

2014_06_15 Trinity Sunday
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

God is Simple

Psalm 8:1-2

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be to you all. Amen.

Psalm 8:1–2

- 1 O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!
- 2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We pray, O Lord how excellent is Your name. Give us the hearts of dear children that we may know and praise Your name in all the earth. Amen.

From the mouth of a child come something simple. A child looks up to his dad and makes a simple statement: “God must have big hands. Dad, did you know God’s hand is bigger than the world? God’s hands are bigger than everything!”

Most of us grown ups make things more complicated than they need to be. If you are like me, you find yourself facing a problem and wrestling over the solution. You try to think through all the scenarios and possibilities, you get apprehensive about all the things that could go wrong. Yet, while you try to imagine every detail and potential for something bad to happen, you end up missing the whole picture. You find yourself having redoing things over again and again before you get close to what you envisioned. Grown ups, especially, tend to make things more complicated than they need to be.

We try to wrap our minds around an idea like God and His will for us and find our minds wrapped into knots and our tongues tied. We wonder how big God’s hands really are. We try to explain the concept of God being Triune and can’t seem to find the

right words. In the Athanasian Creed, we use words like these: "...we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence." And while this is necessary to avoid misrepresenting who God is and explain who God is not, there is a danger too; if we spend too much time trying to reason out the details of how God can be three in one, we may miss the whole picture.

Even more so, there is a danger that we spend too much time trying to reason out God's interaction in the details of this fallen world? As we try to reason out how God relates to the events going on around us in the world and in our lives, we may miss the whole picture. We get wrapped up in knots and tongue tied trying to make God fit into our idea of who we think God should be. We make things complicated. But the truth is, God's hands are big; the truth is: God is simple.

I don't know about you, but in my mind, the mark of a genius is not the person who comes up with the most complex idea or even the person who accomplishes the most; in my mind, the mark of a genius is someone who can accomplish the most in the simplest way. For example, we speak of "simple machines" as those mechanisms that can accomplish the most work with a minimal amount of wasted energy. What makes a lever, or a pulley, or a wheel and axel simple is that they don't need any additional mechanisms to accomplish their task. They have the least amount of working parts to do the job. When we say that God is simple, what we mean is that He is able to accomplish the most in the simplest way. To say, "God is simple," is to say that He has no moving parts; He needs no additional mechanism to accomplish His task; He is perfectly united; perfectly independent; perfectly free from space and time and limits.

1 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! 2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

A child looks up to his dad and makes a simple statement: "God must have big hands. Dad, did you know God's hand is bigger than the world? God's hands are bigger than everything."

A child sees things much more simply than grown ups do. It is from such a mouth that God has established strength. Literally, as verse 2 says, He has "established a stronghold, for the enemy, to still the enemy and the avenger."

There is something in a child's faith that proves the enemy powerless. What a wonder. The God whose name is majesty and whose glory is above the heavens reveals His fortress and power against the enemy in the mouth of a child.

Echoes of this psalm accompany Jesus as He rides into Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday Jesus makes His humble entrance into the city of the King on a donkey and the mouths of children shout Messianic praises. He enters the temple healing the blind and the lame and the children cry out: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Yet the wise and learned priests and scribes do not; they become angry at this – "do you not hear what these are saying?" Jesus responds: "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" (Matthew 21:16). The children acknowledge what the Pharisees do not. However humble and human He might be, they see the size of His hands – this Jesus holds power over all creation, the strength to heal and the power to right what is wrong.

God is simple. His hands are bigger than everything. What we mean when we say that God is simple is that He has no moving parts; He relies on no mechanism to accomplish His task. After all, what was needed for Him to bring this world into being? With nothing more than a word of His mouth, God created the heavens and the earth. The Spirit hovered over the waters and with a word He was sent forth into this formless, empty mass – shaping and molding, bringing forth light and life, filling all creation with touch of God's hand; bringing forth mankind – shaping and molding Him in His own image: filled with His Spirit; filled with those simple things that define God's every action and will: righteousness, holiness, truth.

It was a work of the Triune God, in His eternal will, God the Father spoke; in His Word God the Son acted; and in His breath, God the Spirit gave life. Yet they were all united – indivisible, yet distinct in their work; they were united and freed; There was no mechanism compelling God to do this; there was no demand for God to create us or give us such good things. He was simply free. This means it was an act of grace. It was by grace that God united Himself with us and gave us His image. It all rested in God's big hands and He saw that it was very good.

