

What Are We That You Should Be Mindful Of Us?

May 20, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

It's strange how one can be concentrating on a thought and that thought leads to another and another and another. One of the joys of having a computer is the wide variety of emails I receive. Some are trash to be sure, but more times than not, I've gotten some magnificent pictures of outer space, stars and planets among others. I was thinking about that and the words of Prayer C of the Rite II Eucharist came into my head: *At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses and this fragile earth.* That thought evolved into these lines from Psalm 8: *“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars you have set in their courses, what is man that you are mindful of him V. 4-5a)?* Better, perhaps, *what are we that you should be mindful of us?*

However we understand the Ascension which last Thursday we commemorated, it marked the end of our

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Lord's physical presence with his disciples. On that day, we are told, a cloud received him out of their sight and he was no more seen among them as they had seen him before. This marked the end of an era in our relationship with Christ. And the fact that the turning of the years brings all of life, as we know it, to an end leads us to ask with the Psalmist, *what are we that you are mindful of us*, and leads us to search for some deeper understanding of our humanity.

The answer we discover depends upon how much of the evidence we will consider.

It is the evidence to be found in every cemetery and memorial garden where the stones and plaques are inscribed with names and dates. Every name stands for a person who was once alive, as you and I are alive, who did the same things we do. The dates indicate that these persons lived through a span of years, suggesting that this is the basic elemental truth about that person.

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One of my favorite Churches in this area is Trinity Church, Oxford in the northeast section of Philadelphia. That Parish was founded in 1697 and it's graveyard is filled with people who were famous in the founding of that part of the city, for whom streets and communities were named. In fact, next month, they plan a service to commemorate the slaves of those people. Those slaves lie mostly in unmarked graves.

The inference is plainly that we are creatures of time like everything else in the world, not really different from the grass, which is green in the Spring, then fades as the heat of the Summer increases from June to July and into August.

That we are creatures of time is obviously true, but if this is the only truth about us, it's hard to see how we are different from any other animal, or why we shouldn't be satisfied with just food and shelter. That

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we have learned to desire more or less elaborate varieties of food and shelter doesn't change the essential facts.

But, in seeking the answer to the question, we can combine the evidence of common sense with the evidence of our religious instincts and conclude that we are *also* the objects of God's concern. This was the question of the Psalmist who asked the question in the first place. It is the conclusion...no, rather the *assumption* of the whole of the Old Testament, which sees life, lived out against the background of eternity, which sees us created in the image of God, responsible to the will of God. It becomes a question of how *well* we live, not how long. The dimension of *breadth* is added to the dimension of length.

And, this is reasonable because there is so much in our experience, which has nothing to do with how long we live. There is our strange capacity for love, which

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begins even before we are born and is the last requirement of old age. We live in a relationship with family, friends and neighbors, and we dwell in communities because we need from other people, and they need from us, not just the things that we can do for each other, but, more fundamentally, we need the *presence* of each other. And, this truth about us says something more profound about ourselves and God. *Our* capacity for love and concern is a reflection of *God's* love and concern for us.

There is more evidence to consider in answering the question. Beside our common sense, and in addition to what the Old Testament describes about our relationship with God, there is the *New* Testament, which *clearly* says that we are the objects of God's *redeeming* love, once shown in Jesus Christ. God came among us to share our experiences; love broken in order to restore the relationship between God and ourselves, that relationship *itself* once broken.

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In short, we are the creatures who stand in a personal relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who was with us through our beginning, throughout all our days, even beyond the end of our days. Our purpose, which gives meaning to all that we do, is to *preserve and enrich* the relationship God wants us to have with him.

From all of this evidence we discover that we are more than we seem to be, more than a name and dates. It sounds simplistic, doesn't it? Overly pious? The impossible dream? It's what Christ taught us. It's true. It's *his* truth.

The question was *What are we that your are mindful of us?* The answer reveals to us a foundation upon which to continue building our lives, lives meant to respond to God's love, to reach out and, by serving

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others, extend his love to them until they know what we know, until they see for themselves that we are not creatures whose only purpose is self-gratification, but a people whose purpose is *love* and *service* to the Lord, and to his people, *wherever* they may be.

AMEN.