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**Psalm 8**; Mark 10:13-16

## ROYALTY

As much as Americans value our democratic form of government, we also have a love-affair with royalty. The regularity with which the British royal family makes an appearance on the magazine covers found in grocery store check-out lines makes me wonder if we Americans secretly wish we had a royal family of our own. The Netflix dramatic series called *The Crown* about the life of the reigning Queen Elizabeth drew more than 3 million viewers in the United States. It is clear that Americans have a strong fascination with the royal family. And now that the American born actress Meghan Markle has married Prince Harry of Great Britain, the feelings of kinship toward that royal family have even increased.

Why lies behind our attraction to royalty? There are no doubt many reasons. Status, wealth, and power are always alluring. Of course, in today's world, few monarchs retain real power. But the allure is still there, perhaps because royal families stand on the other side of average. We may have to endure mundane, tedious lives but royalty are set apart from the rest of us, and serve as idealized versions of who we may wish to be.

If it is royalty we desire, well then the writer of Psalm 8 has good news for us. Because this writer affirms that every single one of us *is* royalty: you and me and the postal worker and check-out clerk, all humans are royal creatures. The writer is speaking to God and marveling at the status of human beings. "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with

glory and honor." According to our psalmist, crowns of royalty have been placed upon our heads by our Creator.

The writer of Psalm 8 has a very high view of humanity. Many other writers in the Bible and even in the Book of Psalms, will offer what we might call a "low view of humanity," where they enumerate humanity's failings and shortcomings and reflect upon our fallen status. A low view of humanity is the conclusion you and I might come to each day after reading the newspaper or watching TV as we learn about stories of cruelty, poverty, indifference, greed, and hatred.

But the writer of Psalm 8 brings us a different perspective: a high view of humanity. Maybe he or she didn't read the paper that morning. Or maybe they just woke up in an incredibly good mood. But for whatever reason, the writer sees the greatness that resides in humanity and offers praise to God. The writer does what so many of us have done at some point in our lives: stood gazing up at the vastness of the night sky or stood upon the shore looking at the immense ocean and felt small. In the scope of the cosmos, in the scope of all creation, we humans are tiny. And yet, the psalmist marvels that God has crowned us with honor and glory and made us just a little lower than divine beings.

This is an important message for us to recall in these disheartening times where the brokenness of humanity is on display on a daily basis. Most days it is very hard to see anything divine or royal in our fellow inhabitants on this earth. And when we are honest with ourselves about our personal failings, it is often hard to find anything very divine or royal in ourselves. But according to Psalm 8, God has crowned you and me and all humanity with honor and glory and given us a special status. There is a unique kind of God-given potential that lies within us.

We have been created with "royal" potential. In other words, we have been created with the potential to be splendid.

And there are indeed ways humanity *has* demonstrated how splendid we can be. What comes to your mind when you think of humanity's greatness? Our minds might turn to humanity's great achievements: the great cities we have built, the scientific achievements, the medical advancements. Or we may consider the capacity of humans to express ourselves in beautiful art, to touch the soul with words of poetry and literature, to craft symphonies. These are indeed examples of our grand and splendid capacities, evidence that we *do* enjoy a special status from all the rest of creation.

The problem has been that humanity has often gotten drunk on this idea that we are special. Instead of exercising what the writer of Psalm 8 calls "dominion" over creation--where we assume a responsibility toward the rest of the created world-- humanity has instead chosen to exercise *domination* over other creatures. And so we have ravaged our world with little regard for the other creatures or for the sustainability of the planet. And our high view of ourselves has morphed into a sense of entitlement, and power, and domination where some humans will decide that they enjoy a higher status than other humans. And we have run amok like wealthy prep school adolescents filled with an exaggerated sense of entitlement and status.

Psalm 8, however, offers us parameters for understanding and living out our royal status in more appropriate ways. The writer does indeed have a high view of humanity, but this begins and ends with praise of God. The Psalm opens and closes with these words: "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" God is Sovereign, not us. We may be members of the royal household but God remains Sovereign, not us. We rise to great heights when we live in that understanding and then strive to bear God's image into the world. And

when we do, the potential to be splendid and to do splendid things emerges--not just in major scientific achievements but in the ordinary acts of life: in the kindness we extend, the generosity we offer of our time and gifts, the efforts we make to help others, the way we strive to reconcile and forgive. Royal potential resides in all of us. The question is, can we see it in ourselves and in one another and how might it change us if we did?

