

## “How Exalted Is Your Name”

### Psalm 8

In the month of June, Bambi are being born in the fields and woods and river bottoms all round Ohio. According to a new book entitled “Heartsblood” by veteran outdoorsman David Peterson, about half of the Bambi will be dead by the end of the summer.

Peterson makes the point that half of the Bambi are produced as food for predators and intended by nature to die young. Half of the deer die within the first few months of life.

“Like it or not, this is the way it is,” writes Peterson. “While I don’t like it much – all the suffering and death inherent to life – I’ve learned at least to acknowledge natural reality. And not just reality, but the evolutionary wisdom it implies.”

Nature has determined that a deer normally has twins each June, and that one fawn winds up as food for a bear, cougar, coyote, bobcat, lynx, fox, eagle, wild dogs, or whatever. The other baby – the stronger or quicker one – usually escapes and grows up to continue the species. This is not a pretty picture, but there is a certain wisdom to it. The author of “Heartsblood” wants us to avoid both sentimentality about little animals and ignorance of biological facts.

But many of us are suffering from what I call “Bambi Syndrome.” When Walt Disney made the movie “Bambi”, they made a conscious decision to make “Man” the common enemy of all the animals in the film, and they removed all animal predators from the script.

There would be no coyotes attacking and eating a young fawn. Instead, leaving no heartstrings unpulled, in the opening scene of Bambi, the creatures of the forest gather peacefully around the newborn prince that looks like the Christmas morning manger scene. After the admiring animals finish hailing the birth of the young prince, they depart, and a godlike father looks down from a heavenly crag upon the mother and child nestled in a thorny thicket.

Bambi syndrome. It simply isn't correct to assume that the natural world is always good and delightful and harmonious, with animals playing together peacefully like the childish creatures of the Disney film.

I couldn't find statistics for Ohio but in the State of Minnesota, an estimated 100,000 deer are killed each year by wolves, coyotes, bears, and bobcats. Another 15,000 deer are killed by cars each year in Minnesota. The same statistics said that so many deer are left to overgraze that 19 plant species have disappeared and 23 more are threatened. In one of the parks, the deer herd is 5 times too large, resulting in many malnourished deer.

Emotions run high whenever someone implies that Bambi must die. And, while a service of worship is neither the time nor the place to recommend a particular policy for controlling animal overpopulation, whether it be in Minnesota or Cuyahoga County, the issue does raise for us the question of how humans are to relate to nature. We need to take a clear-eyed look at what it means to have dominion over animals, be good stewards of creation and live responsibly in the midst of a world that is wild and free.

Psalm 8, the appointed Psalm for the First Sunday after Pentecost, is an excellent place to begin. The 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm is one of the best known Psalms. It is a hymn of praise to God for having created human beings in the divine image, and for having placed us in a natural world of wonders in which God's relationship with us is the greatest wonder of all.

Psalm 8 is a proclamation of the supreme authority of God as the Creator, but also an affirmation of the exalted status of human beings.

Let's turn to Psalm 8 in our red ELW. We'll read the psalm responsively by half verse and then, if you would keep your hymnals open as we work through the Psalm verse by verse.

Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the Book of Psalms. It interrupts the Psalms that are praying for help and salvation. Look back to the first verses of

Psalms 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Psalm 4:1 – “Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause; you set me free when I was in distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.”

Psalm 5:1 – “Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing.  
Listen to my cry for help

Psalm 6:1 – “Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger; do not punish me in your wrath.”

Psalm 7:1 – “O Lord, my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me.”

All of these Psalms are prayers for help and salvation. Then, all of a sudden, comes Psalm 8, a hymn of praise in which there is no cry for help, no pleading for salvation, just praising God.

Psalm 8:1 – “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Psalm 8 is clearly a hymn of praise and is the only hymn in the Old Testament composed completely from beginning to end as a direct address to God.

There is no lamenting about personal problems, about poor health, about enemies closing in, about neighbor’s gossip, about not being able to sleep at night, or about guilt over a sinful past. There is no talking about oneself like there is in many of the Psalms and like most of us do when we go to God in prayer. We

usually go complaining, pleading for help, hoping to be healed of something.

How often do we go to God completely in praise as does the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalmist?

Verse 2 – “You whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the mouths of infants and children.” I think of children being in awe of God’s creation – sometimes out of fear when they hear the thunder and see the lightening – sometimes out of love when they fall asleep cuddling one of their pets and sleeping together. As Alexander and Chance become children of God in Holy Baptism this weekend, we pray that they will grow to be in awe of God’s creation as our creation’s future stewards and managers.

