

Psalm 8  
Romans 5:1-5

Trinity Sunday, Year C  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
June 12, 2022

## **Creator and Creature**

### *Introduction to the Psalm*

In today's psalm we hear of God's sovereignty and majesty, and we also hear of the high view that God has of human beings. It is clearly a psalm of praise. And it is the only hymn in the Old Testament that is completely addressed to God. Listen to these words from Psalm 8...

### *Introduction to the Epistle Lesson*

In our Epistle Lesson today we hear Paul declare that followers of Christ can boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God; not only that, but also in our sufferings. Listen to these words from Romans 5:1-5...

### *Sermon*

Lees-McRae College is a small, private, four-year school in Banner Elk, North Carolina, and affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Located in the mountains of western North Carolina, it has the highest elevation of any college or university east of the Mississippi River. Lees-McRae is one of the few colleges to be named after two women, Suzanna Lees and Elizabeth McRae. Well, some years ago I was in Banner Elk and rode by the school. I remember seeing a sign there which said, "A strong positive self-image is the best preparation for a successful future."

Do you have a strong positive self-image—a healthy regard for yourself—a sense of human dignity? Do you believe that you are of great value to God, as well as to humanity, a person with special God-given gifts, a person with real potential for good?

The church has long preached the virtues of humility, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. The church has taught its adherents to avoid all forms of spiritual pride, selfishness, an overblown regard for one's own importance. And yes, humans are capable of doing inhumane things. Like shooting innocent school children in Uvalde, Texas, or destroying the country of Ukraine. And yes, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We have blurred that image of God in which we were created. But the church has sometimes over-played its hand, to the point where some people have been made to feel guilty—just for existing.

Of course, we want to avoid being puffed up with the deceit of pride—that sin listed first of the “Seven Deadly Sins.” Pride is considered the original and most serious of those deadly sins, and the source from which the others arise. Proverbs notes that:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18).

But isn't there also a different kind of pride? Isn't it also important that Christians feel good about themselves as human beings, as children of God, with a sense of dignity?

In reading the diaries of our spiritual ancestors—the Puritans—one often notes a morbid tendency to wallow in feelings of utter worthlessness. But there's a difference between conceit and self-regard. Yes, false pride is still sinful, but self-regard can be seen as a basic, even essential, component of spiritual health. It is the glad heart which will be most loving toward others.

In thinking of a healthy pride, consider a craftsman. Because the craftsman takes pride in his work, there is no reason to discount the value of his accomplishment. In fact, if we are having some remodeling done in our home, we would much prefer the work of a craftsman who takes pride in what he does, than that of one who does not. So it is with the Christian life; basic, positive feelings of self-regard and self-worth are vital to the good we would hope to accomplish.

The Apostle Paul said, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1Cor. 15:10). Thereby did he combine humble reverence and joyful pride.

In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus denounced certain people like the Pharisees, who displayed an inflated sense of pride. “He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.” (Lk. 1:51b) But we also see that in story after story, Jesus sought to help people who had failed and seemed to have little sense of worth.

Recall his parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). Here was a young man who wasted himself and his inheritance in the far country. But when he came home, his father didn’t wait for apologies, didn’t deal out retribution, didn’t tell him he’d never amount to anything; but lovingly welcomed him as one who was dead and is alive again, lost, but now found.

Remember Peter? After boasting that he would never deny Jesus, he did so three times. But in a resurrection appearance Jesus restored him, asking Peter three times if he loved him, and then instructing Peter to feed his lambs and tend his sheep (Jn. 21:15-17).

Remember the woman about to be stoned (Jn. 8:1-11)? Here she was caught in adultery. The crowd was ready to stone her. And what did Jesus say? “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,” and then he told the woman to go and sin no more.

Suppose in situations like these Jesus had simply castigated these people for their failures. Caused them to wallow in feelings of utter worthlessness. Would they have been of any use to him, or to themselves? Not likely. But this was not the way of our Lord. Whether it be the fraudulent tax-collector Zacchaeus or the busy and distracted sister Martha, Jesus led people to believe in him and to believe in themselves.

When Jesus said that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Mt. 12:31), it was clear that he expects and wants us to love ourselves, in a proper way. Not like Narcissus. In Greek mythology Narcissus was a hunter who was renowned for his beauty. But he was very

proud and disdained those who loved him. As divine punishment, he fell in love with his own reflection in a pool, not realizing it was merely an image, and so he wasted away to death, unable to leave the beauty of his own reflection. So much for the creature. What about the Creator?

Apollo 11 carried to the moon a Goodwill Disc that had messages from seventy-three countries. This thin silicon disc was left in a simple cloth pouch in an aluminum case on the Sea of Tranquility in July 1969 by astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. At the top of the disc was the inscription: “Goodwill messages from around the world brought to the Moon by the astronauts of Apollo 11.” And around the rim the statement: “From Planet Earth—July 1969.” In tiny type etched into its surface were goodwill messages from world leaders.

The Vatican submitted a message that incorporated a text from the Bible. If you could have made the decision of a part of the Bible to send up to the moon, which would you have chosen? The Vatican submitted the text of Psalm 8, making it the first Biblical text to reach the moon. This Psalm of David begins and ends with the same phrase, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.” It frames the content of the Psalm in the praise of the majesty of God. Then the Psalm asks a penetrating question, “What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”

An explorer by the name of William Beebe was a good friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Sometimes when he visited the President at Sagamore Hill, the two men would go outdoors at night to see who could first locate the Andromeda galaxy. Then, as they gazed at the tiny smudge of distant starlight, one of them would recite:

“That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It’s as large as our Milky Way. It is one of 100 million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our sun.”

Then Roosevelt would grin and say, “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

So then the question—how does the God of all creation, the God of cosmic majesty—how does God, the Creator, look on human beings, the creatures? And the answer:

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. (8:5-8)

Wonder of wonders, though seemingly a mere speck in a vast universe, we are actually “a little lower than God” and have been crowned with glory and honor, created in the image of God. We are bestowed with dignity and granted dominion over the works of his hands.

Unfortunately, some have failed to recognize that we are indeed “a little lower than God.” In fact, for some God is not even in the equation, rather “It’s all about me.” But here the psalmist declares that it is from God that we receive glory and honor, not from ourselves, or our families, or our schools, or our country, or anything else. If we do not see that, and if we do not recognize the boundaries which God has set, and acknowledge that God is *above* us, then the exercise of human dominion becomes simply autonomy and self-rule. Yes, God gives us a remarkable responsibility and partnership. He wants us to collaborate with him in the care of his creation.

So, my friends, our psalm can encourage us to have a healthy regard for ourselves. But sometimes we stop listening to the Word of God and hear only the voices of our misgivings, or the voices of those who only criticize us, or some other sickening voice. Or we may try to measure our worth by the wrong things—like money, success, or power—instead of resting ourselves in the gospel of God’s love and grace, and the high place that we have in God’s sight.

This week let's remember that we are God's creation, adorned with glory and honor. Recall what Paul said to the Christians in Ephesus, that we are created in Jesus Christ for good works (2:10). And when you do a good work, don't go around bragging about it, but do allow yourself to feel good about it. If you hear someone try to run you down, remember that no one determines your inherent value but God.

Believe in God the Father as we know him in Christ Jesus the Son. In the words of Romans 5 know "that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5b). Know that God loves you, values you, has given you gifts to use in the building of his kingdom. Like the craftsman who takes pride in his work, have a healthy pride in yourself. The world will thereby be a better place, and you will know a more joyful and fulfilling life.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.