

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA 22310
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Psalm 8
Romans 5:1–5

SUMMONS TO LIFE

When we hear or see the message of Romans, Chapter 5, and Psalm 8, what comes through for you? What is the essence of the message that you take away?

There's clear indication in what we have experienced this morning who God is. And there is a message about how big this universe of ours is and how far it is again beyond our ability to conceptualize. And then there's that message about how important we are to God. A message about our role in life as stewards over all that this great God has caused to come into existence—the created order in which we play and have life, in which we endure and know hope.

In our lessons today, there is much to comprehend about God's authority and the authority that has been given to us—about responsibility in awe and wonder. Did you know that Psalm 8 was the first scriptural passage to be delivered by Apollo 11 to the moon? Seventy-three nations sent messages on a silicone disc and included in those was a message from the Vatican. It included Psalm 8 proclaiming God's sovereignty and the human vocation. Clearly the psalmist had the leisure to think about God, and about who he was as one of the human race which God created and gave special authority/identity to.

I believe the life of faith—the journey of faith—that we all share, the thing we call discipleship, which some say is only about salvation and which others, like us, say is about not only salvation but about justification and about sanctification. The good news of the gospel really needs to be simplified and understood.

Who is God? Who are we? And what is the nature of our relationship? Those who've been through confirmation recently know these were some of the questions that we asked they include in their statements of faith. I think every Christian benefits from answering those questions in their own words.

Psalm 8, verse 2 says, “Out of the mouths of babes and infants we will hear our wisest responses to those questions.” In other words, the answer to who God is, who we are, and what the nature of our relationship is (though it could fill volumes) are best when they are simple and child-like. God is everything. God is over everything. And while we are not divine, we have been created “good” like all of God's creation and valuable to God, valuable to this world; and we share a unique relationship in all that God has done and created. Our lives alone can only be lived in proper context when God is first. Then and only then can we hear that summons to life.

Two people in my life have asked questions that pulled me up short after my first year of seminary. I remember my father-in-law at dinner laying in wait for me in the kindest pos-

sible spirit and asking me: “Basically, are we good or are we bad, Carl?” And I didn’t know enough then to be certain of my answer. All sorts of disclaimers and qualifications followed as I stumbled around, and then he brought me back to the first chapter of Genesis and “everything God has created God has made good.”

Another was a soccer coach. Early in my first child’s life, we moved to a community and for the first time he had a chance to be on a travel team—something a little bit more than just regular soccer. But we were told that it wouldn’t do any good to try out; he’ll never make the team. But he tried out anyway and, low and behold, this soccer coach saw something that he could work with. It wasn’t long before the coach and I were talking about faith, about theology, about the Bible, about belief. I remember walking across a soggy field and the soccer coach saying, “For me, it really all boils down to just one thing: here is God and here is humanity. Everything is as it should be as long as these two are kept in proper perspective. Our struggle is we always want to try to do this. [hand gesture] That soccer coach spoke volumes, so simple that anyone could grasp.

Susan Jacoby is a secular author. She doesn’t think very much of the church or of people of faith. And she argues that the only real explanation for the persistence of the church is our inflated opinion of ourselves.

Shelley Cunningham is a Lutheran pastor from Minnesota, that state where all the children are smart and all the men and women are above average, or something like that. Anyway, Shelley Cunningham observes that Miss Jacoby doesn’t understand Psalm 8. Humans are just a little lower than elohim (el-oh-heem, phonetically)—that which is divine. And we are charged with the responsibility to care for all of God’s creation, all living things. She goes on to note that the psalmist isn’t holding us up as the center of the universe, clearly Psalm 8 holds up the power and majesty of God. God created the infinite stars, the intricate web of all living organisms. And God still holds all that God has created in God’s hands.

No matter what others may say, religion and faith are not about proclaiming how great we are, it’s about proclaiming how great the Lord is. Someone has tried to help us understand the magnitude of God’s greatness by putting our own galaxy in perspective. If our galaxy were the relative size of North America, then our solar system—our sun and the planets which orbit the sun—would be the size of a quarter. So imagine how big we are on that quarter. This person says it’s kind of like that part of an atom we now call a quark.

I recently had a group of college students with me during the big snow, and we were up in the mountains where there weren’t nearly as many lights as there are around here. Some of the kids said they had never seen a night sky that wasn’t infected by light pollution, and they were dumb-founded. If you were to start counting the stars in our galaxy and you counted one per second, it would take you 2,500 years to count them all.

Our galaxy contains billions of stars, and yet our galaxy is only one in at least 200 billion galaxies. (I fully expect you to go home and check all these facts.) But my message, and the message that has come to us through scripture today, is that religion—faith—

still proclaims boldly in the vastness of all that God has created, the living word has come into our hearts. The promises of this trustworthy God are still true for each of us and all of us.

Yes, if you listen closely, the children's sermon said it all. It is indeed the greatest statement of faith for us to proclaim God cares about you and God cares about me. And so it is right that we should feel honored and valuable. Not because of our self-worth, but because the God who summoned life into being still wants a personal relationship with us. That's what we meant when we said together, "Oh Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." Amen.