



## June 15 – Starry Night

With Adam's presence at Grace last Sunday, I have had Western North Dakota on my mind. No, I am not considering moving there. I have been thinking about a road trip nearly 30 years ago. My high school friend Chris was getting married, and I traveled to the wedding with another high school friend. I drove from Iowa State to Sioux Falls, SD, and then we traveled in his car from there. It was a long drive. As college students, we opted to drive straight through, so we did not have to spend money on a hotel.

There was something about the night sky that drew us both in. We looked up and you could see EVERYTHING. The Milky Way was visible. There looked to be several times the number of stars one can normally see. When you are away from light pollution there is more visible than you ever could have imagined. There was almost a hushed, whispered tone to our speaking, as if saying "Thank you." We pulled off the road and looked at the sky. It created a sense of awe and wonder. Wow. And there was, at the same time, the sense that we are but a tiny speck in the expanse of the universe. You cannot help but pray silently, "Have mercy on me."

It is almost as if Psalm 8 resides in the heart and bursts forward in such moments. The entire Psalm is a chiasmic structure. It centers on verse 5. The lead in to this central verse is the experience of the starry night, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers..., what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them." These verses lean into the mysteries of God. These verses are simultaneously the hushed "Thank you", the "Wow" of wonder, and the "Have mercy on me" as we look to the expanse of creation.

I find it quite poetic that these are the verses that are coupled with the other texts on Holy Trinity Sunday. It is the Sunday each year when we try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. It is the only Sunday on which such a subject is attempted. We do not have other Sundays based on doctrine. And how many of you feel you could accurately explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity without treading on heresy? I am all ears, because I cannot. I used to think that I could. That was in my youthful altruistic phase of adulthood. The more I live out my faith, the more I discover it to be a mystery.

Nearly every year we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" on Holy Trinity Sunday. We sing out as if we have all the answers. "God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity." We know that the music carries a truth, whether our minds can comprehend it or not. Our hearts lean into the mystery, as it simultaneously singing "Thank you", "Wow" and "Have mercy on me." The hymn carries both a sense of bold proclamation and a fearless sense of wonder. God is God and we are not.

The theologian James McTyre wrote "The life built around answers is a life propelled by anxiety." He goes on to talk about how yesterday's answers may not hold true, or become obsolete. It leaves one constantly yearning for more answers, on guard for attacks on held truths, and protecting today's answers from tomorrow's destruction. It is a vicious cycle. He suggests that Psalm 8 holds the key. Instead of striving to have all of the answers, he suggests we approach life with a sense of wonder, awe, and curiosity.

What if wonder replaced the need for answers as the driving force of life? How might the world be seen differently? I think the Church universal would benefit quite a bit from such a shift. Instead of feeling like your perspective contains all of the answers, we might learn to appreciate differing perspectives. We may even gain a more full view of God in the process.

When we feel the need for answers, we also feel the need to protect the answers that we hold dear. It also leads to a fear of sharing the story of your faith because you are afraid of saying something wrong. Instead of striving for answers, and getting everything right, maybe we would be better simply leaning into the fact that God is a mystery. May we look up, and simultaneously say "Thank you", "Wow", and "Have mercy." Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt