

May 30, 2010

Psalm 8

1 O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
"To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth--

when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

+ + +

Well I'm excited.

It appears that the theological brains of the operation might finally have joined some texts together and for Trinity Sunday, of all times--

There's that Psalm 8 thing we all love that either picked up, or loaned to-- the idea that human beings are the creatures-- that is to say, we are created beings who have dominion, that is to say dominate the earth.

In the mind of this poet we particular creatures have divine permission to dominate the earth-- which to my way of thinking makes us like James Bond; it's as though God has given us a license to kill.

Let's read some of it again in a slightly different way just to bring home the parts I underlined.

"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 *us*, mortals that you care for them *us*?

"Yet you have made them *us* a little lower than God, and crowned them *us* with glory and honor. You have given *us* dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under *our* feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, (*the oil beneath the sea,*) (*the coal beneath the mountains*) whatever passes along the paths of the seas."

Sounds like permission to me. Sounds like to the poet at least, that God has given us the dreaded "double 0 prefix".

But that's not all. As long as we're cherry picking, let's take a look at what else God has given us that should be grounds to keep our homicidal tendencies in check.

In Proverbs 8 we find,

“Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
“To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.”

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.” Proverbs 8:1-4, 22

Theoretically then, we have a corrective. We have the power, but we also have the good sense not to use the power.

You may not like where I'm going with this, and I don't either, but after 40+ days of watching oil pouring out of that hole at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, of suffering scenes of birds of the air all black and glistening, of wondering about the effect of all this on the fish of the sea; I'm sorry but I'm just going to have to champion the obvious and reflect on what we know all too well, but would rather not discuss-- but wait-- that's right, what was I thinking? *We don't mind discussing it.* But damned if we're going to do the first thing about it. And when I say damned, I mean *condemned*, because once the “birds of the air” and “the fish of the sea” of the sea are ruined, condemned is a pretty good assessment of what our condition will be.

We've got our double 0 prefix. Might as well use it.

But we're old, right? We won't be around to see the massive result of all this foolishness. We'll be in eternity, a long way away and probably unable to hear our grandchildren's grandchildren cursing, condemning, damning us.

So I wanted to offer yet another passage of interest for this morning's topic. It's from...

Hosea 4:1-6

I don't know how *in the world* he knew about our present condition, but listen to what he said.

*1 Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.*

What's that all about?

An indictment against the inhabitants of the land?

Good thing this passage is nearly three thousand years old,

Hosea can't be talking about us, or can he?

Maybe it's just the usual sin thing.

OK, Lord I have made yet another mistake for which I am heartily sorry.

Will you forgive me?

Will you show me how to keep from making that mistake again?

Will you, because of my earnest and honest plea, keep this blot from my permanent record?

Is this one of those timeless passages?

Is this one of those times that the prophet spoke all those years ago only for us to discover that the words are not limited to those people who lived all those years ago, but they apply equally to us?

Oh it must be one of those preacher conceits, where the person in the pulpit tries to squeeze some relevance out of an orange already sucked dry.

Well forget about it preacher, didn't the words clearly address the people of Israel? And am I not from Covington, or Erlanger, or Florence, Kentucky, for goodness sake? Did you hear that preacher? Kentucky? That's a place that isn't even in the Bible, you won't find it in your concordance, so what does this have to do with me? Or anyone in this room, including the preacher?

Besides, Hosea doesn't even have a last name, let alone a social security number. He must not be too important.

OK, so maybe, "the Lord *has* an indictment against the inhabitants of the land."

And just maybe we have to include ourselves as among the inhabitants of the land as part of being all people across all time, living on all the land.

Now listen to the summary of human behavior because once again, it's not just about Israel.

"There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land.

Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish;

together with the wild animals and the birds of the air,

even the fish of the sea are perishing."

Here's the thing. I'm not so sure that all that biblical stuff about having dominion over the earth is right. I know it seems right, after all we're the brains of creation, according to the scripture, we've got the wisdom that supposedly tempers the alleged license to kill.

“Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest. You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night, and I will destroy your mother.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

How about that, apart from having to live in the consequences of our greed, you folks get a Get Our of Jail Free card, and because my colleagues and I were not doing our job, we will bear the greater penalty.

Because priest and prophet failed to differentiate ourselves from people who are our responsibility; because we failed to be “in the world but not of it” by being too much of the world, because we want to be liked, approved of, honored, have big congregations and fat paychecks, and perhaps most of all, a job...

We didn’t do the job we were entrusted with. We were afraid people would leave. We didn’t want to be blamed for ruining the church-- and we have almost all sold out and the oil belching into the Gulf of Mexico is the judgment against us.

And so I apologize to you for not doing my job by pointing out the obvious and by reminding us that we do not have dominion over the earth, despite what you might have read, or even where you read it. For as time has passed more and more of us have come to realize that we are but a cog in the created machine and we must do our part to keep everything humming along.

We’re not the boss of it.

It is God’s world, and God’s universe. It is God’s creation and we are but an important part of it; but are we more important than anything else God created? No

And how do we turn back from our effort of suicide by proxy of future generations? Do I want you to march against BP? No, I don’t even want you to write Geoff Davis, or Mitch, or Jack Conway, or Rand Paul.

This is what I want you to do-- it is no less than what I have been doing since early last week when Joanna reminded me that we were going to have a Green Sunday-- and that is to examine yourself-- because in the final analysis, none of this is the fault of BP any more than the Exxon Valdez was the fault of Exxon.

I want you to think of us as a tiny pebble tossed into a pond that sends a wave out beyond us, a wave that affects many, many others until all of us have moved past the talking about it stage to the doing something about it.

Now I've done my part as your pastor. But it remains for me to work with you to be the pebble.

So my friends, the chickens are coming home to roost, and I apologize for not getting around to doing this sooner, but as I explained, I had my reasons. Forgive me.