

Psalm 8 is efficient. It ends how it starts. It gives four verses to talk about God, four verses to talk about humanity. It stretches from the heavens above to the seas below. It's a favorite of God's people. In some Jewish practices it's recited in prayers before Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Jesus quotes from it in Matthew 21. Paul references it in 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22. The author of Hebrews interprets it in reference to God's incarnation in Jesus. The Anglican prayer book uses Psalm 8 to kick off each month. The Catholic Church uses Psalm 8 as we will today, as part of the Eucharist liturgy.

Psalm 8 has inspired hymns like Peirpoint's 1864 "For the Beauty of the Earth" and Boberg's 1885 "How Great Thou Art" as well as Christian pop music, like Smallwood's 1990 hit, "How Majestic."

If astronomy had a Christian anthem, it'd likely be Psalm 8. It inspired Shakespeare as he composed a monologue for his character Hamlet. "What a piece of work is man?" Mark Twain uses Psalm 8 as the foundation for his essay, "What is Man?" Science fiction author Isaac Asimov titles a short story about his famous Three Laws of Robotics, "That Thou Art Mindful of Him." It shows up in the rock musical *Hair*, and Captain Picard mentions it from the bridge of the Enterprise.

Not bad for a 9 verse passage.

Psalm 8 is a much needed reprieve in the midst of humanity's struggles. Numerous voices often ask the question, "What are human beings?" in a depressed tone. Job asks the question in chapters 7 and 25. Psalm 144 presents it too. Hamlet's point to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern mocks humanity.... The quintessence of dust. When the anti-maskers and anti-vaxers march down Bloor and turn past our UofT Family housing on Younge... trumpeting falsehoods; endangering the community; sacrosancting their freedoms over the health of their neighbor... and carrying crosses...

I must admit... I resonate much more with Job and Hamlet's tone. What a piece of work humanity is! How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty. In form and moving how admirable. In action how like the angels. In apprehension how like a god.

We might all feel that sentiment as they march by. Uck. "Not for us," we might say. Turning our nose to the heavens. Give us the stars. Delight us with the beauty, wisdom, and insights we can gain by studying and testing... give us double-blind studies and the orbits of the planets. Give us the joy of using our brains in the science of God's majestically engineered systems.

Wouldn't it be nice if Psalm 8 would support those attitudes... but it doesn't.

Psalm 8 voices the opposite of Hamlet's tone. Psalm 8 reminds us that humans ARE beautiful. Humans ARE important. Humans ARE crowned in glory and honor. Psalm 8 corrects our hearts and reorients our vision. Those marchers... those human beings, though scared and misguided, harmful and hurting... God is mindful of them too. They might not be living life as God wants it to be lived... I can't think of a worse way of carrying a cross through one's city streets than in protest AGAINST sacrifice while forefronting one's rights and privileges...

... but what else IS our faith if not the incessant, commitment to the value of each and every human. That's *why* we get vaccinated; it's *why* we love enemies; it's *why* we forefront the cross too. What else is occurring when we celebrate the meal of communion but the recognition that Jesus ate with Judas, so therefore he also eats with all humans. That Jesus lays down his life for everyone is a testament that Jesus also lays it down for us.

Like the medical professionals who, though angry and disheartened, continue to care for what has now become mostly a pandemic for the anti-vaxers, Psalm 8 blesses all humanity... not just the worthy. Shakespeare's mocking is closer to where we might be, but Psalm 8 reminds us where we're trying to go... where our God, Jesus, stands.

Psalm 8 reminds us that in a Bible that mostly talks about human mistakes and the need for fixing, that we are... after all... worth fixing. The Bible has a nice way of cushioning us. It reminds us that we ARE dirt and to dirt we shall return... but we're divine dirt. We are, each of us, worthy dirt. Many might say that the Bible makes humans out to be worms and scum... indeed that is often a message trumpeted by many who march in opposition to health while holding crosses... but that's not the Bible's position.

Humans are a little lower than God. Almost there. So close. We are the nexus of the corporeal and the spiritual. Like the Angels we have a soul... a spirit which yearns for connection with God and with each other. Wouldn't the beasts yearn for that!?! Like the beasts, birds, and fish; like the trees and the dirt we have material substance... eat your heart out angels. We are where heaven and earth overlap. That's also why God becomes human, to zipper us together with divinity.

And sure enough. When Jesus ascends into Heaven at the end of Luke, there is a littlebit of humanity in heaven... and then at the beginning of Acts the Spirit descends INTO God's people, bringing a little bit of heaven into humanity.

Undoubtedly, treating the dirt, the earth, and other humans, so undivinely is what drives us frustrations. At the heart of it, that's our biggest problem with the numerous injustices we see around us. It's so dissonant with the divinity of the earth and our humanity. But we won't be able to resanctify it by cutting the humanity out of the oppressor or the anti-vaxer.

Our best approach is, as it has been from the beginning, by reinviting everyone to the table. God's table is the place where, like Psalm 8, we are reminded of the value of each human being through the sacrifices made and care extended.

Not bad for a meager piece of bread and little sip of the vine.

Not bad for nine verses.

Not bad for the quintessence of dust.

Not bad.