

Psalm 8

“The Glory of Humanity”

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Pentecost Season

I was not planning on preaching this Sunday, as I’ve been out of town all week at our denomination’s General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, Alabama.

But, in God’s providence, when our scheduled guest preacher became ill this week, I knew I would have to pivot quickly to prepare a sermon for this Lord’s Day.

When I selected Psalm 8 as my sermon text this week in a hotel in Birmingham, I did not know, of course, that the Supreme Court’s decision leading to the overturning of Roe v. Wade would be released this past Friday.

But as it turns out, this text serves perfectly as a summary of what we as a church believe regarding the dignity and value of human life.

Friends, I can’t tell you how thankful I am for God’s mercy and kindness toward our nation in this week’s ruling overturning Roe v. Wade.

Like many of you, this is a day for which I have been hoping and praying for many years. I read the news on Friday afternoon after flying back from Alabama, and I was overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude.

My father, Barry Anderson, directed the Crisis Pregnancy Center in Richmond, VA from the mid 1980s until the early 1990s, so I grew up from an early age on the front lines of these matters – both politically and practically.

I was 12 years old in 1992, and I remember vividly the hope and expectation that Roe v. Wade might be overturned when the Planned Parenthood v. Casey case was heard, as well as the deep sense of disappointment and defeat when that deeply flawed Supreme Court decision was handed down.

To be crystal clear, Roe v. Wade in 1973 was a travesty of both constitutional and (more importantly) biblical justice.

As our Westminster Larger Catechism states, the Sixth Commandment forbids *“all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; [and] the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life.”*

Holy Scripture clearly teaches on a number of occasions that human life begins at conception in the womb – thus to declare that a “constitutional right” exists to end human life in the womb was and is a grievous and wicked violation of Scripture’s teaching.

While there are certainly other substantial examples of injustice and sin in our nation’s laws and practices in our day, make no mistake – legally protected abortion on demand *is* the human rights issue of our day and age, and the most serious contemporary sin of our nation.

For many years, I have prayed and hoped for Roe v. Wade to be overturned, and I must admit, there were many times when I did not think it could possibly happen in my lifetime.

To have the constitutionally protected “right” to abortion overturned in Friday’s decision, and the issue returned to the states and their legislatures is a remarkable act of God’s kindness and mercy to us as a people.

It certainly gives us an opportunity, as a nation, to repent of our sins, and to pass, uphold and apply wise and appropriate laws to protect human life in the womb.

Thanks be to God, who has providentially ended Roe v. Wade, and has graciously offered us a new opportunity as a nation to repent of our sins and pursue justice and righteousness.

May we as the church lead the way by responding with repentance, faithfulness, love, and mercy!

Listen now to God’s word, as it declares to us the glory of being human.

Psalm 8

To the choirmaster: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

*1 O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.*

*2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

*3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,*

4 *what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

5 *Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.*

6 *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,*

7 *all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,*

8 *the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

9 *O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Prayer...

This psalm begins and ends with David praising God, declaring his name to be majestic in all the earth.

But why does David praise God in Psalm 8? He does so because of the glory of humanity, and the glory of his own status as a human being.

In verse 2, David delights in the capacity that human beings, and particularly children have to praise God with their lips.

*As he writes: Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

It's interesting that David begins here - the glory of humanity is revealed most prominently in this, he says - that human beings have the capacity of speech, and they use that speech to praise God with their mouths.

It is of course, the ability to speak that most obviously sets human beings apart from the rest of creation. All of creation praises God, but only men and women and children do so with the gift of language.

“O Lord, open my lips,” David declares in Psalm 51, *“and my mouth will declare your praise.”*

It is not enough simply to be thankful in our hearts to God - we must open our lips to proclaim it.

In Colossians 3, Paul writes: *“Be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

And indeed, we are most truly human, must fully fulfilling our vocation as human persons made in God’s image when we use our God given capacity of speech and language to praise his name.

And this beloved, is why on Sunday mornings, we sing.

We sing because song is language glorified, and in our corporate songs offered together on the Lord’s Day in our worship — including the voices of infants and children — we are truly and gloriously human together.

But David does not only praise God for making humanity glorious through its praise.

He also praises God for making humanity glorious because God has set his affection on the human race.

When I was a child, after I got to the age when I was old enough to have some sense for the size of the earth and space, one of the things I liked to do was to lie in bed at night and conduct a thought experiment.

First I would imagine our house as though I was looking at it from the sky.

And then I would widen the lens of my imagination a little and I would imagine our neighborhood, I would imagine all the houses on the streets close by that I knew, and all the people inside those houses who were also lying in their beds sleeping.

And then I would expand a bit further and include the whole of the city of Richmond, with its thousands of houses and about a million or so people.

And then after I held that image in my mind for a few moments I would go out to the state of Virginia - from the mountains in the west to the ocean on the eastern coasts and imagine all the little towns and cities in between, and all the houses and all the people.

And then I would do the same thing with the entire United States.

And then, when I felt brave enough, I would think about the world — all the people, all the houses, all the sleeping children, and how tiny and insignificant I was in comparison.

And then, if I was feeling really reckless, I would imagine the solar system, the planets whose names I knew, all orbiting our Sun, with my house an unseen speck on the third one.

And then I would slowly try to comprehend the reality that I had been taught that our solar system was only a tiny corner of our galaxy, and our galaxy only a tiny speck in the immensity of the universe.

I don't know why I did that. I know that it frightened me a little. It frightened me because I could hardly even comprehend my own minuscule existence when I considered the space occupied by everything else that was out there. And yet I couldn't help returning to that image of the universe and my tiny place in it.

