

Psa. 8:2 O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,
You who have covered the heavens with Your splendor!
3 From the mouths of infants and sucklings
You have founded strength on account of Your foes,
to put an end to enemy and avenger.
4 When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and stars that You set in place,
5 what is man that You have been mindful of him,
mortal man that You have taken note of him,
6 that You have made him little less than divine,
and adorned him with glory and majesty;
7 You have made him master over Your handiwork,
laying the world at his feet,
8 sheep and oxen, all of them,
and wild beasts, too;
9 the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,
whatever travels the paths of the seas.
10 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name
throughout the earth!

5 מָה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ:

Imagine that you are a little child, maybe 5 years old. You live in the ancient Babylonian empire, 3,000 years ago. And one day you look at your mom and dad, and you ask ***“What am I? Why was I born? What is the meaning of my life?”*** Imagine the mom and dad giving each other a quick but troubled glance. And then the dad says, “Well, little Darius, if you must know, you were born to be a slave to the gods. That is all you are and all you shall ever be. Your life has no meaning.”

Now imagine you are a little 5-year old ancient Israelite child living 3,000 years ago. And you ask mom and dad “What am I? Why was I born? What is the meaning of my life?” They quickly smile and say “Little Rivkah, we are so glad you asked.

You are a child of the Living God, Adonai Eloheynu. You are created in God's image, and it is your destiny to be a person who reflects the ways of God to a broken world. **YOU ARE A REFLECTION OF THE CREATOR!** *Always know that.*"

This is the central question and answer in the reading for today from Psalm 8. As I have said in the past, each of our Psalms are little bundled messages given in poetic fashion. The words are beautiful. I wish we could have heard the song that went with these words. But we can get a sense by just hearing the ultimate question within: I have to share the Hebrew because it is so beautiful...

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Maw Enosh ci tizkaraynu, uvet Adam ci tifqadeynu ? *What is a person that you remember us, a human child that you appoint us?* And what is the answer? We are a little lower than divine, and we have a destiny. And, we are more special than the stars and the moon and the sky. We are not just an accident of biology, without purpose or meaning. We really need to hold on to that!

On this third of a series message I ask, which little child would you have wanted to be, long, long ago? Little Darius the Babylonian, or little Rivkalah the Israelite? Imagine being a child born into a world, and you are told "Your life will never be worth a thing, you are a slave, and that is all there is." Do you suppose that would make a little guy want to get up every day and go live that life?! Or would you rather be told that you are

destined to be a reflection of the Creator and Sustainer of our world and all worlds? Which is a better deal, and does it really matter that much what we think about ourselves? *I mean come on... they are only thoughts!* Right?

We've been filling in some lines on the LIST over the last weeks. The first 4 are already done for us. I'd like us to move on to belief #5, which simply states

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT OURSELVES IS CRUCIAL.

In recent years parents and teachers have really understood that, maybe more than in the past. Yes, on the one hand, it is shaky to give awards to every child to make them feel good. On the other hand, that might be the only praise they ever get.

I believe that it matters so much what we believe about ourselves. What messages do we get, especially from parents, and how might those messages mark us? I knew a girl in 9th grade who told me the saddest thing. I invited her to our youth group hayride in the Fall of 1973. We barely knew each other, and she was a new girl to our school. But she was a friend of a friend. When the hay wagon part was concluded, she felt the need to tell me the saddest thing. She felt the need to tell me that her dad had never wanted her, that he even HURT her mom when she was in her mother's womb. I will never forget that moment. I didn't know what to say, but I have always felt so badly about that for her. Do you imagine that would be a rough thing to know? Allow me to share two other sad stories of people and what they had been told about themselves.

I know that a young man from Louisville, Ohio murdered a girl back in 1989, and that he was a boy who had committed a lot of crimes, including against me. I found out years later that his father was in prison, and that he had been told for most of his life that he was no good, and that like his father, he would also end up in prison. Sometimes these beliefs really hurt a child. Sometimes they seem to have a different effect.

