

“Humility and Responsibility”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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Old Testament lesson: Psalm 8

New Testament lesson: Matthew 22:34-40

Yesterday evening we had our first of two Family Movie Nights this summer, with a sermon tie-in on Sunday. Welcome to the sermon tie-in; you don't have to have to watched the movie.

The movie we watched was Trolls, a DreamWorks animated comedy about those cute little Troll dolls many of us grew up with – you know the ones with the wigged out hair.

But unlike the Trolls we used to play with, these movie Trolls are alive. And as you can imagine, they are just as cute as can be. They live in a happy forest, in the happiest of trees, and they love nothing more than to sing and dance and hug. Ahhhh.

Also living in this land of movie magic are the Bergens. The Bergens are much larger creatures, the most miserable creatures in all the land. So when they see how happy the Trolls are, they want some of that happiness for themselves. So they eat it. Eating a Troll makes them feel so happy.

Why do some people feel like their fulfillment in life comes from destroying the happiness of others? It's an important question in this age of terrorism, political backbiting, and even family squabbles. The Bergens are big, nasty terrorists hell bent on finding Trolls to consume in their vain attempt at happiness. This has the Trolls searching for a way to escape such a terrible fate. What is a small, happy little Troll to do against a big, angry Bergen?

By the end of the movie, we find out. The Trolls finally figure out what it is that makes them special, and how they can share that specialness with the Bergens, so they too can find an inner sense of happiness – without eating Trolls.

This whole scenario is very similar to the spirit and message of our Old Testament reading for today. The Psalmist – King David – praises God for giving little-old Israel the ability to stand up against their greatest enemies, the Philistines. Remember the Philistines and their giant of champion, Goliath? It was the young boy David and his shepherd's slingshot that brought down Goliath.

The point is, it's not about who has the biggest army, the best weapons, or the most hate. There's something else that, down through history, leads God's people to victory.

We get a hint as to what that is in the Psalm we heard read today.

The Psalmist, King David, begins by shouting out how majestic is our God, saying, “You have set your glory above the heavens,” O Lord. Then he compares this with how insignificant we are next to God’s grandeur. With wonder and astonishment, King David 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.” The enemies of God are those who fail to appreciate and respect just how great God is. Conversely, the friends of God, are those who appreciate what God has done in all creation and seek to further God’s will for humanity.

God’s will for humanity is peace. Or as it says in the familiar words of the prophet Isaiah, that, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.” (Isa 11:6)

That’s the vision God has for humanity, for those who see themselves as wolves and those who see themselves as lambs, those who attack and those who defend against attacks.

“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples,” says Isaiah. “They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” (Isa 2:4-5).

Or how about these familiar words from the prophet Micah? “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Each of these verses of scripture call for – demand – humility before God and responsibility among each other and in all creation.

If we look at those in leadership these days – whether we’re talking corporate leadership, the leadership of nations, or even the leadership in many families and households – leadership today seems to be more about exerting force over people, making other people small, winning at all costs.

Is this what God teaches us in the Bible – might makes right, bigger is better, winning is everything? No! The Bible points to some other quality, some other power in the heart of humanity that leads to God’s vision for this world – a vision of peace among nations, peace within our communities, peace and joy in our families, from generation to generation.

That quality is humility before God and responsibility among each other we have responsibility in relation to all of life, all of creation. The Psalmist looks up to heaven, the moon and the stars that God created and asks, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” Why are we here? How should we behave? What is this world really all about?

There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states this has already happened.¹ Funny, and scary.

And yet, as bizarre and inexplicable as the world is today – particularly the world of politics – there is a way for us to get back on track as human beings. The Psalmist points to this when he says to God, “... You have made (human beings) a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. 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, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”

In other words, we have been given power to harness the greatest of beasts, achieve the power of flight, take command of the seas, and with that, we have the responsibility to protect and preserve all creation. Humility and responsibility.

The Psalmist looks at the insignificance of human beings amid the vastness of creation and points to the one thing that makes us significant compared to all other life on this planet. God chose us to lead the way.

At the end of the movie yesterday, the Trolls found peace and happiness among the Bergens – not by outsmarting them, not by outfighting them, not by bringing them down to size – but rather, they out-loved them.

The Trolls showed the Bergens that they can be happy without destroying the Trolls. Seeing and sharing in the Trolls’ love for one another, the Bergens find an inner sense of happiness based on a new-found ability to show love, and receive love in return.

Love is God. When we know the fullness of God’s love, -Father, Son and Holy Spirit- we can’t help but share that love with one another, even those who are different from us.

If there is someone in your life that you are less than loving toward, you’re missing out on the fullness of God’s love. And certainly, the nations of the world are missing out on the fullness of God’s love, the fullness of God’s desire for humanity. Instead, the world’s leaders seem more focused on fear of one another, rather than any sense of mutual respect and kindness.

I know the political landscape is complicated. I know we have to protect ourselves. I know we have to restrain those who would do us harm. But God knows that if this is not balanced by a sense of humility and responsibility, mutual respect and loving kindness, then we as a people are missing out on the fullness of God’s love, the peace that God desires for this planet.

¹ Douglas Adams, via www.homileticsonline.com.

Let us join in praying for that right now, the fullness of God's love known and shared the world over. Pray with me, won't you?

Sovereign God, guide our world leaders along a pathway of mutual respect for one another and a sense of responsibility for the people they serve and the world we live in. And let us do what we can, O Lord, to make the fullness of God's love known in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our churches, in our schools and in our workplaces. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Eternal and holy God, on this day devoted to the mystery of your being, we offer this prayer in recognition of your greatness.

Our planet is the merest speck in one little solar system in one of millions of universes – and you, O God, created them all.

You filled the great lawgiver, Moses, with awe when you let him experience your holiness in that burning bush. You overwhelmed the mighty prophet Isaiah with the vision of your glory. Your Spirit unleashed a frenzy of wind and fire at Pentecost, transforming the bewildered disciples into apostles of astounding power.

Mighty God, on this Trinity Sunday we confess that the mystery of your being is not for us to fathom. For our earthbound minds, three persons cannot be in one being, and one being cannot also be distinctly three.

Help us to accept by faith, what we are not meant to understand.

Help to claim with confidence and conviction those teachings and commands that lead us to the fullness of your being, in love of God, love of neighbor and stewardship of creation.

We pray this in your name, by the power of your spirit, in humility before your grandeur, and using the words that you taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**