And of course, David is doing something similar in this Psalm when he says to God in verses 3-4: *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"*

David looks out at the heavens, at the moon and the stars, and says to himself - what is man in the midst of this? Who is man in relationship to all of this matter that is out there, all of these wondrous things that my God has created?

But his answer is striking, and it's one on which the logic of this whole psalm turns. In verse 5, he writes: *"Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."*

What David is saying is that looking out at the night sky is not an adequate way to judge the worth and significance of humanity.

Yes, we are tiny in comparison to all else God has made. Yes, we are, in some sense, lost in the immensity of all things.

And yet it is to *us*, human beings, in this galaxy, in this solar system, on this planet, that God has set his affection — God is mindful of us, God cares for us, and more than that, he has set us just a little below the angels themselves, he has crowned us, like kings and queens, with glory and honor.

But David does not only praise God for the glory of humanity because God has given the human race the power of praising him - and he does not only praise God because, in spite of the immensity of creation, God has set his special affection on human beings — he also praises God because God has set the human race over all creation.

Look at verses 6-8, as David continues to marvel at the wonder of the glory God has given to the human race.

He says, "You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas."

One commentator has noted that this part of Psalm 8 is simply the dominion mandate from Genesis 1:26-28 set to music.

I think that's right. David here marvels at the glory of humanity by considering all things that God has put under his feet to rule over as the kings and queens of creation: Sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the heaven, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

The last item on this list is fascinating, for even in this day and age when human beings have traveled to the moon, much of the oceans of the world, and especially the ocean bottoms, the paths of the seas, remain unexplored. Think about that for a moment. This line should almost send a shiver up our spine.

We know a lot of things as 21st century men and women, but one thing we still do not fully know is exactly what passes along the paths of the deepest parts of the seas.

Perhaps there are great fish and other sea animals out there waiting to be discovered by mankind. And yet even those creatures are under the dominion and rule of man.

And then after considering all the ways that God has blessed and endowed the human race with his special love, with his glory and honor, David closes this psalm with a repetition of the first line: "*O LORD, Our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*"

The point of Psalm 8 is not how great God is and how puny human beings are.

The point is how great humans are *because* of the affection God has for them and the glory he has given them.

So if, in this Psalm, David praises God for the glory of humanity, then what is the meaning of it in our lives? What difference should this make for us?

Simply put, **this psalm forces us to wrestle with the reality that, as human beings, we are glorious.** To put it more personally, this psalm should force *you* to wrestle with the reality that *you*, as a human being, are glorious.

The glory of humanity is something that I think is often much easier for us to notice and appreciate in others than ourselves.

Think for example of babies. When you hold a baby, you know they are glorious. Everything about them is glorious.

Their eyes, their mouths, their cheeks, their tiny fingers and toes, their smiles, the softness of their skin, the sound of their heart as it beats.

All of it is glorious, and we know it intuitively and utterly. Babies themselves know this. Think about a baby when it discovers his or her own hand for the first time.

When they hold that hand up in front of their face, you can almost imagine what they're thinking: "My hand is awesome. My hand is the most amazing thing in the universe." And you know, in a sense, they're right.

But it's one thing to see that in a baby. And it's another to see it in ourselves. When's the last time you looked in the mirror and considered your reflection, looked at your face, your body staring back at you and thought: "I am a human being, and I am *glorious*?"

I don't know about you, but that's not something that comes naturally to me. And yet that is what David is saying about each one of us in this psalm.

He is saying that if you are a human being, the God whose fingers carved the heavens, the God who set billions and billions of stars in the sky and upholds the universe merely by the power of his word - that God stoops to consider you, and not only consider you, but care for you.

That he cares for you even in the midst of the petty details of your life. He cares for you as you look for a parking space, cares for you as you read a book or brush your teeth. Cares for you as you as you sleep and when you wake.

And he doesn't only care for you, David says, he also crowns you with glory and honor. He calls you glorious.

That's what David is saying here, and if we take him seriously at all, we have to wrestle with this reality.

And that means when you stand in front of the mirror when you wake up in the morning or before you go to bed and you look at yourself, when you look at your face that is so familiar and so full of whatever it is you've come to think about it over the years, you need to learn to also hear God's voice saying in the back of your head: "You are a man. You are a woman. And you are glorious."

The shape of your nose - *glorious*. The color of your eyes - *glorious*. The way your body moves and takes up space - *glorious*. The sound of your voice - *glorious*.

The way your mind makes a million calculations every moment without you even realizing it, the way you can analyze a problem and solve it, the way you think a thought and create a painting or a photograph or an invention or a sentence that no one has ever thought of before - *glorious*.

I want to be clear here - I am not talking about what is commonly referred to "Working on your self-esteem."

The whole modern concept of self-esteem is an effort with good intentions but in the end is the kind of mental and psychological exercise human beings are forced into only when they have forgotten they are *already* glorious.

I am not talking about gritting your teeth and making up your mind to think good thoughts about yourself.

I am talking about realizing you possess a glory that has nothing to do with what *you* think about yourself, and everything to do with what your creator says is true about you.

The glory of your body, the glory of your mind, the glory of your total self is an objective reality because it is rooted in the reality that you bear the imago dei, the image of God himself, and so your glory is not something you could shed even if you wanted to.

Lewis: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit...Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ... Glory Himself, is truly hidden."

Beloved - this is why the protection of human life in the womb is so important, so central to a biblical ethic.

Because every man, woman and child — indeed, every infant, including those yet in the womb, is created in the image of God and crowned by the Living God with glory and honor.

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