

PSALMS OF HOPE

@UnitedChurchFerdown

United Church Ferndown's 2023 Lent Programme

Sunday 26t February
Lent 1

Sermon+

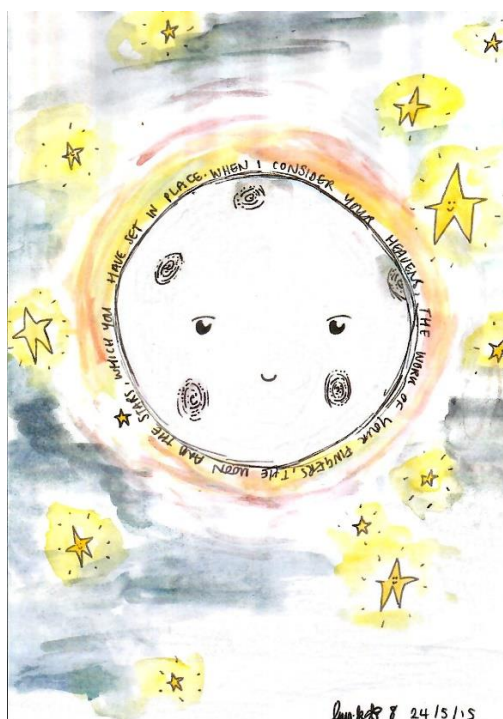
PSALM 8

OUR HOPE IS FOUND IN WHO WE ARE.



Pray:

Our Father, we pray that we may immerse ourselves in this marvellous book of experience and find here not only that which speaks of our own moods and attitudes, but also that which answers them in grace. We thank you for this revelation, written not merely with pen and ink, but with blood and sweat and tears, heartache and sorrow, happiness and joy -- in the lives of men and women like ourselves. In Christ's name. **Amen.**



Introduction:

Melanie tells stories of how, before we were married, she used to sleepwalk. One time she woke up trying to get out of her student flat in the middle of the night. Thankfully the door was double locked, and she couldn't get out – This story could have been a little more dramatic or at least a tad more embarrassing, had it not been so! She was disorientated and confused as she woke up! When traveling, have you ever awakened and not known where you were? The bed is unfamiliar; the room is strange; you look out the window and don't recognize anything. What does it feel like to be disoriented?

Disorientation is a terrible experience. If we cannot locate our place, we are in confusion and anxiety. We are also in danger, for we are apt to act inappropriately. If we are among enemies and don't know it, we may lose our life. If we are among friends and don't know it, we may miss good relationships. If we are alongside a cliff and don't know it, we may lose our footing. In Psalm 8, we find out where we are and some important aspects of who we are.



Read:

Psalm 8 (NIV)

(Maybe you could look at a couple of other translations)

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

² Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

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

⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?^[a]

⁵ You have made them^[d] a little lower than the angels^[e]
and crowned them^[f] with glory and honour.

⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their^[g] feet:
⁷ all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
⁸ the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

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

A Consideration of the Psalm:

David starts and ends our orientation with a bold declaration about God. The first and last verse both say: “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” The phrase, “**O LORD our Lord,**” might sound redundant but as you read it in the Bible, you’ll notice that the two words for “Lord” are spelled differently. The first is spelled in all caps, L-O-R-D, which our English translators use to indicate the Hebrew name for God, “Yahweh.” This is the name God revealed to

Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14) and basically means, “I am who I am,” or “I will be who I will be.”

The second word for “Lord” only capitalizes the “L” and comes from the Hebrew word, “Adonai,” which means “master” or “boss” or “ruler.” So the first “Lord” is a name and the second “Lord” is a title. David is saying, “Yahweh, you are our Master.” God is over all, and as such, his name—his character, his being—deserves to be praised and worshiped across the whole earth. This is the thesis of the psalm. You want to know why you matter? Because God is great! This is so important that David bookends it at beginning and end. No matter what role we find for humanity here, everything we have and everything we are comes from God, our Master, who deserves to be praised.

Then David gives us a couple of reasons why God deserves such praise. First, he points to the glory of creation. He says, “You have set your glory above the heavens.” And he adds in verse 3, **“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...”** You can picture the sheep-herder David gazing at the night sky as he writes these words. The image at the top of this highlights the thought.

Which reminds me: **Did you hear about when Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson went camping? In the middle of the night, Holmes wakes up his friend and asks, “Watson, look at the sky and tell me what you see?” Watson replies, “I see millions and millions of stars.” And Holmes says, “What does that tell you?” – “Well, if there are millions of stars, and if there really are other star systems, then it is quite likely that there are some Earth-like planets out there, and if there is such a planet, there may exist life as well.” And Holmes says, “Watson, you’re an idiot. The starry sky, you can see, tells that someone has stolen our tent!”**



Well, David didn’t let a tent block his view of the starry sky. Indeed, the universe is an amazing creation. Consider the sheer size of it: The earth is about 8,000 miles in diameter. But imagine, for comparison sake, if the earth were the size of a grape, then our star, the sun, would be about the size of a giant beach ball. One of the largest stars in the galaxy, Canis Majoris, could hold over 2,000 of our suns within it!

Certainly, we know a lot more about the stars today than David did. Yet, the more we know, the more we should be amazed. When we are in awe of the creation—whether it be the night sky, or a rainbow, or a beautiful sunrise, or the powerful crescendo of a waterfall—we should praise the Creator behind it all. As David poetically wrote, God’s fingers put the stars in place. Do you think this little anthropomorphism is a comment on the size of God?