The young man who was the smartest guy in my high school, who went off to excel at a prestigious engineering school, had been told by his dad that he was worthless, that he would never amount to anything. Well, he proved him wrong. Now he is a successful man living in the Hudson River Valley in New York. He is very accomplished in life; but he also is very distant from his past, and really wants no part of class reunions or anything that might bring him back to Ohio. Maybe he just wants to get as far away from the past as he can.

What we believe about ourselves matters so much. How do we get these beliefs? Most often we get them because someone programs them into us, usually someone who has great influence in our lives. We often get our beliefs about ourselves from family and parents and siblings. This is where most people probably get their first ingrained ideas about who they are, ***and if they matter or not***, whether they feel like they belong or not, all of that. And sometimes, the beliefs that have been instilled are not especially helpful. But let's think about this...

As a church, this should be a big part of our job. We should be instilling beliefs as well. But frankly, we have to wonder how

we have been doing. Again, many people in many churches cannot even begin to explain what they are supposed to believe, or what they actually believe. They are confused, or they just aren't interested. Who knows. But this one day, we will emphasize one belief, and it is the one little Rivkah would have heard long ago in Israel. We are created in the Image of God. About nothing else in all creation can that be said. Mt. Rainier in its glory was not created in the Image of God. The stars in the sky were not created in the Image of God. A big beautiful valley on a Spring day was not created in the Image of God. But every human being, according to our beliefs and our intended world view, every human is created in the Image of God.

If we just leave that as it is, we might smile and say "Yep, that sounds pretty good." But that is not enough. If we talk about "image of God," we must come to some understanding of what that means. It must mean something. Let me offer this as a suggestion for its meaning:

If we are truly created in the Image of God, we are born to imitate and reflect the ways of God in this world. God's ways are imported into the world through people like us. Let's fill in line #6: **IT IS OUR DESTINY TO IMITATE GOD'S WAYS.** Of course this leads to another question: How on earth do we imitate God? We cannot create worlds and mountains. Genesis says we are created in the Image of God. If we are to be a reflection or an imitator of God, how can we know what to do? I have a suggestion: If we look to the very beginning of Genesis,

we need to watch what God does. We are told that when God begins creating, there is some kind of chaos, some kind of storm with water. God in fact comes in and hovers over the waters. He calms this, he stops the storm, he stops the chaos, and he transforms chaos into Creation. In special ways, this would be the great trademark of God. God is the one who is the Fixer. God takes what is broken and chaotic, and God turns it into something good.

Dare I suggest today that this God has created us to do the same? Are there things that need to be fixed in this life? Could it be that God needs helpers? Let me share a belief with you that is actually more Jewish than Christian technically. But Jewish folks, from reading Genesis, have the idea that God creates us to be junior partners in Creation. God is course is the great Creator and Sustainer. But isn't it a neat idea to think that God is saying to all of us ***I need you to do the same, I need you to turn some chaos into some Creation.*** I need you to help stop some storms, and to calm things down. I need you to help Me bring healing to a torn and bleeding world.

If somebody asks me about the meaning of human life, and asks why are we here, I say 'You are here to fulfill your destiny of being a creature truly created in the Image of God, and this means that it is your job and purpose to be a stabilizer and a healer, one who takes chaos and turns it into something good. If we are imitators of God, then we need to do this. Why else would Genesis say that human beings have been given dominion over the earth? God has left us in charge, maybe with the simple

instruction to leave this world in better shape than we found it. This is God's offer: ***Be my junior partners in Creation.***

What should we tell our kids as they grow up? Should we tell them that they were born to be slaves, and that their lives have no meaning? Should we tell them that they were not wanted? Should we tell them that they are no good and destined for prison? Should we tell them that they will never amount to anything? Or should we tell them that they are created to bring goodness to the world by fulfilling their destiny as beings created in the Image of God?

C. S. Lewis once wrote that it is God's intention to create a lot of little replicas of himself in this world, each one in a tiny, limited way. And just as God is the Fixer, and the bringer of Creation from chaos, we are invited to do the same in our own little world.

God asks us again today: Do you want to be a Junior Partner with the Creator? It's a good job! We are free to reject it, and too many do. But it is our destiny, if only we would take it. AMEN.