

July 15, 2018
National Presbyterian Church
Standing Tall When You Are Thinking Small
David Renwick

Psalm 8

Our Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!
You let your glory be seen in the heavens above.
With praises from children and from tiny infants,
you have built a fortress.
It makes your enemies silent,
and all who turn against you are left speechless.
I often think of the heavens your hands have made,
and of the moon and stars you put in place.
Then I ask: “Why do you care about us?
Why are you concerned for us, for we are just human?”
You made us a little lower than yourself, and you have crowned us with glory and honor. You let
us rule everything your hands have made.
And you put all of it under our power— the sheep and the cattle, and every wild animal, the birds
in the sky, the fish in the sea, and all ocean creatures.
Our Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!

In our sermons in July we’re looking together at some of the Psalms

Last Sunday, Donna Marsh spoke about Psalm 139, and the wonderful truth that we do not need to pretend to be anyone other than who we are. God sees us, and knows us and loves us as we are. Of course, this is no justification to remain as we are. We’re clearly called to strive to be the best we can be. But there’s never a good reason to pretend or to wear a façade in order to be just like everyone else, or as others want us to be.

The poet, E.E. Cummings, once said:

“To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best day and night to make you like everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.”

E. E. Cummings: A miscellany Revised, 1965. By E. E Cummings

In other words, it’s **“a real fight to be REAL”**! But with God’s help, it’s a fight we can win.

That was last week. This Sunday, the Psalm I want us to think about is Psalm 8, which contains a theme that is not-unrelated to “being real”: the theme of “significance.”

That is, “Who we are as human beings”; our value as human beings, our estimation of ourselves – or to use a phrase that we hear frequently these days, I want us to think about our self-esteem and where it comes from or ought to come from if we are believers in God-made-known-in-Jesus.

Clearly how we think about ourselves and how we value ourselves matters.

- Sometimes we want to bury our lives in the ground and disappear into a hole because we think too little of ourselves;
- And sometimes it's the opposite: we lift ourselves up and become arrogant or self-righteous because we think too much of ourselves.

And this is PRIDE! which is never far away, especially if we have been successful or even moderately successful in life.

But “pride” – thinking too much of ourselves – can get us into a whole heap of trouble if we are not careful. For example: the late Swiss physician, Paul Tournier, once said

*It is well known that the most frequent cause of errors in medical diagnosis is the overconfidence of the physician **in him or herself**.*

When we get lost in ourselves – thinking too much of ourselves we can become blind so easily, to all the things we do not and cannot know *and this can cause serious harm to ourselves and others*.

BUT so too, on the other hand, can thinking too little of ourselves. And my guess is that for many of us these days our problem is not so much, or not just that that we lift ourselves up too high but that (at times, and for some, all the time) we actually put ourselves down too low!

Norman Vincent Peale the late pastor of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, shared that when he was a child he constantly thought too little of himself. He was always dealing with his own sense of inferiority and insecurity. And he wrote these words about himself:

“Perhaps the most difficult problem I ever faced, as a youth was my inferiority complex. I was shy and filled with self-doubt. In fact I lived like a scared rabbit. I constantly told myself that I had no brains, no ability, that I didn't amount to anything, and never would.

The True Joy of Positive Living: An Autobiography

That was his self-appraisal! And sometimes such a negative self-appraisal can be absolutely devastating, becoming a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Psychiatrist Smiley Blanton once told the story of a middle-aged man named Gillespie, who, like Norman Peal, had a crippling sense of inferiority. This man came to Dr. Blanton for help. And Dr. Blanton probed deeply and began to explore this man's past, and discovered that when he was 14 years of age he had a math teacher who mocked him incessantly.

Whenever Gillespie was facing a problem the teacher would say, “*Come on, come up to the board and show us the solution to this problem.*”

And the teacher would know that Gillespie couldn't do it, and that there would come this moment of awkwardness when he would give up.

