

“And”

Psalm 8, 103:15-16; Matthew 28: 16-20; James 4:14; Genesis 1:27; Psalm 103:15-16; & John 3:17

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The psalmist sings: **Psalm 8 NLT “O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? And you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!”**

The crux of this psalm is its only question — “What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?” Most people like to be in control. A few people think they are the center of the cosmos. God is the center of the cosmos. The psalmist reminds us that our **Psalm 103:15-16 “days are like grass; we flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone.”** Our lives are like a **James 4:14 “mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”** The psalmist urges us to spend time to lay under the stars. For some this might be a needed humbling. Humanity is a speck of dust that God breathes earthly life into and then that physical body is gone in an instant. A needed reminder that God is in control. For others, it might be comforting. Several times I have laid under the stars and God lifted my burdens from me. My struggles, concerns and worries got smaller as I admired the enormity of the cosmos. The psalmist is urging us to be mindful of God the Creator, to center upon God and worship God. In the light of God’s majesty, glory, awe-inspiring creation, how can human individuals matter all that much?

Next the psalmist has an important “and.” **“And you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.”** A careful reading of the Hebrew reveals important nuances. The noun is singular. God noticing a single human being amid the vastness of the universe. The verbs expressing God’s care for us are emphatic. Translating these nuances to English the song of the astonished psalm-singer is, **“Given the vastness and complexity of God’s universe, why would you, Majestic Lord, take note of and care deeply for one human being?”**

Verse 5 expresses that God **“made each human being a little lower than God and crowned them with glory.”** “God” can also be translated divine beings or heavenly host. With the insight of the New Testament and today being Trinity Sunday, it could read “Triune God.” Genesis declares: **Genesis 1:27 NLT “So God created human beings in God’s own image. In the image of God, God created them.”** Again the Hebrew can be interpreted as plural or singular. God created each person in God’s image. God created you in God’s image. And God is a heavenly host, divine beings, triune. “And” is a critically important word throughout scripture. Often, we suffer from binary thinking. We think in either or, good, better, or best, black or white. Scripture often expresses “and,” a spectrum, a tension, endless shades of grey. We are created in the image of God, One God and in three persons. The three persons of God are one by love. We are created distinct, unique, an individual and by love we are to be one with God, by love one with all of humanity and by love one with the cosmos. In this context, the plural and singular nuances of the Hebrew has great insight. Humans are many and by love we are all one. Humanity is plural and singular.

These insights are important context for the next verse. **God gave them** (humanity plural and individual singular) **charge of everything God made, putting all things under their authority.** Our authority for the cosmos is to be like God’s emphatic authority for us caring, sustaining, grace filled, affirming, life giving. We are to take note of every animal, plant, and element of the cosmos. We are to notice and know all like God notices and knows each of us, so we can perfectly care for all of the cosmos. Authority from the wider biblical context, reveals “vice-lordship” “shepherding” “carefully watching” and “responsible for all of God’s creation.” God esteems you and each person so majestically that God gives you the responsibility of noticing, caring, and loving every person, every animal, every plant, all of the cosmos, with such love that all becomes one.

The psalmist is inviting us to live in the tension between arrogance and low self-esteem, controlling and apathic, overplanning and worry, dictator and fear and to lovingly care with God bringing unity to the cosmos. The psalmist is inviting us to participate and enjoy the dance of life as an individual participant and to perceive the dance from a balcony expanding our awareness, noticing all the participants, the band, and the environment.

Spiritual guides encourage us to notice and be present. Often this involves taming the ego, which creates a false self and a false world. It is easy to fall into a vivacious spiral of not noticing and unloving. Our blind spots feed our false self and our false self feeds our blind spots. Left unchecked one comes to believe that they know fully, that there is only one way, and it is their way and everyone else is less if they do not perceive things from their way. In this situation, the psalmist prescribes going out and looking at the stars. Did you create the cosmos? Do you fully understand how the cosmos is designed? Do you know each star and what is happening on each star?

Spiritual guides encourage us to have an Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will. An Open Mind is the capacity to suspend habitual judgements. An Open Heart is the capacity to shift perspective from my viewpoint to the viewpoint of others. An Open Will is the capacity to let go of preconceived outcomes and let come God's emerging kingdom. In short, let go and let come.

Spiritual guides encourage us to move from knowing to unknowing, from advocating to attending and from striving to surrender. The shift from knowing to unknowing involves being suspicious of our own thinking. Realizing that we are not capable of perceiving the whole picture. We are unable to know the full truth. Our every thought is based on a sliver of perception and then distorted by assumptions, past experiences, and our baggage. Our thinking mind is distorted by our ego which gives rise to judgements, compulsions, and ego-centric concerns. And we can shift to the unknown. We can rise above our thoughts and perceive. We are more than our thoughts. One time when I was laying under the stars, everything faded and I felt connected to the cosmos. I cannot explain it. I knew nothing and I felt complete love. I imagined myself small and infinite. I was filled with wonder, awe, and joy.

From advocating to attending. Energy follows attention. How we pay attention and what we focus on determines how decision making unfolds. We become what we think. If we think something to be true, we usually gather every shred of supporting evidence, and we reject and discard every mountain of contrary information. Anxiety fuels an advocating stance. One forces the spectrum into two choices, picks one, decides that one view to be right and then admittedly promotes that choice. A person in an advocating stance is stubborn, single-minded, and an authoritarian. An attending person avoids adopting an opinion, cause, principle, or targeted outcome. An attending person embraces the fullness of the present moment for all that it might reveal to them. An attending person opens all their senses to experience the situation through divine consciousness that dwells within all and within them. Attending is deep perceiving, being fully present, listening without formulating a reply, becoming aware of the infinite potential within and throughout the cosmos. An attending stance invites one to love God, love all people, love self, love the cosmos.

