**Sermon on Psalm 8 by Rev. Matt Lee**

Do you believe there is life on other planets?  Sounds like a crazy question to pop in a sermon.  And perhaps it is.  But hear me out.  Do you believe there is life on other planets?  It may surprise you that most people in America answer “yes” according to an IPSOS poll.  And while that doesn't prove anything, NASA has been actively searching for other life out there.  In fact in 2018, it was discovered that there is a subglacial lake on Mars, and the scientific community went wild.  Because it’s well known that where there is water, there is also life--at least at the microb level.  Is life on other planets? Well scientists from prominent universities, such as MIT physics professor Sara Seager, have set their careers on looking into the possibilities.

Is life on other planets? This looking to the skies and pondering is nothing new.  In fact, the Psalm 8 which was written around 3000 years ago has us staring into the night sky and pondering not existence of other life in the universe, but our own life in the midst of the universe.

“Lord, who are we that you are mindful of us?" The universe is vast. “Lord, why would you even bother caring for us?” There must be bigger matters to tend to out there. Gazing into it can suddenly make us feel ever so small and insignificant by comparison.  The magnitude of the Milky Way galaxy, let alone the universe, boggles the mind. It sometimes helps to scale things down a bit.  Let’s make the size of the Solar System so that the Sun was the size of a tennis ball, the Earth would be the size of a grain of sand about 27 feet away. And the next nearest star to the Sun would be more than 1400 miles away! Our galaxy, the Milky Way is 100,000 light years across, and it’s only one of billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars!

"What are human beings?" Faced with such knowledge of the vastness of the universe, the answer must be, "less than insignificant." Or, as one of Job's former friends puts it, humanity is "a maggot...a worm!"  And that’s not too far from where the Psalms leads us. The Hebrew word *mah* ("what") is used rather than than *mi* ("who?").  So  Rather than "who am I?" the psalmist wonders, "What is this thing called a human?" Gives a rather disdainful edge.

But the answer that follows is rather surprising. We’re not insignificant, we’re but "a little lower than God." In fact, God has "crowned humanity with glory and honor." And, God has given us meaningful work as well. We’ve been given "dominion over the work of God’s hands."

Now that concept of dominion has gotten us in a little bit of trouble over time. Too often we think of dominion as dominate and that’s not at all what is being talked about here.  The term "given them dominion" (comes from the root mashal, meaning "to rule") is a word borrowed from Jewish royalty. Kings are given dominion. And as the laws concerning the limits of royal power in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 indicate, dominion is entrusted to the king as a sacred responsibility to be stewarded wisely, not as a privilege to be exploited for personal gain.

In other words, God has called human beings to share in God's creative work by taking responsibility to care for the rest of creation. What more meaningful way is there to communicate that someone matters than to tell them, "You matter because what you do in life matters." Here, God has called human beings to participate in God's work of ordering, shaping, stewarding, and caring for life on the planet earth.

Just as Israel's king was not to exalt "himself above other members of the community" (Deuteronomy 17:20), human beings are not to exploit creation -- destroying, denuding, and deforesting -- but we are to be faithful stewards. Creation does not belong to us, but to God (see Psalm 24:1). We are to care for it as a sacred trust given to us by the Creator.

And friends...that is something we can do anywhere at anytime.  Take care of creation.  Take care of those living in creation.  Take care of one another.  Take care of all life for it is all precious to God who gave life to all.  I feel that in the frenzy to get over this pandemic, we may have forgotten our purpose. And I think that is because we have forgotten our focus.  It seems as though many are focused on simply trying to get back to the way things were before the pandemic.  I understand why that can be.  But I also question is that what we are called to be.  Perhaps we could use a little star gazing.  Not to wonder if there is other life out there.  Not to let our minds become distracted by the next comet or shooting star.  But to look into the vastness of the universe and once again get a sense of the vastness of our God. Then perhaps we too, can confess with the psalmist: Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.  And then with the psalmist get a sense of how our great and sovereign God has made us a little lower and calls us to care for all that was made.

God may hold the whole world in God's hands, but God has entrusted everything under our feet to our care. We matter. God has given us meaningful work.