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Proper 22 • Hebrews 2:1–13 (14–18)

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Proper 22 • Hebrews 2:1–18 (14–18) • October 4, 2015

Twice Honored By God

This particular lectionary provides an opportunity to connect the text with the overarching storyline of Scripture. At the heart of this reading is the quotation from Psalm 8 regarding how God made man a little lower than the angels but crowned him with glory by giving him dominion over the works of his hands. The psalmist cannot help but wonder about how it is that God is so mindful of human creatures that he gives them a role of privilege and responsibility within creation.

264

Now, there has been debate as to whether this text refers to Adam and Eve or if it refers to Christ. The answer is probably yes to both. The language of Psalm 8 cannot help but evoke in the reader's mind the imagery of Genesis 1:26–31 in which God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth. At the same time, this Hebrews text clearly connects to Christ. So, how might we do justice to both at the same time? We can do so by setting them within the overarching story of Scripture. Psalm 8 brings the past and future together.

First, Psalm 8 echoes the language of Genesis and asserts that humbleness of humans as creatures of God. What is man that God is mindful of him? He is simply a creature along with all the other creatures. Yet God has made him a little lower than the angels and given us dominion. Such dominion was to reflect God's own dominion over creation. So how does God rule? So that everything blooms and blossoms like in a well-watered garden (Isaiah). God rules so that everything flourishes by his work. That includes the creation, animals, and humans. That was God's vision for his creation. That became our responsibility as image bearers of God. That brings us to how the author to the Hebrews connects Psalm 8 to Christ.

Verse 8 of Hebrews 2 notes that we don't see that dominion that God intended. Clearly something has gone wrong with the original intention. Humans did not rule for the benefit of creation. They did not want to rule as a reflection of God's gracious rule. They wanted to rule and be in control as God himself. They wanted to rule for their own benefit. And as a result, everything has gone wrong.

Verse 9 then points us to Christ. Of interest is the language of 1 Corinthians 8 picked up here by speaking of the Son of God as the creator ("for whom and through whom all things exist"). Now we see a double honor by God. Not only did God honor us with the role of being responsible over creation, he now honors us by becoming a human creature so that in him, that right dominion would be restored. The Creator enters his creation by becoming incarnate. The wording about Christ, that "for a little while" he is made lower than the angels, suggests the state of humiliation. Jesus voluntarily set aside the divine majesty that had been shared with his human nature in the incarnation so that he might suffer and die for us. And even more, that he might be raised up and seated at the right hand of God for us.

In this, as a man the Creator becomes our brother. The man Jesus rules over all creation. As God, he had always ruled. But it is as man that he reacquires the proper dominion over creation as God had given it to Adam and Eve. He does so as one of us, as our brother.

The sermon can be organized into two parts for the double honor God has bestowed upon us: (1) Honored by God with the privilege of looking after his creation, (2) Honored by Christ's incarnation and dominion.

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