

Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5
June 12, 2022

Wonderful Grace

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth.” The 8th psalm begins its brief journey with these majestic words, marveling at the grandeur of the heavens, considering the complex beauty, not only of nature itself, but of the human place in it.

I once knew a farmer in Kentucky, who built a house on top of a hill overlooking a panorama of rolling terrain, wooded areas, pasture land, and row upon row of tobacco, or what he called with his Kentucky drawl, “tabacka.” He had built his house there on purpose, just for the view. While visiting one day I became caught up in it and mentioned how beautiful it was. He said that he never looked at it, paid it much attention.

Failing to pay attention is not terribly uncommon. We, like the psalmist, have the sky to see every night, and land teeming with life as we drive past to and fro on our way from one place to another, and people all around us. We see, but it is easy to miss what is really there, to see without really seeing, the greatness and magnitude of it all.

“When I consider the heavens,” it goes on, and by that the sky is meant, and we know much more than did the ancients about what is up there and just how vast it is. I wonder what poem he might have written if he had the powerful telescopes that can see distant

galaxies that are so far away that without them they do not even appear to us as stars.

The majesty of God is seen in the ocean depths as well as the heavenly vistas or the mountain ranges or the forests and in the plains where rows of corn dominate the landscape for hundreds of miles in every direction. It is good for the soul to pay attention to it now and again. But to what end?

Is it enough to be amazed? More than anything else, before the 8th is a psalm of adoration at the created universe, it is a song of humility at the human place in it, the everlasting smallness of the human race and the things that people made and done.

“What are the humans, that thou are mindful of them?” Actually, people are easily impressed with themselves and often marvel at the wonders of human invention: the discoveries of fire, and the wheel, and the transportation technology that followed it; trains, planes, and automobiles.

And the discovery of electricity itself, and the seemingly limitless capabilities that come along with binary code, computers and smart technology, the internet, artificial intelligence, and robotics that enable people to use complex machines to accomplish what used to be impossible. There is much more, even the more recent advances are small set next to the one who created the universe, made the earth’s geometry and the fire and the electricity to begin with.

It is a rhetorical question, of course, “what is man that thou are mindful of him,” implying that for all the grandeur of creation God *is* mindful of the people in their smallness on this little planet tucked away in this corner of this one galaxy in a universe full of galaxies.

It is not a stretch to say that we have not always been good at it, paying attention that is. Come to think of it, paying attention has a dangerous side to it, because if one is going to open the “eyes that they may see” one has to see everything in the end, even the hard painful things. There is no selective vision.

I suppose my farmer friend also saw all the hard work that he spent so much of his life’s blood on as well. But never mind, go ahead and look at it, both in the daytime and the nighttime, the sky that is, and listen to it, see the beauty and the wonder and the hard work, and ponder anew the wonder of God’s creation and ask again about life’s meaning, “O Lord, why *do* you care for us?”

The message of the gospel is that God *does* care. The life of Christ proclaims God’s loving concern. That is the meaning of the healings and the resuscitations, the exorcisms and the miraculous feeding, the Passion and Easter proclamations.

There are general conclusions to be drawn; that God’s goodness to us means that we should strive to be good to each other, that we should strive to do good in the world without becoming discouraged because of the difficulties.

Our striving to be good, honest, and true, to be compassionate and kind, to be generous, just, and merciful, is not a ticket to get to heaven, but life practice for when we get there. It may be observed that humility, rather than pride, should be nurtured and not disdained in this life, because this life is a preparation for the next.

The epistle reading for the day gives us a hint about things when it tells us that we already have peace with God. The goodness we seek is not a requirement for but an outcome of that peace, and the grace that provides it. It is not a way to get God’s attention in this wonderful universe, but a by-product of the attention that God has already showered upon us. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus *is* God paying attention to us. Faith is how we pay attention to God. By faith, we gain access to this grace, so that we might “rejoice the hope of the God’s glory.”

Furthermore, as long as we are looking and paying attention and observing things and concluding things, let us understand that this attention God has bestowed upon us in Christ has worked a miracle that defies explanation . . . it has redeemed our suffering, the pain that is seen when we open our eyes as see everything.

That is, while common sense leads us to conclude that troubles and hardships *should* destroy us, or at least diminish us, and that they should not be thought of as God’s will for us, they not only bring us no harm, but create something good, for “suffering produces

perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope, which does not disappoint.”

Marvel at that wonderful grace when you have the time. It is a greater than the ocean depths, and higher than the heavens themselves in their vast array.

Prayer

Remember in your mercy all humankind, O God. Let the whole earth be filled with your praise and made glad by the knowledge of your name. Let there fall upon all people a sense of your excellent greatness. Let the nations be in awe of you. Let your glory rule over every seat of power and every workplace. Let your law be honored in every home. Redeem the whole world's life, O God, and transform it utterly through the power of the cross. Amen.

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