

“Amazed in the Midst”

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Psalm 8

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

This Psalm explodes with amazement. When we said it, we were joining in a shout of wonderment and a whisper of awe that’s been happening through the ages.

The Psalm turns us to look around ourselves, deep into the dark mysteries of the cosmos, peering into that which surpasses our understanding or even our knowing. Then, in the midst of our amazement, this Psalm turns us to ourselves: our humility, then our surprising dignity, to God’s unexpected grace for us and God’s astonishing call to us.

Yet through all this, whether we are pondering distant stars or our own place in things, it keeps our focus on God. We look to the beyond, and God amazes us. We look to ourselves, and God amazes us in the midst of it all.

II

We are going to look at 2 video clips this morning.

The first is called “Cosmic Eye.” An astrophysicist from Australia, Danail Obreschkow, made it a few years ago. It starts us with a woman, Louise. It draws us away from her to the greatest distances. Then, it will zoom back in, down to the smallest. At the top of the screen, you will see the scope of the view. At the bottom, look at the sorts of distances we’re talking about.

Show Video Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Are9dDbW24>¹

Who are we, on our “pale blue dot,” our collection of rock tucked to the side of an unremarkable part of one run-of-the-mill galaxy in the midst of billions?

¹ For information about the video, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmic_Eye I combined the video with the song “God of Wonders,” written by Marc Byrd and Steve Hindalong, and performed by Paul Baloche.

Who are we? They estimate there are about one-hundred thousand quadrillion vigintillion atoms in the universe (give or take a few vigintillion).² For a handful of decades, some of them have come together to be you, before they scatter again.³ Who are we?

Who are we, that the Crafter of all of this should give us a moment's thought?

III

Pondering the vastness and the minuscule, our thoughts of God are wonder-full. In the enormous and mighty, God acts. Yet also in the tiny and vulnerable, God acts. In the raging kettle of stellar nurseries, God presses hydrogen and births stars. In the cooing and sighing of a nursing child, God stills the chaos and banishes the monsters back under the bed.

God sets us here, in the midst of it all. We are made of the same stuff as the rest. We did not need modern scientists to tell us. An ancient Hebrew poet called us *adam* ("man" or "human") made from the *adamah* (ground). We are 'adam from the *adamah*, earthlings of the earth, Dusty made from dust. God, "*You only are immortal, the creator and maker of mankind; and we are mortal, formed of the earth, and to earth shall we return.*"⁴ The same physical, chemical and biological forces that God ordered to govern everything, govern us too.

Yet in the midst of this, God set us to govern.

God made us in God's image. We are not God, of course! Yet in some ways God makes us not entirely different. God made us — yes, the likes of us! — creatures to represent the Creator withing the creation. God makes us with glory to reflect God's glory. God makes us with honour, to honour all that God has made. We are stewards of the Master's wealth, sub-creators for the great Contractor, care-takers for the One who cares.

God has put into our hands power over other parts of God's creation. We use that power in everyday decisions that we make, actions that we take. Multiply that power by the billions of earthlings upon the earth, and . . .

² <https://www.universetoday.com/36302/atoms-in-the-universe/>. That's 10 followed by 82 zeros.

³ https://education.jlab.org/ga/mathatom_04.html

⁴ From the Book of Common Prayer's service for the Burial of the Dead.

Well. . . when we turn our God-given “dominion” within creation into “domination” over it, and when our God-given “rule” leads to “ruin,” and when our treading upon the earth expresses human sinfulness rather than service to God . . . it’s not Greenpeace or Environment Canada we need to answer to, but God.⁵

IV

Among my favourite people whom I’ve never met, Katharine Hayhoe stands tall.⁶ She’s a Canadian, married to an evangelical pastor and living in Texas. She’s a scientist who studies the effects of climate change. Dr. Hayhoe has emerged as someone who is very good at teaching ordinary people like us about what climate change is — she calls it “global weirding” — and the reasons why it is happening.⁷ What I value most is how she connects it to how we live our everyday lives, and what we can do to make a difference.

Katharine Hayhoe does all of this as a Christian. Some call her a “Climate Change Evangelist.”

Show Video Clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1eGJLqxxKQ&t=16s>

Katharine Hayhoe’s work as a researcher, a teacher and an advocate is how she praises God.

V

You might have noticed how Psalm 8 starts and finishes with the same words.

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

⁵ Here I’ve adapted Stan Mast’s words: “When we turn “dominion” into “domination,” “rule” into “ruin,” and “subordination to the divine purpose” into “subjection to human sinfulness,” we will have to answer not to the EPA or the Sierra Club, but to our covenant God.” Mast is adjunct professor of preaching at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁶ http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/trinity-sunday-c/?type=the_lectionary_psalms

⁷ https://www.depts.ttu.edu/politicalscience/Faculty/Hayhoe_Katharine.php

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi6RkdaEggRVKi3AzidF4ow>

It's a perfect circle; we end as we began. But we do not end the Psalm the same as we began. For in between our first praise and our last, we have learned how to behold God's majesty. We see God's majesty in the massive expanse. We see God's majesty in the tiny and vulnerable. We see God's majesty humble at our small place in it all. We see God's majesty in God's call to us to be stewards.⁸

We begin and end praising God, and praising God envelops all we do.

Climate change, the water-taking controversy in our community, the rapid extinction of species, the peril of plastics in our oceans, and so on . . . I wonder if the first step in thinking about these, and hearing what God is calling us to do, is to praise God.⁹

Praising God resets us to who God is, and who we are. Praising God reminds us whom we are serving, and that we are servants. Praising God reawakens in us wonder at it all, and humility at our place in it all. Praising God is hope. Praising God is thanksgiving. Praise God is amazement in the midst of it all.

Praise be to God! Amen.

⁸ Robert Alter wrote, "A perfect circle is closed: the majesty of God, affirmed at the beginning, is restated verbatim at the end, but with the sense accrued through the intervening eight lines of what concretely it means of His name to be majestic throughout the earth." Quoted in Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., Psalms, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 60.

⁹ "It is not naive to say that the first step in addressing the environmental crisis is to praise God, for praising god is that act of worship and mode of existence that reminds us that we human beings are not free to do whatever our science and technology enable us to do. Praise flies in the face of our culture's tendency to unrestrained exploitation." Brueggemann and Bellinger, 61.