

**Who Am I?**  
Psalm 8  
Northridge Presbyterian Church  
August 27, 2023

**Many years ago, when I was just starting out in ministry, I found myself lying on my back on the church lawn.**

I got myself into this position when a VBS small group leader decided her young charges needed to slow down a bit after several high energy games. At her direction, we all found a patch of grass, laid down, and looked up to do some cloud watching.

Every child immediately saw things in the sky. I can't remember all of the animals and other characters they were able to see among the abstract arrangement of clouds. I do, however, remember how excited they were when an airplane entered our overhead scene. As it entered the clouds one of the young theologians exclaimed "it's flying all the way up to God!"

This morning we are continuing a summer series on the Psalms with an exploration of Psalm 8 – a Psalm that begins and ends with a similar observation: O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

This is important because Psalm 8 is the first of several Psalms classified as a hymn of praise and the only hymn in the book of Psalms that is spoken entirely to God.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the words may sound familiar to you for a number of reasons, including their regular appearance in worship as one of the readings on Trinity Sunday. Placed alongside other readings on that day, this passage is intended to teach us about God.

Since today isn't Trinity Sunday and since your pastor is an excellent theological educator, I'll simply note that this is one of the two big ideas present in Psalm 8.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome Creech. Commentary on Psalm 8. (Working Preacher, May 2013). Available from [workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-psalm-8-6](http://workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity-3/commentary-on-psalm-8-6)

**The other big idea – the one we turn our attention to – begins with anthropology rather than theology. It seeks to answer the question “Who am I?” rather than “Who is God?”**

Human identity.

The “who am I?” question is an inquiry that invites consideration of what it means to be a human being.

Right in the middle of Psalm 8 we are confronted with the Psalmist’s version of that question: What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (NRSV)

The Message renders the verse: Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way?

The New Century Version is even more direct: But why are people important to you? Why do you take care of human beings?

So . . . who am I? And, who are you?

According to the verses that follow, humans are

- made a little lower than God, and crowned with glory and honor
- tasked with caring for the rest of creation

This imagery is intended to take us back to the beginning – all the way to the very first story on the first page of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is there that we were first told how we came to be and learned that God created people in God’s own image.

So, the best way I know to begin answering the question “who am I?” is to remind myself I’m not a self-made person. I’m a God created creature made in God’s own image who is tasked with living in God honoring ways.

One significant aspect of being made in God’s image is that humans are relational. And, those of us here who have chosen to follow in the Way of Jesus are mindful that our religious path is one that is shaped by love – love for all: God, self, neighbor, and creation.

## **Who am I? I'm someone who loves, praises, and worships a God who first loved me.**

One of my favorite Christian authors, Diana Butler Bass had a Damascus Road experience in her mid-20s that made this real for her.

Diana and her conservative Calvinist husband were attending an Episcopal church that was conflicted over the topic of ordaining women. The disagreement had become so serious that the church was in danger of splitting. They invited the bishop to come address the congregation.

The big meeting grew more and more tense culminating with Diana's then husband asking the bishop, "What is the Gospel?"

"The bishop didn't blink. He didn't fight back. Instead he opened his arms to the room and said, "God is love."

The ... questioner said, "Well, yes. But what is the Gospel?"

The bishop said again, "God is love." He stopped for a moment, breathed deeply, and added, "And God loves everybody."

The demand came again. "What is the Gospel?"

"God loves everybody," the bishop said firmly. "God loves everybody. That's the Gospel."

The room was in an uproar. And I stood frozen with small tears in my eyes. God loves everybody. That was it. I heard it. I've never not heard it every single day since then.

I didn't quite get it at first. It took about six years for it to really sink in - and make a difference - and start to become the person I am now.<sup>2</sup>

Siblings in Christ, when you've encountered the God who is love and who loves everybody, you too will be changed. And, you will wholeheartedly love, praise and worship the Loving One.

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<sup>2</sup> Diana Butler Bass. God Loves Everybody and Every Body (The Cottage, September 2021). Available from <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/god-loves-everybody-and-every-body>

**Who am I? I am someone who loves my neighbor as myself, which is a statement that requires a commitment to self-care and self-love.**

Jesus calls us to get over ourselves and to adopt his inclusive definition of neighbor. In short, whoever crosses our path is our neighbor. This requires us to show love to the neighbors we actually encounter not to the idealized ones we wish to encounter.

At White Rock Center of Hope, we never know who will walk through our doors next. On any given day, we serve a few dozen families who are struggling in one or more areas of life.

These are the neighbors many people work hard not to see. God invites us not only to see these people, but to journey with these neighbors. We are called to love those who are rude, mean, or defiant just as we love those who are sweet, kind, and compliant.

Not long ago a new to us neighbor arrived just after we had closed for the day. They banged and banged on the door until someone went to greet them and to let them know they'd need to return again the next day . . . or at least that was what I assumed was happening.

Instead, a few volunteers recognized this person was in distress and surrounded this individual with love, providing after-hours compassion alongside a few bags of groceries. And, they made sure the person had a way to return to receive additional help in the future.

This isn't a dramatic story, but that's precisely the point. It's a simple reminder that loving our neighbor is a moment-by-moment choice. Your next opportunity might be as close as an unwelcomed knock on the door or unexpected encounter the next time you are out and about in our community.

**Who am I? I'm someone who takes seriously God's call to love all of creation by caring for the environment and for all of the creatures with whom we share this planet.**

People are increasingly aware of both the beauty and fragility of creation. Reflecting on the last few weeks, I'm reminded that all is far from well:

- Almost every day, I'm greeted by a message on my phone warning me that today will be another dangerously hot day.
- Parts of the Western United States experienced flooding from Tropical Storm Hilary.
- Maui's wildfire was the deadliest in our country in over 100 years.

Cherokee descendant Randy Woodley is a Christian missiologist, farmer, and professor who offers this wisdom,

"In the Genesis accounts of creation, I find a world where each part of creation is related to the other . . . The importance of the narrative is not just about humans. It is also about the animal kingdom and the plants and the water and the sky and everything else . . . I think the original stories are meant to help us see a bigger picture than what we normally see. My theology begins with the land."<sup>3</sup>

For those of us who live in the city, it is easy to become and remain disconnected from the land.

As someone with limited personal experience in this area, I'm intrigued by the ways in which congregations and individuals are committing to both learning more and living differently.

Recently I was challenged to reconsider my view when a colleague shared about the development of her congregation's community garden. It has become a place where people build new relationships with one another and with the earth. And, it has led to many questions about where people's food comes from and why that matters.

Caring for creation necessarily includes the land that is beneath our feet. And, it invites us to recognize the interdependence that is all around us.

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<sup>3</sup> Randy Woodley. *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview: A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Baker Academic, 2022), p56.

## **Who am I?**

I've asked the question many times because it is important.

It's a question we all get asked by others from time to time. And, if we are the least bit introspective, it's also a question we ask of ourself.

The next time you encounter the "who am I?" question, resist the temptation to robotically reply with a default answer.

Instead, remind yourself that you are a child of God and that you've been invited to co-create God's realm here on earth as it already is in heaven.

Amen.