

## **“What Are Human Beings That You Are Mindful of Us?”**

**Psalm 8 Hebrews 2:5-12**

**Scott B. Martin**

It was three or four a.m. in the morning. I was driving on the Tamiami Trail through the Everglades on my way to Miami. I had not seen the headlights of another car or any sign of human habitation for 20-30 minutes. I could have been the only person in the whole wide world. The sky was crystal clear and full of millions of stars. I pulled the car over on the side of the road, turned off the headlights, got out of the car and just stood there for I don't know how long, just taking it all in. In the pitch blackness of night in the Everglades, with the sound of thousands of frogs, crickets, and even the occasional alligator in the background the starlight seemed to go right through me. The immensity and the beauty of this “third rock from the sun” and all of the cosmos was on full display. One couldn't help but feel rather insignificant and yet at the same time comfortingly part of it ALL.

The psalmist in a very different part of the world, in a very different time, must have felt something similar to my experience in the Everglades. His voice comes down through the centuries to us, saying, **“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?”** (Psalm 8:3-4 NRSV)

Good question! When you think of the vast immensity of the universe, which extends far further than our eyes can see and even far further than any scientific instrument can see, why does God bother with us? We are tiny specks, on a tiny planet with a rather tiny star that gives us light. **“What,” indeed, “are human beings that you are mindful of us?”** Centuries after the psalmist wrote these words Jesus would assure all who listened to him that God counted even the hairs on our heads and that even the death of a sparrow does not go unnoticed by God the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. The Celtic Christians spoke of feeling the sustaining presence of God all around them, which one described as BEAUTY; beauty above me, beauty below me, beauty behind me, beauty before us.

What does it mean to be human? What is our role in God's creation? All religions struggle with these questions. In Hinduism they believe in reincarnation. In reincarnation you are born, you die and you are reborn again, and again and again, hundreds, maybe even thousands of times, until that blessed day when you reach spiritual wholeness and escape the wheel of rebirth. Now the interesting thing about this concept is that when a person dies they are not automatically reborn as a human being, much less as a better human being than they were before! If they have built up particularly bad karma through their choices and actions they can move down the "spiritual evolutionary" hierarchy. They can be reincarnated as dog or an insect! Someone like Hitler must have come back as an amoeba!

There is certainly no doubt that we human beings can act in the most despicable ways to each other and to our fellow creatures. A quick stroll through human history or even the morning newspaper proves this. Yet human beings also have the capability to act in the most amazing and wonderful ways.

I just returned from Back Bay Mission. On the grounds of the newly dedicated campus there is a church bell. It is dedicated to a woman who for 30 years was highly active in the life and ministry of Back Bay Mission, so much so she almost became synonymous with the mission, her name is Mrs. W. F. McDonnell. She came to be lovingly known as Mrs. Mac or sometimes as "The Lady in White." She moved to Back Bay from New Orleans and joined First Evangelical Church in the late 1920's. She was a nurse and had training in music as well as social work.

It wasn't long before she was volunteering with the work of the newly established Back Bay Mission, then in 1927 she became a commissioned worker and staff member. She could be found doing whatever was required. The Mission had an old truck with a jitney body on it that was used to transport children from the Back Bay side of the island to the church on the other side. In the summer of 1929 she and Pastor Arndt were taking the children home when a terrible thunderstorm came up. The lights on the truck went out and the children were in darkness and some started becoming hysterical. Pastor Arndt suggested they sing a hymn and asked for a favorite number. One of the children suggested "Showers of Blessings!" In the end they sang "There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today." They continued on and then the engine stalled. Mrs. McDonnell and the

children got out and pushed the truck to get it going again and then quickly hopped back on.

Being a trained nurse, Mrs Mac worked hard to ensure that the poor people of Back Bay had medical care. At first there was no money to start and operate a clinic. Mrs. Mac prayed hard that the money could be found. Her prayers were answered when Mrs. Peters, whose family owned the Peters Shoe Factory in St. Louis, was visiting the island. Mrs. Mac gave her a tour and shared with Mrs. Peters her dream for a clinic. When Mrs. Peters got back to St. Louis she sent a check for \$200 to start the clinic. Space was made for the clinic in one of the Back Bay Chapels and the work began. Mrs. Mac worked in the clinic three afternoons a week and soon she found a local doctor who came once a week. Of course it wasn't unusual for Mrs. Mac to be awakened in the middle of the night by someone needing help. Rev. Nussmann wrote of Mrs. Mac she "maintains a home for a busy husband and three splendid sons. She has laid her profession at the feet of the people and her services in the lap of the Home Mission Board. She rides with the children in the truck on its Sunday morning rounds, cares for the sick, conducts an afternoon Sunday School in Back Bay, performs all the duties of a parish worker, and kept the mission going for months while it was without a pastor."

Mrs. Mac retired in 1958 because of illness in her family. Rev. Fiegenbaum, who worked at Back Bay in 1953 and 1954 wrote of her, "No history will be accurate without much attention being given to Mrs. Mac, as she was affectionately known. As some said, 'She lived for us, and we feel like dying for her.' She delivered many a baby born in that area. She knew the people like a book. They confided in her. She was an ever-present help in their troubles, whether it was sickness, jail, etc. In the eyes of many of the people served by the Mission, it was Mrs. Mac's Mission." Certainly when one considers such representatives as Mrs. Mac, one can agree with the Psalmist that God has made just a little "lower than the angels."

The Psalmist also says that God made us a little lower than the angels for a reason, to be stewards of God's good earth. "You have given us dominion over the works of your hands;..." (Psalm 8:6) As stewards we do not have carte blanche. We can not do whatever we want to do with this good earth or to our fellow human beings, who likewise are made "a little lower than the angels."

Throughout the Bible angels were the servants of God. All of the powers they had were put at God's disposal. Angels are found bringing messages from God to individuals. They are found ministering to God's prophets in time of great need. They are found delivering the Good News that Christ has come. In John's vision of heaven they are seen praising God.

In the book of Hebrews we find an early Christian reflecting on the same passage from Psalm 8 that we have been focusing on. As our brother in the faith looks around the world he can't help but notice that while God has given dominion to humanity that they are not fully living up to their almost angelic roles. Looking at our world today we can unfortunately say that this has not changed much.

In spite of this our early brother in the faith finds comfort and assurance in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. He tells us, **“Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”**

(Hebrews 2:8b-9)

Our early brother in the faith seems to see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the fulfillment of what the Psalmist spoke of in Psalm 8. He finds hope that humanity will some day fully live up to its God given potential, to its almost angelic calling. Our early brothers and sisters in the Eastern Orthodox tradition said, “God became man, so man might become God.” Amen.