

“Sister Moon”

Psalm 8; Philippians 2: 12-14

One of my favorite things about going to summer camp when I was younger was on the last night of camp the counselors would let us stay up late. Now this was when we all thought we had out smarted the adults, that we had the advantage over them because after all, we got what we wanted. But looking back I'm not so sure that was the case. I don't think we gave the adults enough credit because inevitably an experience that started out as controlled chaos on the basketball court would transform into tranquility. Soon on this group of noisy teenagers, a hush would fall and a stillness would come. I was never sure exactly who would start it or who would make the decision but somehow someone would decide he or she was going to lie down which meant we all had to lie down. And here was the brilliance of the adults' plan...eventually all lying down, we would just look at the stars. Twenty some years later, I couldn't tell you what the themes of the week at camp were. I couldn't tell you what Scriptures we talked about in our small groups. But what I can tell you is that I learned one of the greatest lessons of God's love and grace and I learned it all from observing the moon and stars.

You see, at this camp in the mountains of western North Carolina, there was no light pollution. So when we looked up at the night sky, it was just miles and

miles of stars. No distractions, nothing to obscure our view. And the longer I stared at the night sky, the more it felt like I was becoming one with the stars. No longer was there distance separating us but rather I was part of a sky full of stars with such a heavenly view.

In those moments everything was right with the world. Worries and doubts didn't exist. Life's problems were far away. In those moments, gazing at the night sky, I was part of the bigger Creation and it took my breath away.

As I lived with these texts this past week, I wondered how many times have you like me, looked out at the night sky, gazed up at the moon and stars, and stood amazed? How many times have you like me lost yourself in the vastness of the night sky? How many times have you like me stood amazed at the stars, the moon, and realized that the same God who created them also created us?

It simply takes our breath away. It is amazing to think, It is humbling to think, it is life transforming to think that the same God who created such a heavenly view, who created a night sky filled with the moon and stars, stars that are too many to count, to think that the same God who created all that looked at us and decided the world needed one of us too. It simply takes our breath away.

This feeling of awe and wonder is what the psalmist experienced when he wrote the words to Psalm 8. He was captivated by the beauty of the night sky, deeply moved by what he saw. And in doing so, learned the greatest lesson of

God's love and grace. He came to the realization that the same God who created all this beauty also formed his inmost being, the same God who created light also breathed into him the breath of life. The psalmist came to the realization that in the vastness of God's creation, God still knows him and loves him.

You see, it's not just that God notices human beings. The NRSV doesn't do the Hebrew any favors in this text. By trying to be inclusive the NRSV misses the point. What the psalmist realizes is that even with all the coming and goings of God's creation, even with all the new beginnings and endings happening constantly in the world around us, God still notices us as individuals.

We matter to God, not as a collective. Not as one Body. But we as individuals, each one made in the image of God, matter to God. All of us hold within ourselves the unique knowledge that we are precious and beautiful and that we matter to God.

It has always bothered me that more people don't know this when it comes to our God. Unfortunately the message the Church usually sends out is that we as people of faith need to follow a certain set of rules or follow a certain set of beliefs—so much so that this amazing awe inspiring life giving news that we matter to God gets lost in the mix. People simply don't know that they are precious and beautiful, that they are loved more than they could ever imagine. People simply don't know

that they are made in the image of God, claimed and named as a Beloved Child of God.

I have to tell you that sometimes I feel like I am a broken record. It feels like I say the same thing ever week-We are all created in the image of God, made precious and beautiful and loved more than we could ever imagine. Sometimes I just want to say to God, Can't you give me something else to say?!

What I have discovered is the answer is always no. The answer that always comes back to me is that I am called, we are called to share this message about the awe inspiring nature of God's grace and God's love. This is what should be and needs to be the foundation of our faith. Because this message never changes. It is constant. From the beginning of time to the end of the same, the greatest lesson that we could ever share with the world is that we matter to God, that we are precious and beautiful, that we are loved more than we could ever imagine. That's why God wrote this message in the stars and moon at night. So that we would see it, experience it every time we stand amazed at the beauty of God's creation, a creation that includes us. Even as we experience the vastness of God's creation, we realize that there is no place where God's love and God's grace cannot find us and breathe new life into us. We realize that there is nothing we could ever do to take away God's love and God's grace. Doesn't that just take your breath away?