Jesus saw our royal potential. He came to teach us how we might live fully into our high calling as children of God. And through all he did and all he taught, he demonstrated what the Kingdom of God was like. The Kingdom of God is where you and I, as royal creatures, are called to reside. In today's reading from Mark, some of the disciples try to shoo away some little children. And Mark tells us Jesus was really ticked off by what the disciples did. It is one of the rare moments where we are given an insight into Jesus' emotions. Mark tells us that Jesus was "indignant." Jesus took a child in his arms and said "it is to such as *these* that the kingdom of God belongs." Jesus was not sentimentalizing children. He lived in a very hierarchical world where children occupied the lowest rung on the ladder. It was a world grounded in an understanding of reciprocity, of "I'll do for you if you do for me." And children, lacking any power or influence, brought nothing of value to the table. And so the disciples tried to get rid of them. But Jesus instructed his followers that it is precisely the weakest, most vulnerable, least powerful who are welcomed in as members of God's royal family. According to Jesus, if you and I are to be part of God's household, we are to honor the royalty in all of God's people, especially the least powerful.

The writer of Psalm 8 offers a similar message about the important place the weakest members of society have in this kingdom of God. The writer says to God, "out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the

avenger." Now this is a somewhat odd and confusing sentence. Let's see if we can understand it. A bulwark was a kind of defensive barrier used to keep back the enemy. What this writer seems to be saying is that somehow, God uses the very coos and gurgles of babies and infants to form a defensive barrier against the enemies of chaos and darkness. In other words, the contributions of even the weakest, smallest, least powerful among us have important consequences in the forces of good. Even our smallest efforts at praise, even our small actions of kindness, even our little gestures of compassion, even our ordinary efforts to forgive, that even these actions by the least powerful, by you and I in all our ordinariness, that these have cosmic consequences in the force of goodness. Therein lies our royalty. There is something inexpressibly majestic in who God created us to be, creatures who have the capacity to act in splendid ways toward one another, people who honor the royalty in one another.

The evangelical sociologist, Tony Campolo, tells the story of the time he had to travel to Hawaii for a conference. Because of the significant time change from the East Coast, Campolo found himself wide awake at 3 o'clock in the morning. So he headed out and found an all night diner. It was a greasy little place and Campolo sat down at the counter and ordered some food. Before too long, a group of about ten women burst through the door. From the way they were dressed Campolo could see they were prostitutes. They sat down at the counter as well and as they were eating and drinking coffee, one of the women, a woman named Agnes, mentioned to her companion that tomorrow was her birthday. Her friend responded, "What do you want me to do about it? You want a birthday party or something?" Agnes replied that she didn't want anything. She said she had never had a birthday party in her life and didn't expect one now. She just wanted someone to know it was her birthday. After the women left, Campolo found out from the diner's owner, Harry, that the women came in to the diner every night around the same

time. It was then that Campolo asked Harry if he would help him throw a birthday party for Agnes. Harry agreed. Early the following morning, the diner was decorated for a party, streamers hanging everywhere, when lots and lots of women began pouring into the restaurant. Harry had put out the word. And finally Agnes arrived. Everyone sang “Happy Birthday” to her. The cake with candles was brought out and Agnes burst into tears. When the time came for her to blow out the candles she begged everyone to let her take the cake home to show her mother. After Agnes left the diner, Campolo suggested that the remaining guests join him in prayer and they all prayed for Agnes. When he finished, Harry said he hadn’t known that Campolo was a preacher and asked what type of church he belonged to. Campolo replied that it was a church that gives birthday parties for prostitutes, the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls us to honor the royalty in one another.

In a short while, we will gather around the Table as we join in celebrating World Communion Sunday. This feast laid upon this Table is the party Jesus gives for you and for me and for everyone. Jesus throws this party for us because he sees the royalty inside us and because he knows that when we nourish ourselves with the love and forgiveness found here, he *knows* how splendid we can be.