**Sunday June 13, 2021**

**“Wow, God!” (Psalm 8)**

The book of Psalms can be described as the *prayer book of the Bible*. By reflecting on the different Psalms within the Psalter, we can learn a lot about prayer. So, just as the disciples asked Jesus, “*Teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1), we too can approach our Lord for some lessons in prayer. One place to begin is the Bible, especially the Psalms. So, this morning we’re going to spend a few moments reflecting on Psalm 8 as a prayer to God.

To begin our reflections on prayer, I’d like to quote writer Anne Lamott from her book on prayer entitled, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers.* She begins this book with these words, “I do not know much about God and prayer, but I have come to believe, over the past twenty-five-years, that there’s something to be said about keeping prayer simple. *Help. Thanks. Wow*.” (*Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*, p. 9). As the title suggests, her main point is that our prayers come in three forms – “Help” or petition, “Thanks” or thanksgiving, and “Wow” or praise.

Psalm 8 is a good example of a *Wow* prayer. In an interview with National Public Radio, Anne Lamott was asked about the *Wow* prayer, and this was her response, “Wow is the *praise prayer*, the prayer where we're finally speechless - which in my case is saying something . . . When I don't know what else to do, I go outside, and I see the sky, and I see the trees; and a bird flies by, and my mouth drops open again with wonder at the just sheer beauty of creation. And I say, ‘Wow!’ You say it when you see the fjords for the first time at dawn. You say it when you first see the new baby, and you say, ‘Wow. This is great!’ *Wow is the prayer of wonder”* (<https://www.npr.org/2012/11/19/164814269/anne-lamott-distills-prayer-into-help-thanks-wow>).

Psalm 8 is a *Wow* prayer, a prayer of wonder to God. It is a *prayer of praise to God* that recognizes both his greatness and his goodness. *God is great* - his glory and majesty fill heaven and earth and are visible whenever we gaze up at the night sky. *God is good* – his love for humanity and his creation is obvious. So, when I consider that the Maker of everything deeply cares for human beings, who are fragile, finite, and fickle, it prompts me to shout a huge *WOW*.

 Most *psalms of* *praise* begin with a call to God’s people and all creation to give praise to God. For instance, Psalm 117, the shortest psalm in the Psalter, begins with, “*Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him all you peoples*” (Ps 117:1). But Psalm 8 gets right down to business with *a sudden explosion of praise to God*.

 “*Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth*!” (Ps 8:1).

The psalmist’s exuberance is like a great, big *Wow*. His prayer is enthusiastic, reverent, heart-felt and intimate. It’s an *intimate* prayer because the Lord whose glory fills earth and heaven is described *our Lord.* This tiny phrase conveys that when we pray to God, we are talking to a Person with whom we have a relationship; He is *our Lord,* and we are *his people*. Prayer is an invitation into a relationship with someone who hears us when we speak.

The psalmist’s prayer quickly turns from this reverent, yet intimate address, to a grand declaration that majesty of the Lord is greater than all creation. He enthusiastically declares, “*Your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens*” (Ps 8:1). In ancient culture a person’s *name* was not just a label, it also spoke of one’s *character*. Here, God’s essential character is described as great, majestic, and glorious. The invitation to all of us is to open our eyes and stand in awe and wonder at creation, but most importantly, to turn our wonder into praises to the Creator of it all. When we do this, we may even feel like saying “*Wow*.” There are *Wow* experiences all around us. It’s just a matter of having our ears, eyes and hearts open to the world all around and praising the One who made it all. Whether we’re standing on the Scarborough Bluffs, walking on a trail, enjoying our backyard gardens, or listening to lovely sounds of birdsong, our natural response should be to praise God. All creation shouts out “Wow” to God; let’s join in on this cosmic song to our Creator!

 I grew up on a dairy farm and summer was the busiest time of year. During haying season our day would begin early with the morning milking and end with the evening milking, with lots of hay baled and unloaded into the barn throughout the day. By 9:30 at night the evening chores were done, and I was totally exhausted. So, my favourite part of the day was sitting on a lawn chair in our yard in the cool of the evening. I’d take my boots and socks off and run my feet through the dewy grass. I would lean back and gaze at the night sky. That was heaven to me! Sometimes the simplest of things in life are the most wonderful. Nothing compares with dewy grass and starry skies!

The psalmist also gazed at the stars. The vastness of the night sky caused him to ponder the place of humans in the grand scheme of things. His stargazing led to these meditations:

“*When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
    the moon and the stars you set in place—
what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
    human beings that you should care for them?”* (Ps 8:3-4).

Given the magnitude of creation, the psalmist wonders why the Creator of the universe would even give us the time of day when we are but tiny threads in the grand tapestry of the universe. Yet as his meditations continue, he expresses great astonishment in the realization that the majestic God of the universe is indeed mindful of humans*.* Not only is God mindful and caring toward human beings, he has also endowed them with a wonderful dignity. The psalmist declares, “*Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned themwith glory and honor*” (Ps 8:5). These words echo the creation account in Genesis 1:26-27 - “Then God said, ‘Let us make human beingsin our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.’ So God created human beingsin his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” *Wow.* God has made us in his image; all of us are marked with the divine stamp on our being. We have a profound connection to the Maker of everything.

 As bearers of the image of God, we are God’s representatives in the world, having rule and responsibility over his works. The Creator has *crowned* humanity with glory and honour and has given them an important task in the world. The psalmist writes, “*You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents*” (Ps 8:6-8). Yet humanity’s dominion over creation should never be misconstrued as a divine permission slip to do as we please. We are responsible to care for creation. We are not free to exploit the earth’s resources, damage habitats, endanger species, pollute the air and water, or engage in activities that harm the earth’s climate. God created the world and called it good, and we are endowed with the task of caring for it. If creation reveals the glory of God, then we need to make sure that it continues to do so. This means that we will have to make changes in our behaviours and lifestyles in order to protect God’s creation.

 Reflecting on Psalm 8, one theologian has written, “It is not naïve 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” (J.C. McCann, *Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms,* p. 59). The worship of God must be expressed in environmental stewardship for his world.

 The Psalm ends, as it began, with the same exuberant burst of praise to God.

 “*Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*” (Ps 8:9).

So, let’s join in this cosmic shout of “*Wow*” to God!

Wow, God, your majesty is everywhere in your wonderful creation; in flower petals and tree buds; in birdsong and rushing wind; in warm sunrises and blazing sunsets.

Wow, God, your glory can be seen in the billions upon billions of stars in our universe; in the glowing moon and the blazing sun; in black holes and dwarf stars; in quasars and supernovas.

Wow, God, you created all this awesome stuff, and you still took the time to make us! Wow, I can hardly believe it! You even made us in your image, and you gave us a job to do on earth; to care and to preserve; to love creation as much as you do!

Wow, Lord of the Starfields, all I say is “Wow”, but that doesn’t say it all, does it?