



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Last Day of the Church Year**

**November 26, 2017**

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**“What is Man that You are Mindful of Him?”**

*(Ps. 8:3-4)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the Son of Man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:3-4)*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

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I picture David on the flat roof of his palace, in the cool of the night. He loves it up there with the soft breezes stirring the potted palm bushes nearby. Sometimes he walks over to the ledge of the roof and looks down on the capital city. It's so beautiful, also at night. The city is mostly quiet, mostly dark. (There weren't any street lights, or brightly lit parking lots or billboards. There weren't any sirens or Harleys gunning it down the main street.) He sees only the soft glow of those olive oil lamps coming out of the windows. This night, however, he's reclined on a mat and is looking up at the night sky. The arid air of a desert provides the best viewing of the stars. It captivates his imagination and his heart. It's so beautiful, so immense, and he knows it's the handiwork of God. But at the same time, it's unsettling. It's so vast it makes him, even him, the King of Israel, feel small and inconsequential. Who is he, (a mere mortal), who is he compared to the universe so immense? He writes a prayer: Lord, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" In other words, why do you even bother thinking about us? Have you ever wondered about that?

A number of years ago, on PBS, there was a program that was all about stars and galaxies. On this particular show, an astro-physicist from NASA, by the name of Richard Terile, spoke of the number of stars in our Milky Way Galaxy. He said our sun is one of 200 billion other stars in the Milky Way. You hear that number 200 billion and that's nearly meaningless to us; we cannot wrap our arms around it.

So to bring that number down into a scale, Terrile used an elegant little illustration. He said imagine our sun is the size of a single grain of salt. If we try to represent the stars by individual grains of salt, how much salt would we have to pour out to pour out 200 billion stars? Again, if each single grain of salt represents one star (like our sun), how much salt would we have to pour out to represent 200 billion stars? A container of salt like this [Morton's 26 oz canister], he said, has within it about 5 million individual grains of salt. If we were to pour out 200 billion grains, we would need forty thousand of these containers. 40 thousand of these containers to pour out 200 billion stars, if each grain represented a star.

Then, almost in passing, Terrile reminded us: by the way folks, this is just one galaxy, the Milky Way. Astronomers estimate there are some 100 billion other galaxies in the universe each containing, on average, 100 billion stars or so.

Said another way, when we look up at night we see pixels of light from distant stars and galaxies. But if our eyes were sensitive enough to see all the stars and galaxies, the night sky would be a solid canopy of light . . . so many pixels of light compressed together that it would create a clear, bright canvas of light.

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the stars. . . what is man that you are mindful of him?” Doesn't it make you feel small, maybe even worthless? Maybe you too have seen that black T-shirt depicting the swirl of the Milky Way, and an arrow pointing to one of the stars with the caption, “You are here.” That's the reaction of many when they consider their position in the universe, maybe even you, when you have those flashes of doubt. You look up and don't quietly praise God for his creativity; but quietly despair. You look up and don't see the finger prints of God out there in space; but rather an accidental existence. You don't see a loving God who leads you like a shepherd. Rather, you see yourself drifting aimlessly through space, living an absolutely meaningless

life. What is your life compared to all those stars and galaxies out there?

The point is this: every now and then, each of us gets the sneaking suspicion our lives just don't matter. Young children may get that feeling when adults never seem to listen to them, or when they don't get the part in the musical, or any play time on the field. College students may feel that way when everyone else seems smarter than they are. Graduates when they can't find a job. Older adults might get that feeling when the kids don't call. Or maybe it's when they have a question about their social security or their taxes and they make the phone call and it's like shouting into a black hole.

Everyone has triggers that make your life feel small and meaningless. What's yours? As a pastor I feel that way whenever I try pushing back a little bit at our culture. It's like swimming up to the prow of an aircraft carrier and kicking like mad to try to turn it. Absolutely futile! Whoever we are, we can feel, or be made to feel we're living a small, meaningless existence. Maybe we have a name in Watertown, but in the grand scheme of things we are nameless, anonymous, and begin to suspect our lives mean nothing (!), not even to people two blocks away, let alone to the distant stars. We're living out our small lives, on a small and inconsequential planet, orbiting around an average size star, which is one of 200 billion in the Milky Way, which is one of at least 100 billion other galaxies.