But man would not accept something so simple. It was too simple; to live in harmony with God, to trust Him and be dependent on Him for everything. The command: "do not eat" was too simple. There was no explanation as to why God had placed that tree and given that command. And man twisted things in his reasoning. There must be something behind it all. God is holding back; God does not want us to know something or have something. And so things become complicated. With one sin, death enters the world and things become complicated. Man falls from the image of God, loses that simple harmony with His creator; loses the righteousness, the holiness, the truth, and things become complicated.

We do make things complicated. It is not enough for us simply to trust Him. When we can't see His will being played out the way we would like it, we get apprehensive; we try to make out every detail of how these things fit together or how these things will work out and we get our mind wrapped in knots; we become tongue tied. We can't accept the idea that God is bigger than us and we want Him to fit into our complex knots.

The sins we commit make our lives complex and then we wonder why God isn't answering our prayers or doing the things we want Him to do. All the while, God gives no explanation as to why He has placed that tree in that garden; temptation confuses us; and He simply asks us to trust Him? It is too simple; and that is why it is so hard for us. We are complicated.

We live in a complicated world – where people have twisted this creation into knots. The Bible needs updating; marriage needs updating; our principles of family life need updating; our contentment with simplicity – patience and humility, honesty and honor, a good reputation and attitude, selflessness and sacrifice, trust and love which acts for others – these things just won't do anymore; God needs to be brought up to speed with the 21st century.

And yet we have a God who wants to keep things simple – who purposes to untie our knots; who redeems us from sin; who sends His Son to death; who raises up Jesus and makes Him Lord of all – who unties the knots we've made and restores the simplicity of His creation to what it should be – He removes death, and pours out life in His Spirit.

And so wisdom speaks in the whisper of Proverbs 9: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here ... forsake foolishness and live."

The Father resurrects man. Death must be undone and in Jesus, God does just that. By miracles and signs and wonders, God proves His power is above the heavens and it is a creative power sent to restore sight to the blind, to make the lame walk, to answer your prayers. And by sending His Son and raising Jesus from death, things become simple again.

Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of all creation, the One who has become the first fruits of a creation God will restore. As Lord, He has authority over all and sends out His Spirit to give us what we had lost. "Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teachings them all things I have commanded."

The Spirit again hovers over the waters. The hand of God again touches His creation, reaching into the water and forming new life. It is simple – no moving parts, no mechanism for us to operate, only God and His Word; and because it is so simple, it silences the enemy. God proves that His strength is not found in us, but is found in Him. The majesty of His name brings power to the waters of baptism and places His name into the mouth of a nursing child, an infant who is just learning to talk becomes a place for God’s praise. God’s hands are big. The enemy is nothing against this stronghold. The enemy is silenced against these praises and the mouth of a child becomes the strength of God.

It is a call for us grown ups likewise to return to the water; to return to those creative acts of God in His Word; to treasure the earthly elements in which God has promised to bless us with eternal life and create a new creation. We return to the water, to the bread and wine and find the God of Creation, present in the work of His Son, visiting us in His Spirit to restore His image within us. He puts away our sins, and places His name upon us. He drowns us in the waters of baptism, and crowns us with the life of Christ. He unties our knots so that we would look to Him in a simple faith.

An old man is left dead, a new man comes forth in the simplicity that God intends. We live now for the simplicity of the Triune God; with no moving parts, no mechanism of the law forcing us; we live in freedom – in patience and humility, honesty and honor, a good reputation and attitude, selflessness and sacrifice, trust and love. Yes, the Triune God of the Bible is the same God of the 21st century who will come again to judge the living and the dead. For He says, “lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

1 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! 2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

Children tend to keep things simple. When they learn to ride a bike, they don’t think much about how to do it; they just do it. They don’t think about what the simple machines that make that task possible. They don’t think about the wheels and axel, the pulleys, the leverage that makes it possible accomplish so much more with such less energy. As parents, we probably make things more complicated than they need to be; we try to tell them how to ride a bike: we say, “you need to turn the wheel this way and lean more that way, you need to keep the pedals going, you need to go faster, you need to look up.” And yet the truth is, they learn simply by doing it; the more they try it, the more their body and mind adjust and learn how to balance without even thinking about it.

As we look ahead to tomorrow, to the next day, to the future – we do so with the mind of a child. For by baptism we are children of our heavenly Father. As children, we look ahead. God does not tell us every detail or coach us through every decision that will help us balance our life toward the goal. Instead He teaches us simply by doing it for us and letting us do it in him. He remains with us always, leading us to repentance when we ignore Him; helping us up when we fall; healing our wounds when we are hurt; putting us back into His purpose and steering us forward in Christ. As children, we learn to balance. We find refuge in Him. And we look up to praise His holy name.

It is a simple statement, and with it we place ourselves into God's simplicity: "God's hands are bigger than everything!"

1 O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! 2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.