

Divine Majesty and Human Dominion

Prov. 8:1–4, 22–31

Ps. 8

Rom. 5:1–5

John 16:12–15

Goal for the Session *In responding to God as majestic Creator, adults will consider their ecological role as “rulers” of creation.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Psalm 8

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Thomas W. Walker

Completing the psalm with the repeated phrase of the majesty of God’s name, the psalmist frames humanity’s role within the rule of God. Human beings are little less than God, crowned with glory and honor, and are to rule over the created order. But, they do this only *in the midst*, surrounded and bounded by God’s rule. Symbolically, the psalmist asserts the place and role of humanity, the ruling of creation, but also limits that authority by the majesty and glory of God.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Bonnie L. Pattison

A millennium after the psalmist wrote, the second person of the Trinity entered David’s lineage through the power of the Holy Spirit to reconcile humanity to our heavenly Father. Hours before his death Jesus explains the significance of this to his disciples by speaking about the work of the Spirit (John 16:14–15). As Christ revealed the Father, it is now the Holy Spirit’s task to take what Christ humbly revealed and manifest it through us. Thus it is by the power of the Spirit that we cry with the humility of a child, as Jesus did, “Abba! Father!”

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” James McTyre

In Psalm 8, questions and praise peacefully coexist. It is possible to have questions and doubts, and still believe. Even more, between the questions and praise, there is purpose to life. God has made human beings little less than angels in order to care for all things under heaven. On the day we speak of the mysterious union of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are guided by this psalm in its lyrical union of questions, praise, and purpose. While three things in one may be difficult to explain, they can be understood.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” James Gertmenian

There will be, of course, in our ecologically precarious world, some question about the meaning of human “dominion” over the created order (vv. 6–8). Put together with the creation accounts in Genesis, these verses are ripe for misuse and all sorts of rationalizing mischief. But the psalmist’s idea here is surely not to invite despoilment of what God has made. The faithful response to God’s grace in honoring humankind with such “dominion” is not hubris (“It’s all ours to do with as we wish”) but humility (“How amazing that we are entrusted with such gifts!”). This is a spiritual dominion that draws its power from humankind’s primary relationship with God.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Psalm 8

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- a plant or vase of flowers (*optional*)
- computer and projector or book about the universe (*optional*)
- pens, markers
- newsprint
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 23, 2019

For Responding

- option 1: pens, paper, copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: pens, paper, copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: pens, paper, names and addresses of political leaders

Many psalms mention creation but focus on the Creator who is responsible for, and cares for, all that was made. While creation may be fascinating, keep the group focused on God and on what God calls us to be and do.

Focus on Your Teaching

Adults approach the created world from various viewpoints. Most wonder at beauty, grandeur, and power. Many fear hurricanes, tornadoes, or floods. At this time, some may be planning summer camping trips or vacations in beautiful locations. Yet with all of our appreciation of nature, it has taken years for humans to become aware of deep environmental issues. Many would rather reflect on the beautiful than on ways to deal with problems. In this session the focus is on our response to the Creator God by caring for all creation.

Creator God, you brought into being an unbelievably stunning universe. Help me to love and care for your world. Let me teach in a way that witnesses to you as the source of all. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, set in the room a vase of flowers, a flowering plant, a fern, or some other reminder of the natural world. If you will use option 3 in Responding, obtain the names of government officials and their addresses, including e-mail addresses.

Welcome participants warmly.

If you have a computer and projector, as participants arrive show images from the Hubble Web site (Hubblesite.org; click on “image gallery”; nebulae are particularly beautiful). If you do not have a computer and projector, show pictures from a book about the universe.

When all have gathered, invite them to describe the most unusual or beautiful thing that they have seen in nature. Say that today’s session will help us consider the creation and the Creator through the eyes of an ancient poet.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Holy triune God, we praise you today and ask that we might hear your word to us as we study the Scriptures. Amen.

EXPLORING

If all participants have the same version of the Bible, read Psalm 8 responsively. Half of the group will read to the middle of each verse, and the other half will read the remainder of the verse. If participants have different versions of the Bible, just have one person read the psalm.