In the second half of verse 2 – the hostile powers of chaos that would threaten the order and intent of God’s creation are brought into subjection. “You have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence the foe and avenger.”

Beginning in verse 3, the second section of the hymn is spoken in an individual voice because it is an individual’s experience as he/she sits outside on a clear night and writes down the wondering reflections that come to mind when a mortal looks up at the heavenly bodies that are the result of the Lord’s creation and control. And, sometimes we wonder and we marvel about why God gives so much attention and importance to human beings in such a huge universe.

The Psalmist describes it this way . . . “When I consider your heavens, the

work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses, what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them?”

Then the Psalmist goes on to wonder why the Creator God would rank us just below the angels and himself in giving us dominion over all living things. Why would God make human beings the administrators of his kingdom? Why would God, who established dominion over chaos and brought forth creation, give humankind the capacity and vocation to master other animals and bring forth civilization?

Maybe the Psalmist had the Genesis story in mind as he gazed at the nighttime sky and wondered about our place in the big picture.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

As we sit outside on a clear night and look up at the moon and the stars that God has set in their courses, we begin to wonder along with the Psalmist 3000 years ago, why the Creator God would rank us just below the angels and himself

in giving us dominion over all living things. Why would God make us the administrators of his kingdom as we attempt to clean-up yet another out of control oil spill?

The Psalmist describes it this way: <sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them little less than divine; with glory and honor you crown them. <sup>6</sup>You have made them rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet: <sup>7</sup>all flocks and cattle, even the wild beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

In Genesis we are given “dominion over all the earth.” In the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm we’re told we are “little less than divine” and that God “has put all things under our feet.”

God didn’t just make us. God made us in his image, as his representative to other creatures, as his administrator of his kingdom. What an awesome honor to be created in God’s image, a little lower than the angels. What an awesome responsibility to be given dominion, to be the administrators and the stewards of God’s kingdom! What a great gift from God to be given the abilities to administrate and manage. Along with the Psalmist, we give thanks to our Creator.

Today, the question is: “How do we use God’s gifts to be his representative,

his administrator, his manager”?

We all know what it means to manage. As our lives become more and more complicated, the demand for administrative skills becomes all the more necessary. Each one of us must learn to manage time, priorities, the budget, the household, personal relationships, and then there is the challenge of our job or jobs. As good managers we learn responsibility, we learn to be accountable to our superiors. We learn trustworthiness.

Is it any different as God’s administrators, managers, and stewards of his kingdom? Throughout history, God is looking for people who will be committed to being stewards of his kingdom. People who will be responsible, accountable, and trustworthy. People who will not turn the gift of dominion into domination, the gift of ruling his creation into ruining his creation. Alvin Johnson, a 100 year old W.W. I veteran and Nebraska parishioner, talked about the stewardship of God’s creation this way: When you are a good steward of the land, the land will take care of you. When you are a good steward of the livestock which live off the land, the livestock will take care of you. When you are a good steward of your family , which live off the livestock and the land, your family will take care of you. When you are a good steward of your faith, God will take care of everything and the circle will be complete – Alvin’s theology of stewardship and life.

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Out of the mouths of infants and children (and veterans) your majesty is praised above the heavens.”

It’s up to us. Sometimes we need to go to God in lamentation, but not all the time. We don’t always need to be lamenting about personal problems, about poor health, about enemies closing in, about neighbor’s gossip, about eating too much, about not being able to sleep at night, about a sinful past. We don’t always need to be going to God complaining, pleading for help, hoping to be healed of something.

There is a time for praise and thanksgiving in our relationship with our Creator. There is a time to sit outdoors on a clear night and to look up and marvel at the handiwork of God. There is a time to give thanks for being created in the image of God and to be gifted with dominion over the earth. There is a time to be responsible, accountable, and trustworthy in our administering God’s kingdom.

And, most of all, we give thanks for God sending his Son into our world to bring us the gifts of grace, love, and forgiveness. It is through our faith in Jesus Christ that we move from suffering, complaining, and lamenting to endurance, character, and hope.

What is your psalm of praise and thanksgiving? The next time you sit outdoors on a clear night and gaze into the heavens, take a few moments to give praise and thanksgiving to our Creator. Better yet, write down your psalm of praise and thanksgiving. Write down your theology of stewardship and life. Then challenge yourself to be God's administrator, God's steward, God's manager in your home, in our church, in our community, and in our world.

Then we can join with the Psalmist in exclaiming, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

ELW #856 - How Great Thou Art