chase him back. God is to be praised in those moments.

Some days I wonder if we adored or praised God more often would how things might change. We might be encouraged to lead lives where we engage with creation more and take care of our environment and ourselves more. The psalmist understands the majesty of God and how God has been the master artist making each brush stroke with great care and delicacy. God's name is imprinted over all the things created.

As such we should take stock of the creation around us and give thanks for what represents the Lord. As we praise God, we too are transformed whether we realize it or not. Something happens to us as we adore the Lord.

In the text, we read of how humans have been made slightly less than divine, being crowned with glory and grandeur. While some commentators might struggle with this imagery and its implications, I marvel at how God would crown us as part of God's kingdom. The imagery here is beautiful as we realize the preciousness of our time on earth in God's creation. God crowning us gives us a purpose and a mission to follow with God being our greatest advocate.

The recent arrival of the Netflix series "The Crown," following the life of Queen Elizabeth II and her family of the United Kingdom, has received both praise and criticism. I have been drawn more to the show, even with its inaccuracies, due to the fact that we are given a potential glimpse into an ancient institution and having to reconcile how these are actual people. They have death, new life, and complicated relationships like we all do. Yet they are crowned and called to lead in a different way.

For many of us, we can relate to the multi dimensions of our life and wonder how we are to thrive in the world with all the obstacles and challenges. The psalmist tells us there is good news as we are crowned by God with glory and grandeur. So that perhaps on the days where there are struggles or we wonder about the next steps, we are reminded of how God has claimed and crowned us as those who belong to the Lord of all.

What are the ways you adore God? How are there ways you can adore God this week? What are ways you can appreciate and take care of God's creation? Have you ever thought of yourself as "crowned by God"? What does it do for you to imagine that you are God's royalty, chosen to be who you are for this world?

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