And the teacher would point to him, and tell him in front of the whole class, *that his head was empty; there was nothing in his brain.*

And what Doctor Blanton discovered was that those words affected everything that Gillespie did from that time on. They were like poison in his soul effectively crippling his life and effectiveness – until the poison was identified, and expunged, and set him free

Told by Ruth Stafford Peale, in Plus, June 1991, pp.16-17

Sometimes there is a lingering and destructive WORD in our minds, spoken to us by someone who was significant to us – or who had power over us (like a teacher or parent) – at the time.

Or, sometimes – it may NOT be a word that makes us feel small, *but an ACTION*: something we did, our fault or not, that we regret; a failure within our life, a weakness – and we haven't been able to let go of that either.

Dale Galloway is a retired pastor from Portland Oregon and he speaks about the impact of hearing the news of his wife's request for a divorce and how painful it was. He knew he wasn't by any means innocent, But the moment was still dreadful:

"It all happened exactly as my wife had told me that it would. According to her preplanned time schedule a total stranger handed me those dreadful divorce papers on that fateful Friday a few days before Christmas. Within 24 hours I stood at the Portland International Airport and through misty eyes watched helplessly as the woman I'd loved since I was 18 years old led my two children onto an airplane and departed never to return.

Many times as a minister I've heard people talk about some things feeling worse than death. At that moment – and in the following days for me –that was so: life was worse than death.

("12 Ways to Develop a Positive Attitude", introduction).

Feeling small – way small? It can happen in multiple ways:

- What we've done or failed to do
- What people have done to or said about us

All of it can powerfully and negatively impact on what we do, or don't do, with our lives.

Sometimes the problem is really complicated – I know that! And the help we need is professional: medical or mental health care (like Gillespie) is needed, and we should never be ashamed of that. It's available: take it!

But what I also know is this, that sometimes the adjustment we need when we're feeling small, to change our lives dramatically for good is not complicated or huge at all.

Let me put it like this:

- If a small negative word spoken by somebody significant can push us down and make us feel very small indeed,

Then, in the same way, it's surely quite possible that

- a small, but positive, word spoken by somebody significant can also lift us up, to stand as tall as God made us to be.

There's a great **story about Bart Starr**, quarterback for the Green Bay Packers in the 1960's.

Bart had a little incentive game going with his son – Bart Junior. Bart Junior was a lucky boy! If he got a perfect score on a paper at school, then when he arrived home, he would get paid – a whopping ten cents!

Apparently, in those days, 10¢ was quite an incentive, and Bart Jr. was motivated by this – it worked: one dime for a perfect paper.

In 1967, Green Bay would win the first ever Super Bowl, but two years earlier, in January 1965, even though they made it to the playoffs against Saint Louis, they lost 24-17 and Bart Sr. felt bad about his game. The trip home was long, the season suddenly ended, and when he

arrived home late he was down on himself, feeling small. Until he got into his bedroom, and looked at his pillow. And there on his pillow was a note from his son, and on the note it said, “Dear Dad, I thought you played a great game. Love Bart.” And then right beside the note, taped to it – not just one dime but two.

The Christian Athlete

What a difference a couple of dimes can make! A little word or action from someone who is significant to us. It could be a child? a parent? a friend? a spouse? Who knows who it is – and our view of ourselves can begin to change.

And this really is the message of Psalm 8.

It’s a message ABOUT THE MOST-“SIGNIFICANT-OTHER” OF-ALL sent TO and ABOUT US, THAT God cannot get us out of God’s mind and heart. Though we are mortal, though we are mere flesh, and though we will wither away and die, just dust and ashes, God says to us through Psalm 8 *that we matter, infinitely: you and I matter infinitely to the infinite God*. So we have every reason to stand tall.

And this is where Christian, Biblical self-esteem starts: not with our greatness but with God’s. And It’s where Psalm 8 starts too.

It begins like this:

*Our Lord and Ruler, YOUR name is wonderful everywhere on earth!
You let YOUR glory be seen in the heavens above.*

In other words, ultimately the most significant reality in the universe is not US, but GOD.