But you know what? The one who made the sun and the moon and the stars, the one who made the planets and galaxies . . . he never talks to us like that. He never sends the message that our lives are meaningless and inconsequential.

Let's take it from the beginning. He prepared a planet that is unreasonably suited for the existence of life. More and more, scientists are finding it very difficult to explain why this planet in this galaxy should be so finely tuned to support life, except as the act of a God who intended to create it that way. William Phillips, who has a Nobel Laureate in physics, and is also a Christian, writes, "I see a

universe that, had it been constructed slightly differently, would never have given birth to stars and planets, let alone bacteria and people. And there is no good scientific reason for why the universe should have been different.”

So, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth in such a way that it would be a suitable home for you. And then, as David wrote, “He knit you together in your mother’s womb.” What a fine and improbable piece of knitting that was! Can you imagine God knitting us together . . . the muscles, tendons and nerves, the lungs and the blood vessels, the retina and the ear drums, the electrical circuit of the central nervous system. You try to do that!

Last week I was visiting Pegi Drays who’s been home ill. That woman knows how to knit! She showed me some of the Norwegian sweaters she’s made and to me, they just look impossibly complex. On the other hand, knitting together a Norwegian sweater is nothing compared to knitting together a Norwegian! To explain away the complexity of the human body as the result of happy accident . . . that’s just intellectually lazy.

So against all odds, God created a universe and a planet that can sustain life, and then he created you. And never does he suggest your life is meaningless, not to him it isn’t. Consider, he knows your name. Isaiah 43: “Fear not, I have called you by name. You are mine.” He knows everything about you. From Psalm 139, “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord” (vv.1-4). In Luke 12, Jesus said, “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid” (v. 7). That is, any God who bothers to know everything about us, must really care for us. Our lives must matter to him. So don’t be afraid. You may feel your life is meaningless and inconsequential, but it’s not . . . not to him!

He promises to hear our prayers. Imagine, if you woke up in the morning at the break of dawn, and at that

very moment turned your soul toward him in prayer, he's already there. He got there ahead of you. He's not distracted by anything. He's listening, and promises to answer.

You're not meaningless to him. He sends people to take care of you, parents, friends, doctors, police, plumbers, waitresses, hospice workers. On top of that, he sends his angels whom I often forget about, but they're there, those "mighty ones who do his bidding" (Ps. 103:20). Who knows the accidents you were not in because of them, the times you didn't trip and fall because of them, the illnesses you didn't catch, the thieves that didn't break in, the wicked plans of people that didn't work out because of them.

Your life is not inconsequential, not to him. In fact, he says he loves you, in spite of your sin and doubt and unbelief. So much he loves you that he even laid his life down for you. "Very rarely" Paul writes, "will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-7). Any God who would die for us must love us. Your life is not meaningless. Repent of that, for it turns God into a liar and dismisses his real and sacrificial love as a myth. The truth is he desires that all should be saved so that we can be with him eternally.

They say house guests, like fish, start to stink after three days. That God our Father should wish to spend an eternity with him in his house? It must mean he loves us. It must mean we are important to him, precious even.

One last thing: Remember God's promise to Abraham? God "took him outside" outside there in the desert air, and said, "Look up. Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them", which, of course, no one can. Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (Gen. 15:5). The promise was initially fulfilled in Egypt where the descendants of Abraham "multiplied and increased greatly", to the chagrin of the Egyptians. But ultimately, the promise is fulfilled another

way. Galatians 3 says all who belong to Christ are offspring of Abraham. And they shall be as many as the stars in the sky. You see what God has done? He has turned the night sky from something potentially troubling into a shimmering promise. Those who belong Christ (that's us) are offspring of Abraham, and shall be as many as the stars in the sky.

So when you look up to the heavens, don't think about how small it makes you feel. Think about great and vast the promise is, that those who belong to Christ are as numerous [salt] as the stars in the sky. Thanks be to God! Amen.

