

Pastor's Message
Psalm 8:3-9 Job 12:7-10
Earth Day – Marsh Haven Nature Center worship

Our presence here today springs from ideas born in Worship Committee meetings and from Dream Team meetings. They had talked about having special worship services on the 5th Sundays of the month and perhaps having potlucks after those worship services. So, this worship service meets both of those ideas. And since Earth Day was just a week ago yesterday, how appropriate to meet and worship at the Marsh Haven Nature Center.

Psalm 8 has always struck me, especially verse 4: “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” When I consider the vastness of the universe and the complexity of creation, I have wondered about the relative insignificance of mortals compared to the majesty of God. This is not to downplay human beings or each individual, the psalmist's *reason for pointing this out* is to remind us of the incomparable and transcendent nature of God.

Human beings tend to believe themselves to be the center of the universe. Perhaps we need to adopt this pose so as not to be overwhelmed by the vastness of creation and fall into despair? We think we're something! We can sometimes forget, as Psalm 103:15-16 says that our “days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” We can sometimes forget that our lives are like a “mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes,” according to James 4:14. We think we're pretty big stuff. That it's all about us. We're hotshots. Important.

But take a look at the heavens. Perhaps you went outside one of the nights early last week and saw and marveled at the aurora borealis display. Step outside and look at the moon and stars. Think about the Creator who hung those stars and planets in the skies. Why would the Creator be mindful of us or care about us? We are not the center of everything. We're more like a speck of dust that blows away in a breeze. Perhaps it is time to be mindful of the Creator and take care to praise the Creator for all of the created world, and even our own fragile

existence! And so here we are to celebrate and observe Earth Day at Marsh Haven.

Consider the heavens; count the stars if you can. Consider that:

- A beam of light takes eight minutes to cross the 93 million miles between Earth and the sun.
- If you were to count the stars in our galaxy, one per second, it would take you 2,500 years to count them all.
- The Milky Way galaxy contains billions of stars, but our galaxy is only one of at least 200 billion galaxies.
- Our solar system — the sun and eight planets — is the relative size of a quarter, making our galaxy the size of North America.

Given this comparative sizing, how heart-stopping is the realization that God is mindful of — caring toward — each of the 300 billion lint atom quarks on this quarter?

What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? (Ps. 8:4)

While God counts and names the trillions of stars, God goes so much further with each of us, designing us each uniquely. God knows what makes us tick, hears our prayers when we cry out and cares about each one of us.

We should feel awe. Honor. Divinely inflated self-worth. All that beauty of the heavens and the earth to look at and appreciate, and God pays attention to us.

This psalm reminds us of our uniqueness. Our divinely inspired value. The glory given us by the Glorious One. Our purpose in the sweep of all of time and space.

We've been made "a little lower" than God, and crowned with glory and honor (v. 5). And why is this? To join God in the care of creation. To share God's power and unite with him in being mindful of the other creatures of his world; to be co-creators with God in "having dominion over the earth" as some Bible translations say in Genesis 1:28. Dominion does not mean domination in this particular view of the world - it means being good caretakers of creation and using our authority and control for the proper maintenance of what God has given us.

This language, "have dominion," means that we are responsible for the health of the earth and all that live on it, above it, or beneath it.

It means that we are responsible for all life to survive and thrive or to die out, become extinct, and disappear from the face of the earth. God has given us responsibility.

When God spoke each day of creation into existence, God called each day's handiwork "good." But on Day 6, the Almighty also called the creation of humanity "very good" (1:31). *Then God said, "Let us make human being in 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,¹ and the small animals that scurry along the ground."* So, God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Part of infusing us with the *Imago Dei*, created in the image of God, means that we carry a functional likeness to God — by creating, cultivating, filling the earth, and exercising dominion. The sun didn't get this responsibility. Neither did the trees nor the fish or any plants or other animals. This means that our involvement in the world should be based on respect for the natural order that God has created. As Christians, we don't worship nature, but we do respect it as "the work of [God's] fingers" (Ps. 8:3). To live responsibly in the midst of a world that is wild and free means that we must work to maintain what the LORD has created.

Not only that, but all that God has made relies on us—not just us, but our better selves, our true selves, our lives as the sons and daughters of God—which is a roundabout way of saying that we treat our world as though it were a part of God, and a part of us.

There are some ways that we already do that. Today, and for a number of Sundays, we have been using previously-purchased, pre-printed bulletins with pretty covers. We're not buying more paper and not cutting down more trees to make it. We've been using more of the colored paper we already have in inventory in the Church Office. Today we're using plates and cups and tableware we can wash instead of paper, although we do have to use some paper to supplement what's available here at Marsh Haven. And we're not using Styrofoam which stays in the landfill for decades if not centuries without biodegrading.

You who are parents, you who are grandparents, make decisions to leave a better world for your children and grandchildren. United

Methodists realize and practice care for future generations. One of the bases of our faith is that we hold and care for the building and all that is in it in trust for those who are not yet part of our Church that they will have a place to worship and be Church. It is not ours but belongs to the larger Church which we will not be a part of. We are co-creators and builders of what is still to come.

So, what are some of the things we can do to preserve, care for, and exercise dominion over the world we live in, and our descendants will live in. The United Methodist Church has put out a video which can inspire us and give us some ideas for living Earth Day beyond the actual day. Let's watch that now:

In the light of God's own majesty and glory (Ps. 8:1,9)) and his amazing and awe-inspiring creation (Ps. 8:3), how can human individuals matter all that much? The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates the Hebrew noun of verse 4 as generic plurals: "Human beings" and "mortals." This encompasses women and children as well as men.

But since none of us know Hebrew, we miss the nuance of the Bible words. The psalmist is speaking to us as individuals. God thinks about and cares for each one of us as individuals and gives each individual the responsibility and dominion over creation – putting all things under our authority as individuals. All of us are responsible; none are exempt.

There is urgency in what we do. Things aren't getting better on their own. We need to take an active part in building the kingdom of God. Creation waits. And it is our responsibility to act now.

"Just ask the animals, and they will teach you.

Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you.

Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you.

Let the fish in the sea speak to you. (Job 12:7-8)

We, each of us, have been given both the privilege and responsibility by God to care for the earth and all that lives upon it. I invite you, then, to pray with me the Affirmation of Faith found in your supplements and on the screen.

We believe . . .