That's why Paul tells the group in Philippi to shine like the stars. He is not asking them to burn bright like the sun, overpowering and scorching all they meet. That's not how God's love and grace works. It doesn't beat people over the head until they give up and seek shelter somewhere else. God's love is like the soft glow of a full moon, welcoming, inviting, beckoning us to come home. We are to shine like the stars to guide others to God's love. Or as the prophet Daniel says, "Men and women who have lived wisely and well will shine brilliantly, like the cloudless, star-strewn night skies. And those who put others on the right path to life will glow like stars forever."

When we make this unique knowledge that we are created in the image of God, that we are precious and beautiful, when we make this life giving message that we are loved more than we could ever imagine, when we make this our core understanding of faith, there is nothing that can dim our light. We will glow like stars forever, welcoming others to come and experience the transforming nature of God's love and grace.

You see that's why for thousands of years, sailors have used the stars to guide their ships home again. Just like God's love, just like God's grace, the stars hold their position. They remain steady in the sky. For ones on a journey, the stars are easy reminders, easy ways to guide travelers and people of faith back home.

When we look up at the night sky, we see the moon, we see the stars and we know...we know that we too are precious and beautiful. We look up at the night sky and we know who we are. We know whose we are. It is written in the stars at night. It greets us in the smile of the moon. We matter to God. We are precious and beautiful and loved more than we could ever imagine.

This knowledge of who we are, this knowledge of whose we are is what keeps us steady in a world filled with ups and downs. It guides us on our faith journeys. It brings us home once more when we get lost and don't know where to turn. This message of who we are, of whose we are never changes. It remains constant day in and day out. And all we have to do is gaze up at the night sky to know that we are precious and beautiful, loved more than we could ever imagine, and claimed and named as a Beloved Child of God.

You see, Faith has never been about a certain set of rules or a certain set of beliefs. It has always been about being in a relationship with God, a relationship that transforms us into the people God created us and calls us to be. Faith is about reclaiming our identity, our true identity as Beloved Children of God.

It really should be so simple but I will be the first that it isn't. Because we don't live here. We live out there. We live out there in a world, in a wider community where this message of God's grace, this message of God's love gets mixed up and lost in all the labels the world tries to lay up on, labels that tell us

who we are supposed to be, labels that separate and divide, labels that bring more brokenness and hurt than unity and welcome.

Unfortunately it is these labels and the brokenness they bring that we remember day in and day out. Unfortunately it is these labels and the divisions they create that tell us what to cling to in our everyday lives. Unfortunately, it is these labels and the hurt they generate that we allow to guide and control our lives.

And isn't that sad...when all we really have to do is go and do a little star gazing to know the Truth. No I'm not talking about the Grammy's or anyone out there on the red carpet. No, when I invite us to do a little star gazing, I'm talking about taking some time to gaze up at the night sky and see the message, experience the message written in the stars. Taking time to remember the only label that matters, the only message that matters, the one message that should guide us is the one that brings us into presence of God time and time again. As the prophet says, Men and women who have lived wisely and well will shine brilliantly, like the cloudless, star-strewn night skies. And those who put others on the right path to life will glow like stars forever." Maybe it's time we remember the message written in the stars and realize that we are precious and beautiful, made in the image of God and loved more than we could ever imagine.

As I have thought about this sermon this past week, I thought how lucky for me that a group of scientists made one of the greatest scientific discoveries a few

weeks ago when they discovered that what Einstein said over 100 years ago was correct about gravitational waves. Now I'm not going to try to explain them because let's face it, the only reason I passed AP Physics was because my best friend helped with my homework.

However it amazes to think and realize that the more we learn about science, the more we discover about vastness of space, the more it leads us to faith. To think this God who created space and time, who created black holes and gravitational waves, to think that this God who swirled God's fingers through the star dust and created the Milky Way, took a look at you, took a look at me and decided the world needed one of us to. Doesn't that just take your breath away? Amen.