

## **Message: God's glory, our mission**

The starry sky is impressive. Glorious.

Our Old Testament reading today, from Psalm 8, a Psalm written by David, begins “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.” And goes on to say “...your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place”

Certainly, we know a lot more about the stars today than David did. Yet, the more we know, the more we can be amazed. The distances involved. The vastness of space.

When we are in awe of creation—whether it be the night sky, or a rainbow, or a beautiful sunrise, or the shaking power of thunder — we should praise the creator behind it all. As David figuratively but poetically wrote, God’s fingers put the stars in place.

As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, *“Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”* (Romans 1:20)

The first and last verse of today’s psalm both say: *“LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”* which might sound redundant, but LORD spelled in all capitals is what 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.” God is the great “I am,” the absolutely existing one. God always has been and always will be. God never changes. God is not created. God just is. And everything else in the world is dependent upon God.

The second word “Lord” with only a capital “L” which is sometimes translated as “sovereign” or is from the Hebrew word, “Adonai,”

which means “master” or “boss” or “ruler.” So in saying *“O LORD, our Lord”*, David is effectively saying, “Yahweh, you are our Master.”

God is over all, and as such, his name—God’s character, God’s being—deserves to be praised and worshiped across the whole earth.

Then David gives us reasons God deserves such praise. First, he points to the glory of creation. He says, *“You have set your glory in 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...”* I can imagine David remembering gazing up at the night sky during his days as a shepherd out in the countryside as he wrote those words.

And when David talks about the work of God’s fingers, he isn’t talking about finger painting – the allusion is much more likely to be to the work of embroidery. Intricate work. So, skill - but also creativity. And care. And precision.

In verse 2 David tells us that God has, through the praise of children and infants has established a stronghold against his enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

Of all that God could do, he uses the praise of children. It seems crazy, doesn’t it? Surely grown-ups would do a better job. Babies are pretty helpless creatures. Yet, a recurring theme in scripture is that God uses the weak to overcome the strong.

God likes to take down giants with a boy wielding a sling - as David himself knew very well. It is always God’s strength, not ours. That way God gets the glory.

If we look back to Palm Sunday. As Jesus was entering Jerusalem, cleansing the Temple, and healing people, some children began joining their parents in worshiping Jesus as the “Son of David,” (Matthew 21:15) a title for the long-awaited Messiah. The chief

priests and the teachers of the law complained to Jesus, saying, *“Do 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 verse 2 of this psalm, *“From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise.”* which ended the discussion, and which fulfilled exactly what the verse said: that the enemies of God would be silenced by the praise of children and infants. (Matt 21:15-17)

The key question of the psalm comes in verse 4, when David asks, *“what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”* To be “mindful of” means to remember someone – but not simply to ‘not forget’, rather it means to do things because of them. David is asking: “God, why are we so important that you remember us, that you care for us?”

Many Christians struggle with this, because we know that none of us are really worthy of God’s love. But God chooses to love us, chooses to favour us. Chooses to love us so much that he sent his only begotten Son into creation to rescue us.

But not always: Going back to contemplating the heavens, though: do you ever think that maybe Galileo and Copernicus got it wrong, that our solar system doesn’t really revolve around the sun? Because on some days it seems like everything just revolves around us? We all have our moments of self-centeredness, right? And even if we don’t admit it about ourselves, we all can think of people who it seems do believe that the world revolves around them.

In fact, humans often do a good job of blocking out their view of the glory of God, just as we do to block out the night sky. Just as the light pollution of our city can stop us seeing the magnificence of the night

sky, all the distractions of the world can stop people seeing the glory of God.

As Christians, our value, our self-worth doesn't come from how important we are, who how important others thinks we are, nor does it come from positive thinking, nor from pep-talks, nor from motivational posters. It doesn't even come from what we achieve or what we do. Or what we give.

As Christians, our self-worth comes from knowing that God loves us, God values us. And no matter what we go through, we need to remember that God is mindful of us. God remembers us. Each one of us is on God's mind today. And always. God knows us. And God cares for us.

And just like clouds sometimes block our view of the night sky, the dark clouds of our lives sometimes block our view of the glory of God. But when that happens, we need to remember that just as the stars of the night sky continue to shine on the other side of the clouds, so does God's glory and love continue – even if it doesn't feel like it. As John's gospel tells us: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

Not only does God love us, but God also entrusts a special task to us. David talks of how God created humans just a "*little lower than the angels,*" and put us in charge of all the creation. This takes us back to 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.*"

Here in Psalm 8 David says "*You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*"

Or at Peter tells us, which we were reminded of a few weeks ago: *"...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

We – we all - have a special place in the world. In the universe. In creation. Human beings are not just another living thing on the earth. Human beings are special. But the sad reality is that people don't always live up to that special place – instead they contribute to the destruction of the environment, the destruction of society and the destruction of other people.

But that doesn't have to be the way.

Paul and the writer of Hebrews both point to Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of Psalm 8. In becoming human, in becoming one of us, Jesus made himself a little lower than the angels, to become one of us, to die on a cross, and to be raised on the third day, overcoming sin and conquering death for good. Once and for all. And Jesus will return to institute a new heaven and a new earth.

As we wait for that day, we can say with David *"LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"*

But we don't just wait. We don't just stand around hoping for something to happen soon. Because we have dominion over the world, we have a responsibility to use that dominion wisely... to use that dominion faithfully. To work to restore all things into relationship with God. We all get to be part of God's mission – and it's the mission that we heard in this morning's gospel reading *"...Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.""* (Matt 28:18-20a)"

That's the mission of the church. That's our mission, as a group and as individuals. It's our mission in response to God's glory revealed in Jesus.

And it is a daunting mission, and it will sometimes be a difficult mission, and we will sometimes suffer and we will sometimes fail.

But there are two things in our favour: Firstly, the mission is sharing the gospel. Sharing good news. And good news is meant to be shared.

Secondly, and even more importantly, we aren't alone in this mission: Jesus said *"And remember, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matt 28:20b)

It is not our strength, but his. It is not our power, but, as we were reminded last week, it's the Holy Spirit's power. And it is not our glory, but God's.

And so it is that we, as Christians, as followers of Jesus, can stand with David and say, "O LORD, our Lord, [O Yahweh, our Master], how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

To the glory of God.

Amen.