

Why does God care?

Psalm 8

May 26, 2013

Why does God care? Do you ever wonder?

Each Sunday, we share our joys and our concerns with each other, and then we pray. We pray, sharing these same joys and concerns with God, assuming that God is paying attention, assuming that God is listening, assuming that God cares about the little details of the lives of this particular group of human beings gathered in a building on West 4th Street in Waterloo, Iowa.

But do you ever wonder: Why does God care?

Let me put it in perspective ...

In the vast nation of China, on the other side of the planet, in the mountainous western half of the province of Sichuan, there is a tiny remote village called Longmen. In a small mud-walled shack at the foot of a mountain spur in Longmen, there lives an old widow and her dog, and her dog has fleas. The fleas carry on them a variety of viruses and bacteria and protozoa, and each of the protozoa have within their cell structure several mitochondria which contain their own distinct strands of DNA.

Tell me this: How much concern do you have for a single strand of DNA within one mitochondrion contained in the cytoplasm of a single protozoan on a single flea on a dog owned by an old woman in the remote village of Longmen in the province of Sichuan in the nation of China on the other side of the world?

But in relation to God, we are so much less than that single strand of DNA is to us. Then why does God care about us?

That's what the Hebrew poet was wondering.

*When I look into the heavens which you made,
at the moon and the stars which you set into place,
I wonder: "Why do you care about us?
Why are you concerned with mere human beings?"*

It's all about perspective. A week ago I was very distressed because I had lost my favorite jacket, a navy blue fleece with the name of my alma mater, Yale, emblazoned on it. I was most grateful and relieved when my daughter and son-in-law found the jacket about ten days after I had lost it. But I must say that

when I heard the stories of the damage wreaked by the EF5 tornado in Moore, Oklahoma, stories of families who in a moment lost their homes and everything in them, my worries over my fleece jacket suddenly seemed rather foolish and so unimportant.

I worry about money, too, about having enough money to pay the bills, about having enough money to be able to retire ... someday. But I have never had to wonder how and if I was going to get my next meal. And I have never been without a place, a good place, to live. And my only concern about clothing is how to fit all the clothes I do have on the racks and shelves in my closet.

It's all about perspective, and if we do open our eyes and ears and hearts to the world around us, we will surely realize that so much of what we fret about, so much of what we squabble about, so many of the decisions over which we agonize, don't amount to a hill of beans!

But perspective is about more than seeing our problems and concerns and pains in a wider context. It's also about seeing the wider context itself, seeing the world from a different point of view, and becoming the wiser for it.

That's why the Appalachian Mountain Club has a Youth Opportunities Program. The club's focus is on hiking and environmental stewardship, but its Youth Opportunities Program takes urban at-risk young people into the wilderness, showing them that the world is not all streets and gangs and convenience stores. By getting outside their comfort zones, by being exposed to a whole new aspect of the world in which they live, these young folks may be able to see themselves and their own neighborhoods through new eyes, and imagine new possibilities for their lives.

That's why we travel, to see the world in which we live through new eyes, to discover that my home is not the only home and not even the only place I can feel at home, that my way is not the only way, but one way among many ways, to meet a world full of people who are like me, but not like me, too, who don't always see things or feel things or do things the way I do. We learn to appreciate all the more our own homes, but also to appreciate their wider context.

We gain perspective by moving into unfamiliar landscapes. We gain perspective by meeting people of different backgrounds and cultures. And we gain perspective by lifting our eyes to the heavens.

*When I look into the heavens which you made, at the moon and the stars
which you set into place ...*

Have you ever been in a really dark place, a place far away from the pervasive light pollution of human habitation, and looked into the night sky? Have you seen the myriads and myriads of stars? The horizon-to-horizon streak of our galaxy, the Milky Way? Have you seen the Northern Lights, or the Orion Nebula, that vast cloud of gases and dust?

Have you thought about what you are seeing? Have you tried to count the stars or tried to fathom the distances between them or between each of them and the planet on which you are standing?

Have you tried to picture yourself in the midst of it, one minute speck on an unremarkable hunk of rock circling an unremarkable star in one small corner of this mind-boggling universe?

It puts things into perspective! This is what we are ... or what we are not. In this vast universe, certainly as individual human beings, but even as an entire human race, we are barely more than nothing.

To understand this is wisdom. To understand this is to realize that we are small, we are insignificant, we are virtually powerless, we are no more than a brief blip in the history of the cosmos. And to understand this is to begin to imagine the unimaginable power and reach and magnificence and mystery of the One who made it all.

It puts things into perspective. Here are we and there is God. Here are we and there is God! Which leads us to the only response that is appropriate to God the Creator: awe and wonder and praise and utter humility. And which leads us back to the question with which we started: Why does God care?

Do you know the answer?

I'll tell you. There is no answer!

Why does God care? Who knows? Can you enter the mind of God and tell me? We don't know why God cares. We only know that God does. It is a mystery, but a happy mystery!

Why did God create the universe? Who knows? But God did and it was good.

Why did God choose one particular people, the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, to be his servants, his priests, his messengers? Who knows? But God did and through their story we understand our own stories, and through their story we begin to understand something of who God is and what God is like.

Why did God choose Jesus? Who knows? And why did Jesus have to die? Who knows? But he did die, and by his death -- who knows how? -- a new course is charted for humanity, and the hope of a new life is born for all creation.

Why does God care? Who knows? But God does.

“Why” questions probe causation and motivation and intentionality. We ask “why” questions to satisfy our curiosity and to gain some kind of control over the world as it is. We think that when we know how and why some things happen and how and why other things don’t happen, then maybe we can predict or even control future outcomes and future events.

But we don’t know why God is and we don’t know why God cares. We only know that God does. It is what it is and we can’t change it -- thanks be to God! We can only say: “Thank you!”

God does care and that puts everything into proper perspective. It is the difference between resignation and empowerment, between despair and hope, between knowing that I matter not a whit, that I am subject along with all of creation to indifferent forces that will eventually tear me apart and reduce me to nothing, and knowing that I matter to God, that God is invested in what will become of me and invested in what will become of heaven and earth.

God does care and that is the central fact, that is the driving force, of the universe. It is why I am who I am and why you are who you are and why all of this is what it is.

*When I look into the heavens which you made,
at the moon and the stars which you set into place,
I wonder: “Why do you care about us?
Why are you concerned with mere human beings?”
And yet ...*

“Any yet” makes all the difference!

And yet ... God does care!

And yet ... God crowned us with glory and honor, glory and honor which by right should only belong to him.

And yet ... God gave us the extraordinary privilege and the extraordinary responsibility of caring too, of caring for domestic animals and wild animals, for birds and for fish, and for each other.

This is who we are. God made us so. So who we are and what we are is no cause for pride, no cause for any overblown sense of our own power or importance. It is cause for humility, and cause for gratitude, and cause for unending praise.

And knowing it is true wisdom, knowing that by ourselves we are nothing, knowing that we are something -- something precious, something noteworthy, something that matters -- only because God is, only because God cares.