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**Psalm 8**; Matthew 28:16-20

## CORONATION TIME

Can I have a show of hands of those among us who watched even just a portion of King Charles' coronation early in May? What an incredible spectacle of pomp and pageantry! We Americans are grateful for our democracy but there is still something in us that remains fascinated by royalty. What lies behind this fascination do you suppose? It can't be power because most of the world's royalty today lack any real power. Possibly their wealth is a factor. But there are very wealthy people in the world who don't attract the same fascination. It's got to be something more than wealth. I think it has something to do with the fact that royalty are, by virtue of their birth, set apart from ordinary people. They are special people who are treated with great honor, curtsied to and bowed to, and referred to with fancy titles. The title, "Your royal highness," says it all: they are higher than the rest of us.

And being thought of as "high," being honored as special, is appealing to us. So we are in luck because the writer of today's psalm confirms that we humans lifted up high and are endowed with glory and honor. In fact, the writer of Psalm 8 thinks of human beings as royalty.

One night, the writer of our psalm looked up into the night sky and was blown away by the grandeur of the cosmos. And the writer had that same sensation a lot of us have maybe when gazing at the ocean or standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon. When looking at the heavens, the writer of our psalm felt puny. In comparison to the vastness of the created world, the writer felt humanity's insignificance. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the

moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

And yet . . . and yet, the writer says, “you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” Even though we are so tiny compared to God’s immense universe, the writer affirms that we humans are only a little lower than divine beings! And we are so honored that the writer even speaks of us as wearing metaphorical crowns! Think about that! We’re *all* royalty.

The writer of Psalm 8 has a very high view of humanity. This stands in contrast to the conclusion you and I might come to after watching the evening news. All the stories of humanity’s brokenness, and cruelty, and selfishness would lead many of us to have a low view of human beings. Most days it is very hard to see anything divine or royal in our fellow inhabitants of this earth. And when we are honest about ourselves and our personal failings, it is often hard to find anything divine or royal in ourselves.

But the psalmist is not thinking about such things at this moment. Elsewhere in the Scriptures we will find stories of the fallen nature of humanity. But not here. At this moment the writer of Psalm 8 is impressed by the gifts God has given to humans. “You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.”

Let’s pause for a second and contemplate that word *dominion*. Dominion is not to be confused with *domination*. That is the mistake humans have made. Humans have tried to dominate the natural world and tried to dominate one another instead of exercising *dominion*. *Dominion* means we are tasked with securing the wellbeing of everything upon the earth. We

are entrusted by God with the awesome responsibility as well as the awesome privilege to be care-takers of this planet and its inhabitants and to secure their wellbeing. You don't entrust something precious to just anybody. You entrust something precious to someone special.

That is who the psalmist believes you and I are created to be: people who are set apart as special, people who are to be honored, people who wear crowns of greatness.

But in what ways are we great? I think understanding Psalm 8 and its high view of humanity hinges on one rather unusual sentence. In verse 2 the psalmist writes about 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." This is a strange sentence and not terribly clear. One commentator I read basically said, "this sentence doesn't make much sense," and advised that we just skip over it and move on to the rest of the psalm. But I disagree. I think this sentence holds the key to the entire psalm and to our royal status. Let's try to figure it out.

A bulwark is a defensive structure that is built to hold back the enemy. A fortification against one's foes. The writer tells us that from the mouths of babies, from the little coos and gurgles of infants, God has built a fortification against the forces of chaos and darkness. What that means is that the contributions of even the weakest, smallest, least powerful among us, have important and essential value as a defense against the forces of cruelty and wrong. Our smallest acts of kindness, our faltering efforts to forgive, our little gestures of compassion, our mundane actions of care, are essential in holding back the forces of darkness—not only the darkness we can see around us in our world but also the forces of darkness we can find within ourselves.

And therein lies our royalty. The special status we enjoy is that God has created all of us ordinary people to have the capacity to act in splendid ways toward one another. We may be just

babes and infants when compared to the powerful rulers of the world's nations and the powerful leaders of corporations, but our actions of goodness and kindness have great value. They silence the enemy forces against God's goodness and love. God has created us to be care-takers of one another and this earth—those who secure the wellbeing of others. And when we love, and serve, and help, and forgive, and share, however small those may be, we are part of God's realm of goodness and crowns of glory and honor rest upon our heads.

Sometimes we are privileged to see such moments when humans wear God's crown of glory and honor. You might read about a single man who adopted three foster siblings so they wouldn't be separated. And you think: "Wow! Sometimes people really are good!" And we can see in such moments just how splendid God created us to be.

But sometimes, sometimes our splendid moments are not noticed. Maybe no one saw your act of kindness or generosity. Maybe no one appreciated the effort you went to in order to help another person. Maybe you yourself didn't even think it was anything special. There was no theme music playing when you tried to forgive the person who hurt you, or when you gave money to help survivors of a disaster, or when you took a meal to your neighbor. No one placed an ermine trimmed cape around your shoulders. There was no ride in a golden carriage, no orb given to you to carry out of a grand cathedral. But never doubt that God has placed a crown of honor and glory upon the heads of those who strive to walk Christ's way of love and mercy, grace and compassion, justice and service every day of their ordinary lives.