



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON - HOLY TRINITY

SUNDAY PSALM 8

JUNE 12, 2022

**"HOW DO WE KNOW GOD LOVES
US?"**

In his book *"A Catechism for the Curious"* - Pastor Eric Reisen recounted an interview with the great physicist Albert Einstein in which someone asked him the most important question facing humanity. Dr. Einstein replied, *"is the universe friendly."* Scientific observation tells us the universe is vast, complex, and, if truth be told, for we who cling tenuously to life under the warmth of a thin, breathable blanket of nitrogen and oxygen, the universe is cold and deadly.

It is also beautiful, and mysterious, which is why the writer of Psalm 8 "considers it." Never mind the writer had no telescopes or laboratories - he had eyes and ears... and a stomach! The writer asks... from the perspective of faith, what Einstein asked, presumably, from a scientific perspective... is the universe friendly? The writer answers his own question - yes, but for entirely different reasons than such as Einstein might say yes.

The writer of Psalm 8 says yes because he believes the creator of the universe is good, and when Christians say God is good, what we mean is God is gracious. That's what I wish to talk about today - how we as Christians, using texts like Psalm 8, can confidently say, despite appearance to the contrary, the universe is "friendly" because its creator is "friendly" toward it.

Psalm 8 begins with praise but then it makes a statement about God - verse 2 says *"from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise, because of your enemies ..."* This is a curious phrase, but most take it to mean that even though evidence of God can be found by observation of the heavens - God having "set" his glory in them, God ordains praise from infants and children who largely lack the reasoning and observational capabilities of adults. Enemies in the verse are not to be assumed as all adults, but all who must be convinced apart from faith.

The Psalmist then asks his "Einstein" question... when I consider the universe, all that I see and which I can only imagine is there, who, or what am I, God, that you should care about me? When Christians say this, when we conclude that God is friendly toward us, we affirm the thing that makes Christianity unique - our belief in, trust in, and dependence upon, God's kindness - another word for which is grace. The universe is friendly because its creator is gracious.

Christianity defines grace two ways. The first is God's creating grace - the grace that called all things into existence - sometimes called *"common grace"* because all people on earth are beneficiaries of it. Believer or unbeliever, good and evil alike all have air to breathe, food to eat, warmth to enjoy, etc. As Luther says in his Small Catechism, *"God gives daily bread to all people, though sinful."* When we confess our faith, this is the sort of thing, the sort of grace we attribute to God the Creator, the "first person" of the Trinity.

But Christians also say there is another kind of grace from God- "special" or "sanctifying" grace. This is the grace that creates faith, hope and love in us. This is the grace that comes to us through Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. And this is how Christians can most definitively say "the universe is friendly" - because of Jesus our forgiver. As I asked in my message in our weekly "Connections" newsletter this week; *'how do we know God gives a care about us - or better still, loves us?'* Nature provides but it can also withhold, it supports us but can also harm us, even kill us! We know God loves us because God in Jesus became like us in every way - even to the point where the creation could, and did, harm Him.

To the question of Psalm 8 - *"what is man that you are mindful of him"*, we add not only is God mindful of us - as from afar, as most world religions assert, we can say, we alone, God became one of us. Can't get more "mindful" than that! Christian writer John Stott said what we observe about God in Jesus is what makes it possible for us to believe in God and the goodness of God despite our suffering. Stott wrote *"I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. In the real world of suffering ... how could one worship a God who is immune to it."*

But how are we to know this is true for us - *that God is mindful of me?* Luther said knowing that Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the grave was of no importance whatsoever, unless he be convinced, he had done so for him. This is the work of the Holy Spirit - the "third person" of the Trinity. To Thomas his disciple, Jesus said, *"because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Jesus said in John 17:26 *"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you know, in order that the love you have for me may be in them."*

'Is the universe friendly' is a question for the ages. Well, it's interesting that's for sure. Most science says it's impersonal, most philosophy that it's flawed, most religions say it is good to those who are good to it. But not you - you know it as a creation and gift of God, whom Jesus called his Father, whom God called his Son, who the Holy Spirit unites you to, and therefore you know, that God is merciful, gracious, friendly above all else. Pastor Eric Reisen in his book said it well, *"God is attracted to us because God is good."*

Psalm 8 says the universe, the heavens, reveal the glory of God. It tells us God is majestic, that is, great. But that does not tell us if God is good. Thanks be to God then, for *"the Son of man that he made a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned with glory and honor."* He is yours, because you are His. All glory to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God of the gospel - God's good news for those whom he loves. AMEN