

Psalm 8
John 1:1-13

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
July 16, 2023

Who Are You?

Introduction to the Psalm

In her book *A Very Present Help*, Miriam Dunson notes that our Psalm this morning had the distinction of being the first biblical text to reach the moon, having been included in a silicon disc made up of messages from seventy-three nations, and left on the moon by Apollo 11 in 1969. Further, it is said that Psalm 8 was an appropriate choice for this occasion, for “it is both an eloquent proclamation of the cosmic sovereignty of God and a remarkable affirmation of the exalted status and vocation of the human creature.” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*) Listen to these words from Psalm 8...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson today is from the first part of John’s prologue. We hear the writer of the Fourth Gospel declare that whoever believes in Christ—the Word become flesh—that one is given new life as a child of God. Listen to these words from John 1:1-13...

Sermon

One September morning a father and his son were waiting at Grand Central Station in New York City. The son was taking the train for a college in New England and leaving home for the first time. Just for a moment the father stood there, wanting to say so many things but saying only one, though it was quite enough: “William, never forget who you are.”

Worth more than any number of lectures on behavior was that one challenge to something deep in a boy’s remembrance: “Never forget who you are.” Often the strongest defense a person has is a healthy sense of self-esteem. Psalm 8 teaches us to not hold cheaply

either ourselves or the image we carry in our souls. For while it's healthy to recognize our limitations, it's also healthy to recognize our dignity in God's sight, as one crowned with glory and honor.

Sometimes however, if you think about the various ways we have of calculating the worth of an individual, you realize how confused we can be about what represents human value. From a human standpoint we might assess an individual in marketplace terms. Thus, we may say of someone: "He's a millionaire." Or "she can have whatever money can buy." That may say something about one's financial state, but it says nothing about character or commitment or community service, or even happiness.

A chemist may calculate the value of a person based upon the market value of the elements in your body—carbon, calcium, phosphorus, etc. The sports page may look at a player's value based largely upon talent—the ability to play a particular game very well. And as we know, with that measure an individual could be worth millions of dollars. Former Clemson quarterback, Deshaun Watson, was determined to be worth \$230 million in his recent five-year contract with the Cleveland Browns.

Again, you can take a certain test which measures IQ and find mental assessment in the genius category. But that says very little about one's well-being or about how one can get along with others. In Hollywood you are valued on the basis of box-office appeal. Morals are not an issue.

All these examples are only human standards designed to classify individuals into convenient categories. None of them takes note of the true value of a person. The question was asked by the psalmist, standing in awe before God and the wonder of life and creation:

...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... (8:4-6a)

Now our Gospel Lesson acknowledges that there were many who rejected Jesus. It also affirms that for those who received him, who believed in him, he gave the power, or right to become the children of God.

Commentator William Barclay says that there is a sense in which a person is not naturally a child of God and that we have to *become* a child of God. He illustrates the idea by comparing two kinds of sons. The first son takes everything that the home offers, but gives nothing in return. He takes for granted the hard work of his parents. And when he leaves home, he makes no effort to stay in touch. There is no bond of love and caring.

But the second son realizes what his parents have given him, and he manifests a grateful heart. His relationship with them is one of love and fellowship. As the years go by, he grows closer and closer to them. Both sons had the same parents. But the second has become a son in the way the first never was.

In Matthew 6 we find “The Lord’s Prayer,” where Jesus teaches us to pray to our Father in heaven. What a blessing it is, to believe that our creator, the sovereign God of the whole universe, the Lord of all time and eternity; to believe that this same God has toward us the name and the heart of a father. What Jesus meant when he used the word *Father* for God is that God is gracious, caring, and wise. God is personal. God is loving. God does not want us to suffer or cringe before him. He wants to give us good things, he wants the best for us. He wants our wholeness, our salvation. He is our heavenly Father. So does Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 (9-12) that even more than we who know how to give good gifts to our own children, our Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask.

But just as the Psalmist reminds us that there is a difference between God and us—“Yet you have made humans a little lower than God,” Jesus also teaches us that God is our Father

“who is in heaven.” Thus God is like a personal, loving, and good human father; but God is unlike us in the perfection of divine love. Our Father in heaven is all-powerful, present everywhere, eternal, invisible. He is the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end. While the psalmist proclaims human dignity, he also proclaims divine majesty.

“Never forget who you are,” the father said to his college-bound son. Yes we all fall short of the mark of our true worth—sometimes deliberately, sometimes carelessly, sometimes out of weakness, sometimes out of the notion that God’s laws don’t apply to us, and sometimes in the very audacity of assuming we have reached a par with God himself. But God in his infinite mercy and determination would not be thwarted in his ultimate purposes. So he reaffirmed our worth in Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the members of the church in Rome, Paul says, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” And in his first letter to the church in Corinth, “You are not your own; you were bought with a price.” Many who retire struggle because their identity was tied up to their career. As we grow older, family relationships change. Health issues may burden us. And we may not feel as valuable as we once did. But no matter what we think of ourselves; no matter what others may think of us; the truth is that we are precious in the sight of God. And that is the opinion that really matters and the opinion that can in the words of John Greenleaf Whittier’s hymn, “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”...“re clothe us in our rightful mind.”

Some of you may have heard the story about the man whose wife had a cat. Well, she loved the cat so much that he resented it. She would feed the cat better than she fed him, groom the cat and give the cat more affection than she gave him. Finally, he could stand it no more. So he took the cat down to the river and drowned it, then buried it deep in the woods. Well, his

grieving wife cried for three days! To comfort her, the husband told her he would offer a \$1,000 reward for the return of the cat, to which a friend marveled: “What a generous offer! That’s a lot of money for a cat!” Replied the husband, “When you know what you know, you can afford to take some risks!”

When we know what we know, we can afford to take some risks. And what we can know is that we are a child of a loving, heavenly Father. And that he loves us so much he has sent his only begotten Son to save us.

Many years ago the *New Yorker Magazine* had a cartoon that showed two men standing at the pearly gates of heaven. One said, “Well, all I remember about the whole experience is this: I liked Ike, I loved New York, and I really would’ve rather had a Buick!” The sad truth is that many people live for less because they never honestly reckon with God’s claim upon their lives. They never ask, “What is God calling me to do?” Whatever our choices in career, marriage, and retirement, God is calling us to be a disciple of Jesus Christ—a student, a follower—and to reflect the love of Christ in compassionate ways to others.

In his Second Letter to the church in Corinth (1:20) Paul wants to assure the people of the church that they can rely on God, that there is no vacillation in Jesus between *yes* and *no*. Then he puts the matter in a vivid phrase—“Jesus is the *yes* to every promise of God.” Had Jesus never come we might have doubted the tremendous and precious promises of God. We might have determined that they were too good to be true. But a God who loves us so much that he would give his only begotten Son, this God can be trusted to fulfill his promises. “Yes! This is true!” Jesus is the personal guarantee of God that the greatest and the least of God’s promises are all true.

My friends, God is mindful of us. He has crowned us with glory and honor. We are granted responsibility for creation and humankind. And we are responsible for ourselves. And for those who believe in Christ, there is granted the power to become the children of God. To be like that second son—in gratitude, in fellowship, in devotion.

Amen. And Amen.