



First United Church of Oak Park

Remember Who You Are

Psalm 8

The Rev. John Edgerton

October 25, 2020

One of the great challenges of these days we are living in is how it makes me forget who I am. I used to love going to the grocery, particularly the week of Thanksgiving, when the stores are packed and the energy of the place is just electric. I know it's silly, but it made me feel like I was part of something exciting. Now I only go the store when there's less than an hour until it closes, because being around large crowds makes me feel like a disease vector. Something simple and good in life has gone, and I feel like I've forgotten how to enjoy being around people.

One of my favorite things about moving back home to Chicago is I was able to just drop in to see my parents, or my brother, or my niece and nephew. After ten years of living on the other side of the country, being in Chicago made me feel like I had a family again. Now the best we can manage is to play board games on FaceTime, and it's fun. But I feel like a talking head on a video screen. I feel like I've forgotten what it is like to be around my family.

I feel less connected to the sort of person God has made me to be, like I've forgotten something important about myself and I'm afraid I won't be able to remember who I am.

It seems our nation, too, has forgotten itself, forgotten its values. Hatred of the vulnerable streams from those pretending they are mighty — have we forgotten that our strength comes from unity? Hatred of foreigners streams from those pretending they love God and country — have we forgotten this is a nation of immigrants? Belief in absurd rumors streams from those desperate to explain away desperate times — have we forgotten our obligation to the truth?

I feel like our nation is less connected to the sort of place we aspire to be, like something great and grand and precious about this place has been forgotten, and I'm afraid we won't be able to remember who we are.

In times when it is hard to remember — hard to remember who I am, hard to remember what our nation might be — in times when it is hard to remember, I am so grateful for the words of Psalm 8, that I — that we human beings — that we are made a little lower than the angels. It can be hard to believe that we human beings are made in the very image and likeness of God.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established: what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them but a little lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honor.

This Psalm helps me remember. It helps me remember who I am. It also helps me remember ... New Mexico. I was eighteen and living in Santa Fe, and I went with three of my friends to walk up a mountain nearby called Santa Fe Baldy, so called because its top sits above the altitude where trees can survive, leaving its peak looking like a monk's shaved tonsure spot. It was 14,000 feet at the top, but we drove to the ski-basin and started at 11,000 feet early in the morning. We walked all day through that eggshell-thin air, and by the time the sun was setting, we were still a long way from the peak. So we decided to camp in a clearing — more than a clearing in fact — it was a meadow about a half-mile across. It was early fall, far past the rainy season in New Mexico, and so we simply slept in our sleeping bags with no tents, on a cloudless night with no moon. I woke up in the middle of the night, and when I opened my eyes, what I saw took my breath away. It was the stars, but not like I had known them through the fog of orange street lamps in Chicago. There were the stars I knew, Orion, Cassiopeia, Polaris, but with those familiar lights were an enormous host of Heaven I had not known existed, so many lights that whenever my eyes would focus on one of the few moth-eaten patches of darkness, new stars would seem to flare into existence where moments before there had been nothingness. The lights were so far beyond counting that it was like the sun had been flung against the very center of the curved expanse of the sky and burst into a million pieces. And most remarkable of all was that the sky was divided in half with a wide band of light as if a paintbrush dipped in stars had been dragged from horizon to horizon. I knew in that moment, even though I had never seen it before, that this band of light

was the Milky Way. There on that mountain top, I could see with my naked eye the shape of the galaxy itself, stretching so far that the light entering my eyes had been traveling for 100,000 years from the star that spawned it in fusion fire.

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established: what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

May this Psalm help you remember. May it help you remember who you are, who God made you to be. These days we are living in, they make it easy to forget, that’s true. They’ve somehow made our whole nation forget itself for a time.

But these hard days cannot take away from you what God has made you to be. Nothing can take away from you that you are made by the Lord God almighty, master of the whirling planets, composer of the music of the heavenly spheres, choreographer of the beautiful laws of mathematics dancing together in perfect harmony with the material world. That same God has made you, and nothing can change that, nothing can take that away from you.

Today, this week, these next nine days and quite possibly longer than that, remember the book of Psalms. Remember Psalm 8. Recite it to yourself when you see the moon. Drive out into the country and find a deserted spot and look up at the stars and pray this prayer. Because Psalm 8 is a prayer. Psalm 8 is a praise prayer of disbelief and wonder that the God who formed the moon and stars would not only create something as messy and messed up as human beings, but to crown us with the glory of God’s own image. Pray Psalm 8, and remember who you are. Amen.