God’s “name” is God’s person, and “It’s GOD’s name that is wonderful everywhere on earth.” And God’s “glory” is the greatness of God’s person that overflows into the universe (like the light and heat of the sun overflowing to the earth), and It’s GOD’s glory that is seen in the heavens –not ours.

Sometimes we as adults see this, and sometimes we just plain miss it: too consumed with ourselves. But children and infants don’t! They often see what we miss. They know they are not great in themselves. They know they’re dependent on others. They know that if they have strength, that it always comes from beyond them. So the Psalmist adds:

*With praises from children and from tiny infants,
you have built a fortress. It makes your enemies silent,
and all who turn against you are left speechless.*

So this is what the Psalmist believes: that God is the greatest.

BUT what he also believes is this: that the one who is the greatest – the “infinitely significant one” – makes a choice! About us! To give us significance too! Not to ignore us, but to notice us, and honor us, and, in fact, to give us life itself!

So He writes:

*I often think of the heavens – your hands have made,
and of the moon and stars – you put in place.
Then I ask: “Why do you care about us?
Why are you concerned for us? – for we are just human*

Compared to God, to begin with, he feels small. But then comes the awesome, staggering realization that the infinite God chooses to MAKE US TOO! (not just the moon and stars, BUT US! and not just arbitrarily or secondarily). He continues:

IT'S You WHO made us – just a little lower than you yourself

(which is another way of saying that our creation wasn't arbitrary: that we were made to be like God: *in God's image*; Genesis 1:26)

And you have crowned US (in other words: made us royalty) with glory and honor.

“Glory and honor” are attributes that belong to God.

So God treats us as if we were God! As if we were sons and daughters of the King of Kings. And more than that, God also treat us as *responsible partners* not just children, by entrusting to us the care of his creation:

You let us rule everything your hands have made.

And you put all of it under our power —

(everything else you've made, for example)

***the sheep and the cattle, and every wild animal,
the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and all ocean creatures.***

Which leads to the final burst of praise (from someone now standing tall)

OUR Lord and Ruler, your name is wonderful everywhere on earth!

- Feeling tired or weary?
- small and insignificant?
- in bondage
 - to feelings that belittle you,
 - or words that somebody spoke that cripple you?
 - or to failures or regrets that hold you down?

Psalm 8 is a love letter from God, the infinitely significant One,

who says ***“Remember who I am, so you can know who you are that YOU matter – to the One who matters most!”***

One final thing. **Remember those words from Norman Vincent Peale that I mentioned a few moments ago?** About his struggle as a child? This is how he describes what happened with those feelings. He writes:

One summer Sunday afternoon when I was 12 my father said he wanted to call on a family living two miles out in the country and asked me to accompany him as he walked over there.

On the walk father asked me:

“Norman, are you willing to let the great Doctor Jesus Christ treat you? If you will let Jesus take charge of your mind (If you will allow him to be the most significant person in your life) – you can be free of this misery, which if it continues can destroy your effectiveness.”

I said I would put my life into the hands of this Jesus.

My father committed me to Christ in a prayer.

He then asked me to tell Jesus that I was giving myself into his hands quite deliberately and letting go by an act of affirmation of all my inferiority feelings.

As we walked home in the gathering twilight I felt a sense of peace and happiness as though I were really on top of this problem and although I had another bout with inferiority during my college days, the same remedy was applied again, with the result that this self-defeating thought was healed through the power of Christ.

Thank God . . . We don't have to be God. God is God: we are not!

Thank God . . . We don't have to be perfect: God is perfect: we are not!

This is the anti-dote to pride

- It is **God's** name that is majestic in and above all the Earth.
- **God** is the only truly significant one – who really matters

But it is precisely this very idea that is also the basis of our ability to STAND TALL! It's the infinite One, the one who ultimately matters and who is ultimately significant who chooses to say to you and me

- ***“You matter to me; you are infinitely precious and significant to me:***
- ***I'm the one who crowns you – and I do it with glory and honor***

Friends BELIEVE THIS VERY GOOD NEWS!

And let it enter, your soul, and change you – FOR EVER

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THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016
www.NationalPres.org 202.537.0800