Form three groups to examine the focus text. Assign verses to each of the groups as follows: verses 1 and 2; 3 through 5; and 6 through 8. (If fewer than six people are present, some verses may be assigned to individuals.) Distribute pens, markers, and a sheet of newsprint to each group. Have them discuss the meaning of their assigned verses and then develop a newsprint poster of their findings. The poster might include a heading, drawings, symbols, words, phrases, or anything else that might help communicate the meaning to others.

Regroup as a whole, and have the groups post their newsprint posters where all can see. Have one person from each group briefly describe the meaning of their poster.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Psalm 8). Invite a volunteer to read the “What?” excerpt. Have the group discuss how the excerpt adds to or clarifies points that have been covered in the group posters. Ask: How would you summarize our place and value as humans in the universe?

Explain that the “Where?” excerpt is taken from a longer passage that discusses Hebrews 2:5–9 (which quotes Psalm 8 and points to Jesus as what humanity is meant to be) and John 14:8–11 (which indicates that Jesus is the very image of the Father).¹ Invite volunteers to read Hebrews 2:5–9 and John 14:8–11. Then have a volunteer read the “Where?” excerpt. Have the group discuss how this excerpt adds to the understanding of who we are.

Have a volunteer read the “So What?” excerpt. Suggest that participants scan the psalm silently, then call out the “questions, praise, and purpose” they hear in the psalm.

Lead into Responding by having a volunteer read the “Now What?” excerpt, followed by a brief group discussion on what “dominion” over the created order should mean in our lives today.

It is easy to fall into generalizations about care for the environment. Encourage participants to come up with practical activities and ideas for caring for God’s world that they can actually do.

**EASY
PREP**

RESPONDING

1. **Doing My Part** Provide pens, paper, and copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Dominion?).

From the many issues mentioned on Resource Sheet 2 ask participants to choose one or two that they believe they could do something about as a way of caring for God’s creation. (Ideas may be simple, such as planting a vegetable garden, cleaning up a street or neighborhood park, tending the church flower beds, or recycling more.)

Have participants write a heading “Caring for God’s Creation,” followed by a paragraph describing what they intend to do in the coming week to care for God’s creation in a new or additional way.

When everyone has finished, form pairs and have participants tell their plan to their partner. Suggest that participants take their paragraph home and attach it to the refrigerator as a daily reminder of their plan for the week.

1. Bonnie L. Pattison, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 34, 36.

- 2. Prayers to the Creator** Provide pens, paper, and copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Dominion?). Psalm 8 is the prayerful address of an ancient poet to God the Creator. This activity enables participants to address God in contemporary terms.

Invite participants (individually, in pairs, or as a whole group) to develop their own prayers of praise, confession, or intercession for those who protect and preserve the environment. Resource Sheet 2 may provide ideas for confession and intercession. The prayers may be used in Closing.

- 3. Communal Environmental Action** Invite adults to work together to make a list of environmental issues that pertain to your neighborhood and/or to the country. Provide pens, paper, and the names and addresses (or e-mail addresses) of your local, state, and federal political leaders.

Have participants scan the list and choose an issue of environmental concern in your local community or state. Draft an e-mail message or letter from the group to an appropriate political leader, expressing concern about the issue and urging action. Assign someone to send the message during or after the session.

Further information on environmental issues can be obtained from the Natural Resources Defense Council (nrdc.org), Earthjustice (earthjustice.org), World Resources Institute (wri.org), Global Issues (globalissues.org), Environment.About.com, and Science Daily (sciencedaily.com).

CLOSING

Ask participants to sum up in one word or phrase the main point they will remember from the session.

Together sing or read aloud a hymn on creation (such as “Earth and All Stars” or “All Creatures of Our God and King,” both of which are on YouTube).

If you did option 2 in Responding, invite participants to pray the prayers now. If not, use Psalm 8 as a prayer.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 23, 2019, or e-mail it to participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Psalm 8

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Dominion?

