

Why God? (Holy Trinity, 16June19)
Psalm 8

Clouds, sleepiness, and other factors have complicated things so far, but I'll keep trying (maybe in the darkness of the Boundary Waters) to see Jupiter four times brighter than the brightest star in the sky. It's so close (relatively speaking, of course) that the four Galilean moons should be visible with binoculars. Those moons were first spotted by Galileo 400 years ago, the biggest of around 79 moons Jupiter has. There may even be a chance to see the Great Red Spot, a centuries-old storm that had been three times the size of our entire planet, but has calmed by 20% in the past month, and nobody knows why.

It's so phenomenal, and fits exactly with the Psalmist's neck craned heavenward to the sun, moon, and stars that the Creator set in their courses. Like the composer of Psalm 8, we may be struck by a feeling of insignificance. Thinking on that scale, particularly enveloped by wilderness night sky, we ask "What are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them?"

I was hearing that Ben, three-year old brother of baptism baby James, is fond of asking Why? Sometimes even 20 consecutive answers and explanations still prompt a 21st "Why?" His dad Mike matches that with his own perspective on God, asking lots of Whys, always wondering, wondering, wondering.

And that's what's in our Psalm today. Looking up across lightyears, trying to fathom the unfathomable, pondering our place: Why would God care for humans?

The Psalm seems to have one answer for what makes us special, which might strike us as pompous and domineering. It presumes a hierarchy and finds our uppity place in it. This view draws a chart with God at the top, then angels or divine beings, and humans still pretty close to the top, going down from there to good animals maybe like gorillas or dolphins or pet dogs, followed by lower animals like blue jays and salamanders and hermit crabs, and then slugs

and jellyfish and mosquitoes, on down to trees and flowers, which are still higher than dirt and rocks and a muddy puddle.

That tiered system may try to label what's alive or not. There's also food chain elements to it. And it involves a perspective on complexity, that your eyeball is more evolved than a jellyfish belly.

But it seems slightly suspicious to claim I'm better as a human being, while an oak tree hundreds of years old is nothing, or a structured colony of bees, or even my dog who understands my language though I don't understand his at all. Not to mention claiming that I'm alive means I must be favored over (possibly) lifeless Jupiter, even though it's 2.5 times as massive as all the other planets in the solar system combined.

Not only is it slightly audacious and dubiously defined to stake out that position for ourselves, but it comes with a terrible risk. For some reason, we wind up quick to abuse our territory, claiming we can lord it over other creatures, can trample them and do what we like without regard for others.

We should clearly realize that this Psalm is far from giving us permission to do harm or use up this earth. After all, creatures declare God's majesty. A lake with its fish poisoned, a sky too polluted to see stars, a dead field that holds soybeans but harbors no life, diminish the praise of a majestic God.

Even in this sanctuary, when it's too focused on humans, loses the best and most authentic praise. I'd really like to get a bird to sing Alleluias with us. But at least for the summer we've got plants and fish that rightly expand our praise.

I believe the place of humans is not better or worse, but different. See, birds sing their praise without instruction. Plants grow and bear fruit. Fish naturally know their place. Jupiter doesn't need to be told how to be a planet. But humans need the reminder. Unlike the rest of creation, it seems, we need to be re-placed in these relationships, to be set right.

So instead of ranking it in a hierarchy to make winners and losers, instead of carving out our

niche as haughty trampling tyrants on the one hand, or falling from the moral high ground into lament and despair of the damage we've done and how difficult it sometimes seems it is to do right, to be well, to live life as we should—neither placing ourselves abusively above nor so low and feeble, instead today we have a different perspective, and it comes to us from James Robert, or maybe with him.

“What are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, O God, human beings that you should care for them?” That question remains. As a remarkable mark of mindfulness and care, God gives the promise in baptism.

God has claimed a place of prominence for James Robert. God has offered eternal assurances, tying him to the resurrected and unending life of Jesus. James Robert is clothed in the very presence of God, chosen for God's mission in the world of right relationships of justice and peace. He has been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Clearly that is a gift. Sure, we could say that James Robert is plenty cute, especially when he's smiling. But God didn't choose him for his looks.

It's not because of his singing voice or because he knows the answers and can speak for God, though the Psalm says God's praise and defense comes out of the mouths of babes and infants. I don't expect the next time he's wailing in the middle of the night it will feel like he's praising God. Yet God must not need our articulate words, our songs pitched to praise. Even with a small sob, God wants to be identified.

Even more clearly, then, the status of humans generally and James Robert particularly is not from his potential, because he's so powerfully capable. This is the really amazing thing about baptizing babies: it's not their choice. It's not their ability. It's not their response. It's not the good they have done or the bad that they'll try to stay away from. It's only and totally because God wants him. What are human beings that God is mindful, we little people that God cares? Well, with baptism we have the clear proclamation that our place is beloved. It's not anything we are or aren't but is because of what God is, a God of

love, of relationship, a God of reconciliation and compassion, a God striving for life.

On this Trinity Sunday, maybe that's what we notice, a God not of lording it over, not of power and might, but a God of possibility and life, even beyond death, a God delighting in creation, a God who is somehow with us right now.

We ask why. And we can't fully know. We ask how, and we can just trust. We may only have that our tradition has been able to discern this God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, the Father of Jesus, God incarnate suffering to make it right, God's Spirit invisible but still bringing Jesus to be with us as she leads us into this truth. And all that because God wants you to know your place: you are loved.