From striving to surrender. The striving person strives to fix it, complete every "to do," power through barriers and resolve every issue. The striving self is formed by false identities of winning, looking good, competence, success, net worth, awards, stuff. A surrendering person's identity comes from God, being a beloved child of God with a desire to glorify God and enjoy God forever. This form of surrender is not disinterested in winning, looks, and awards; rather, they are achieved to glorify God, to be enjoyed, to be shared, rather than used as a source of identity. This form of surrender is not giving up or giving in or conceding defeat or apathy. This form of surrender is contemplative, to yield and submit to God. Surrender is accepting the past for what it was and leaving the past in the past. Surrender is dreaming about the opportunities of the future and setting aside worry and a desire to know what is coming. Surrender is letting go of what you cannot control. Surrender focuses on changing self and not others. Surrender embraces the present.

Again, no one is all one or the other. We are a mix of and. Each person has a different spot on the spectrum that feels good and is their loving sweet spot. As we journey, we move all over the spectrum.

Let go, you are a mere speck of dust in the cosmos. Let come, you are a noticed, known, cared for, a beloved child of God who is being loved into oneness with the cosmos and your distinctness is honored, cherished, and preserved.

Being a disciple is an "and" journey. A disciple learns and teaches, follows and guides, knows Christ and shows Christ. Everyone is both throughout their life. There are seasons when one is learning more than teaching, following more than guiding and vice versa. The "and" is present regardless of any distinction. Jesus pointed out that we can learn from a child as well as himself, God incarnate.

The disciples spent most of their three years with Jesus learning and following. Jesus said: **"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth."** There is that word "authority" again which means to notice every person, care for every person and love, to bring all together in harmony. John declares. **John 3:17 NLT "For God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Jesus."** It took the disciples three years to perceive this radical grace, that saves each person and everyone, that notices each person and cares for each person. Throughout the gospels, Jesus notices and cares for those who the religious leaders and society belittled and

excluded. Jesus notices and cares for those who were demoted, devalued, and forced into a lower class. Jesus notices and cares for those who are regulated to places where they could be ignored, the outskirts of town, at a well in the heat of the day, in a cemetery, in the wilderness. The disciples repeatedly had to experience God's radical grace and witness God's free, redeeming, lifegiving love. Jesus noticed and cared for children, women, tax collectors, foreigners, people from other religions, enemies, soldiers, oppressors, dictators, even corrupt religious leaders. Anyone who was brushed aside Jesus noticed them, cared for them, and welcomed them into community. Jesus never condemned anyone; even when a person was caught in sinful act with witnesses, and religious leaders and everyone knew the act was wrong, Jesus was gracious and forgave. Jesus noticed and cared for everyone.

Many of the disciples' conversations with Jesus involve them testing the limits of grace. Can anyone be excluded? Is anyone deserving of a higher position? Is anyone's lifestyle worthy of more blessings? Every time Jesus revealed that grace is for everyone, no one is excluded, all are equal. All blessings are a free gift of God. Usually, Jesus required nothing from the people he healed, no commitment to worship, no belief requirement, no promise to try to be more loving. Jesus went out to meet people where they were. Grace is only grace if it is completely free and unmerited. This is extremely hard to grasp, so the disciples followed and learned about grace for three years.

If being a disciple was basic information, Jesus could have hosted seminars, retreats, or conferences, or explained it all concisely. Jesus taught in parables, because everything is a spectrum with various shades. There are numerous perspectives, layers, and a unique message for each person who hears a parable. It took the disciples three years to learn how to be a guide for others, to help others experience God's redeeming grace.

Jesus spent little time in the temple. Jesus' longest conversations were with the religious leaders who were using religious tradition, beliefs, and laws to judge and exclude people, to sort people into different status levels giving them access to different parts of the temple. The religious leaders were binary thinkers, either or, black or white. In a myriad of ways, Jesus rejects judging, sorting, excluding inequality and binary thinking. Jesus' message was always constant, every person is loved, all will be welcomed home to God's family by grace. Those who rejected grace had a closed heart, closed mind, and closed will. They were the type of person who was oblivious to the majesty of a starry night, who thought they were in control and what they achieved in their life was due to their hard work. Instead of awe and wonder under a majestic starry night, they marveled at all they knew and did. They completely ignored the message of the psalmist and Jesus. God is the center. You are created in God's image to notice, care, and love. All you have is a gift of God. Your identity is to come from being God's beloved child, equal siblings with everyone.

God's redeeming grace for all people is the context for the great commission. **Matthew 28:16-20 NLT** **"Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

After three years of experiencing grace, the disciples are ready to go with authority, which means noticing, caring, and loving. They are to go and meet people where they are at, to notice every person, all people. They are to make disciples by noticing, caring, loving, and sharing experiences of grace. Teaching them the unlimited energy of grace to condemn no one and save everyone. Baptism is the sacrament of grace. All is forgiven. Every division is removed. All people are united equally in God's family.

The first wave of Baptisms were informal and free of ritual. People were not asked to come to a place of worship, building, or a certain place. There were no regulations surrounding baptism. The disciples went out to homes, paths, and carriages baptizing freely. The disciples used whatever water in whatever form to express grace to the recipient. A sprinkle from a jar, a splash from a creek, a dunk in a lake. Every baptism is unique like every person is unique. During baptism, the grace of God washes, purifies, and assures that person that they belong to God's family, that they are noticed, cared for and will be eternally loved.

Jesus concludes: **"And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** Jesus is with us, like Jesus God the Redeemer is with God the Creator and God the Sustainer. Each unique, distinct, their own person and one by love. Amen