David’s son, Solomon, must have remembered this from Dad as he built the famous Solomon’s temple. When he dedicated it, he prayed, **“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”** (1 Kings 8:27). So David cites this reason first, that God is great because the universe is great. But then he talks about another reason. He says in verse 2, “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.” We see a couple of things here. First, we see that God has enemies, people and angels who do not praise God, who do not give credit to God for the glory of the universe, but instead want to take it themselves. They want to praise themselves.

But then David says a curious thing: He says God takes the praise of babies and infants to silence them. How much could babies add to the fight? Sounds ludicrous, doesn’t it? Babies are pretty helpless creatures. Yet, a recurring theme in scripture is that God likes to use the weak to overcome the strong. John McArthur writes about this verse, “The introductory irony about infants sets the

stage for a contrast between the dependent and the foolishly self-sufficient.” The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians about how God refused to take away his thorn in the flesh, but Paul grew to be satisfied, knowing that in his own weakness, God’s strength would shine through. **“When I am weak, he is strong”** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). The God of the Bible likes to wage war with choirs in the front lines. He likes to take down giants with a boy and a slingshot. This way God gets all the glory.

Jesus chose to quote verse 2 on the first Palm Sunday. As he was entering Jerusalem, cleansing the Temple, and healing people, some children began joining their parents in worshiping Jesus as the “Son of David,” a title for the long-awaited Messiah. Some of the religious leaders complained to Jesus, saying, “Don’t you hear what these children are saying?” Jesus first replied with a simple, “Yes.” In other words, “Yes, I hear them, and I am not going to correct them, because they are right. I am the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Then he went on to quote the Greek version of this verse, which ended the discussion, that the enemies of God would be silenced by the praise of children and infants. Jesus, along with the children, fulfilled scripture that day.

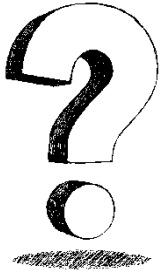
The key question of the psalm comes in verse 4, the exact centre of the poem. David asks, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” To be “mindful of” means to remember someone. “God, why are we so important that you remember us, that you care for us?” Many Christians struggle with this. Some think God must not love them, and others think God has to love them, that He has no choice. But neither are correct. God chooses to love us, to cast his favour upon us. For a Christian, your self-esteem doesn’t come from self-talk in front of a mirror, “I think I can. I know I can. I can do this.” No, your self-esteem comes from knowing that God esteems you, that God finds value in you just because he chooses to. And no matter what trials you face, please remember that God remembers you. You are on God’s mind today.

Not only does God love us, God entrusts a special task to us. David talks of how God created humans just a “little lower than the heavenly beings,” and put us in charge of all the creation. I wonder if David is thinking of Genesis 1:26-27, where God said, **“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”**

David is in awe that we have been elevated to such a level of responsibility to entrust all of creation to us. It is amazing when you think of it. And it is sad, when you consider ways we have let down our Creator: pollution, cruelty to animals, cruelty to each other, litter, wastefulness, envy, gossip, adultery, assault, murder. Our sinful state, beginning with our first parents Adam and Eve, has introduced to the world sickness and death and natural disaster. It is all a corruption of our original role: to care for the creation in honour of the Creator.

Since we fall short, the psalm carries a prophetic hope of future fulfilment. Someday there will be harmony. Someday there will be beauty again. Someday all will be right with the world and with the relationship between the Creator and the created. We have little glimpses of that from time to time: a rainbow, a beautiful sunrise, the bluebells in the woods, a smile, someone holding the door for us or offering us a hand: all little glimpses of the beauty and harmony God has in store for us.

Paul and the writer of Hebrews both point to Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of Psalm 8. Jesus made himself a little lower than the heavenly beings, to become one of us, to die on a cross, and to be raised on the third day, overcoming sin and death for good. And Jesus will return to institute a new heaven and a new earth. So we may say with David, “O Yahweh, our Master, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Until he returns again, we are to serve him every way we can. As the poet wrote, **“Only one life, will soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”**



Questions:

Consider God's Word:

1. Browse through the psalm and note every word that refers to what God has created. How do these things reveal God's glory?
2. Why do you think the psalmist contrasts what children and infants say with what foes and avengers say(v2)?
3. What evidence do we have that God is mindful of us, that he cares for us?
4. "Ruler" and "under his feet" (v6) can be twisted into excuses to exploit and pillage. What is there in this psalm to prevent such twisting?

Consider Psalm 8's application:

1. How does Psalm 8 compare with the way you view yourself?
2. What adjustments do you need to make to view yourself as God views you?
3. Some people think of themselves as "a little higher than the heavenly beings"; others think, "a little lower than the beasts of the field." In what area has Psalm 8 corrected your self-image?



Pray Together:

We bow before you, our Father, and almost tremble because we are privileged to call you Father -- such a great God, such a revelation of wisdom, greatness, power and strength and yet, our Father, our Lord, our God.

That thou shouldst so delight in me and be the God thou art;
Is darkness to my intellect but sunshine to my heart.

Thank you for who we are. If any here have not yet found the way to your heart through Jesus Christ we pray that this very moment they will open their heart to the One who has been seeking them for many years, that he may come into them and change them and make them part of a new creation. We ask in his name, **Amen**