

Almost Perfect

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. 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 a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Here we are this morning, worshipping outdoors in God's beautiful creation. I want you to take a moment to really look around. Notice something you haven't really looked at before. A number of years ago, a reporter carried out an interesting survey on the street. Pedestrians were stopped at random and asked, without looking up, to describe the sky as it was that day. Only a small percentage could give a description with reasonable accuracy. It's kind of like that old question, "Do fish know they're wet?" Fish are so completely surrounded by water, all the time, you have to wonder if they really notice it. We, after all, don't really notice the air most of the time.

When you stop to think about it, it's kind of interesting how easy it is for something to become commonplace for us. For us to stop noticing. Especially when the world around us is so fascinating. All you have to do to realize the complexities and nuances of creation is to watch the Discovery Channel series *Planet Earth* or *Life*. Both of these series look at some of the animals and plants and ecosystems that are less familiar to us. Of course, it doesn't hurt that they were trying to push the envelope with cutting edge techniques in filming either.

When we really stop to notice, creation is amazing. Awe-inspiring. Overwhelming. And like the Psalmist, we stop to wonder where we fit in all of this. At best estimate, there are 100-

200 billion galaxies in the universe. God's creation is a huge place, full of amazing things. Why would God bother to notice a few puny humans running around? Because God created us. And more than that, our Psalm reminds us, we were created in God's image, just a little less than God.

We may not always be attentive to the world around us. We may not always notice God's creation. But God notices us – because God cares so much about us. Recall the words of Jesus in the book of Matthew: “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” And again, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

In fact, God cares about us so much that we have been invited to be co-creators with God. We get to be part of the ongoing miracle that is creation. Our Psalm this morning says that God has given us dominion over the universe. We read that same thing back in Genesis, when God first creates the world. In Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Far from seeing people as one small component of a wide and wonderful creation, God cares for us. And thinks so highly of us, he lets us participate in the ongoing work of creation. God, in fact, puts us in charge! God thinks we are the right ones for the job. But after thousands of years, it seems to me, we are only almost right for the job. The Psalm puts it well this morning: we are so small, such a tiny part of creation, yet we are crowned with the glory of God's image. We are so close to perfect, and yet so far away. Paul reflects on this reality in his

letters in the Bible. In Romans, he writes, “I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate.”

So we have been given this important charge from God. God has given us dominion of creation. But we have messed up. First, we have misunderstood the word ‘dominion.’ It’s a dangerous word, because it tends to evoke images of absolute power and control. Over the generations, humanity has used this word as justification for mistreatment of the environment, claiming that God gave it to us to use as we see fit. However, a closer look at the term reveals that the kind of control God grants to humans is of a totally different sort. The Hebrew word, *mashal*, is also used to describe the way that God rules over creation. God’s role is one of caretaker, who does not use creation to his own benefit, but rather protects and sustains it for the use of others. Likewise, we are entrusted with the great responsibility of tending the garden of creation.

Well if that’s true, then why is the same word used in Genesis, this time also with the word ‘subdue?’ God tells Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Well, the Hebrew word *kabash* here refers literally to the earth, the ground. God is talking about cultivation, gardening. Farming today is a labor-intensive and difficult job, but imagine how much more so it was thousands of years ago. So to subdue the earth was simply to be able to bring forth crops to feed people.

We could have been perfect for the job. God said to us, “Here is creation. Care for it and treat it the way I treat you.” But we have misunderstood the words ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue,’ so we have fallen short of perfect. Of course, not everyone has misunderstood these words. Not every person has gone pillaging and rampaging across creation, mindlessly using the world

without any regard for the consequences. Unfortunately, however, we have sometimes been ignorant of the consequences of our actions.

One of the ways environmentalists try to quantify how we are using the resources of creation is by creating a measure called a carbon footprint. Your footprint is calculated based on a number of things, but essentially how many resources you use and how many you replenish. You can calculate a carbon footprint for an individual, for a family, or even a country. Not surprisingly, Americans tend to rate high. In fact, if everyone on the planet consumed resources the way the average American does, we would need six planet earths just to keep up with us!

Larson and I try to do better than that. We recycle. We compost. We use cloth diapers. We replace things only when they're broken, not just because we feel like it. We buy local food at the Farmer's Market in the summer. But even we are using up more than our fair share. According to an online quiz, if everyone in the world lived like us, we would still need 3.8 planets. That's better than six, but you don't have to be a math whiz to know that this is unsustainable.

The only reason we haven't yet destroyed the planet is because there is a large population who counterbalances the overconsumption of Americans and Europeans. Nearly 80% of the world lives on less than \$10 a day. These people, living in poverty, use less than their fair share of resources. We generally have our needs met, and many of our wants as well. Meanwhile, the reason that's possible is because around the world, others are struggling just to meet their basic needs.

So what is it we should be doing? What does God want from us, as the caretakers of creation? We are responsible for using creation in a way that meets the needs of all, not just the wants of a few. For many of us, that means we need to change the way we live. We need to

simplify how we live and what we use so that there are resources left for others. We have to find ways to protect resources for fair distribution.

Sometimes we can do that by making only small changes in our lives. Recycle as much of your garbage as possible. Much of what we throw away we can immediately stop thinking about, but those same items sit in a landfill for hundreds of years. Better yet, we should try to make less garbage in the first place. A lot of consumer products that have appeared in the last decade have been an attempt to make life more convenient. Individually wrapped snacks. Juice boxes. Disposable anything. These products have made life easier in the short run – but what are we doing to God’s creation in the long run? Instead, take your own cloth bags with you when you go shopping. Use more washcloths and towels, instead of paper towels. Pack your lunch in reusable Tupperware instead of plastic bags.

We can also start to work toward making larger changes. Lifestyle changes. What if we all had solar panels, or insisted that our electricity companies use renewable sources for power? What if we used more public transportation, or carpoled more, or had more efficient vehicles? What if we took a hard look at where we spend our money? We can choose to buy only from ecologically responsible companies. We can even choose to spend less money and own less stuff. It won’t be easy, and it won’t happen overnight. But we can start to work in that direction.

Psalms 8 is a bold statement about the inherent worth and value of human beings. It proclaims that God cares about us amid all the marvelous things God has created, and we have been given special responsibility to care for the rest of God’s creation. What God has created so far is spectacular. And God has invited us to be co-creators in the process. Will we answer the call to be creative? Or will we destroy what we have been given? Amen and amen.