

North Main, 1.14.18

GRelationshipWHumans11418

Title:

Ascribe to What to Whom

Texts:

Psalm 29. Scripture reading: Matthew Psalm 29:1-2, 10-11.

There's a lot of "ascribing" (to say or think that something is associated with a particular person) going on in Psalm 29:1.

One could zero in on several subjects in Psalm 29: the voice of God, the power of God, the majesty of God, fear of God, God's relationship with creation, God's eternal role. This text is about relationships, at several levels. I'm a human, created by God, believing in God, having some kind of relationship, with God. Everyone has a relationship with God. No exceptions. Even atheists have a relationship with God, though one of denial. About 80 percent of Americans say they believe in God. But many fewer take that affiliation seriously enough to strengthen or improve it.

But how in the world does one even begin to understand a personal relationship with God? That relationship is so complex that we can't wrap our heads around it without employing human examples. Because God is big. We are not.

But doesn't comparing a human relationship with the association one has with God cheapen the relationship with God? I was stuck. Time to turn to the text again. Psalm 29:1-2 describes the relationship between mere humans and God:

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

God is big. We are not.

The writer goes on to describe the magnitude of God. Echoing the creation story, the psalmist writes that God's majestic, powerful voice thunders over the cosmos: breaking cedars, flashing like flame, shaking the wilderness, causing oaks to whirl, stripping the forest. Naming creation as God's temple, everyone and everything ascribes glory to God's name.

God is big. We are not.

Then the psalmist bookends this text, focusing on the human relationship with God:

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
May the Lord give strength to his people!
May the Lord bless his people with peace! (29:10-11).

God is big. We are not. Often we are like three-year-olds who say: "You're not the boss of me."

But God is big. We are not. That's the essential nature of Psalms that elevate God as king, and Psalm 29 is a "God as King" psalm.

God is big. We are not. But the essence of God's message to us isn't a bunch of hoops I need to jump through to relate to God, or a series of ideas we have to agree with. Rather it's an invitation to know God, to be in a relationship with God. But how in the world does one *know* God, the creator of all that is, the creator of you, me and the universe, the great knower of you and me? Wednesday afternoon, seven books were split open on my desk, as I tried to answer an essential question: How does God want to relate to humans?

Much is made about having a childlike faith, and while I get the essence of that, I'm not a child anymore. Simple answers don't scratch the depths of my questions and curiosity. Yet, it was a child's story that came as close as anything to defining the kind of relationship God desires with me, with us. In the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis describes the first time the children hear about Aslan, the Lion:

"Is he a man?" asked Lucy.

"Aslan, a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor Beyond the Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the Great Lion."

"Ooh! said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or just plain silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beavers tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

God is big. We are not. But God desires a relationship with us. God has no meaning without relationships. Listen to what happens when I link Psalm 29:1-2 with 29:10-11:

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
May the Lord give strength to his people!
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

One of the lines from *The Shack* I can't get out of my head is "Papa is very fond of you." My grandchildren call me Papa. Something deep inside me melts when I hear that. So I'm back to using human relationships to define the kind of relationship God wants with me. I wonder if the

relationships I have with—Idella, my children, their children, with you, my church—are not unlike the blurred photos of my relationship with God. My relationship with those I’m close to begins with—grace, love, mercy, loyalty, then goes on from there. My relationship with God begins with—grace, love, mercy, loyalty—then goes on from there, to all the other elements of God’s relationship with us mere humans. God is big. I am not.

This is January 14. We are sitting on the front edge of a new year. It’s likely that 2018 will be a lot like 2017. But there will be surprises and changes. One thing remains, however, God desires a relationship with us mere humans.

Thursday afternoon, I continued to struggle with the definition for that relationship. Then I noticed today’s bulletin cover on my desk and realized: that’s it. What God wants from me is defined in that photograph: God is big and I’m not, which is precisely why I need God.

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