

“Wonder”

Psalm 72:18-19, Matthew 8:3-4, Mark 10:14-16, Luke 5:18-26 & Matthew 8:6

Pastor James York

January 31, 2021

Prayer for Understanding God of grace, you promised to never break your covenant with us. Amid all the changing words of our generation, speak your words of eternal love. Amen.

God hopes that you will enjoy wonder. The psalmist sings, **Psalm 72:18-19 “Blessed be the Lord God, who alone works wonders. And blessed be God’s glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with God’s glory. Amen and Amen.”**

Jesus urges us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. Children are full of wonder. Wonder is defined as to be curious about, to marvel, and to be filled with admiration, amazement, and awe.

Remember when you were a child, you would go out on a summer night, lay down in the grass, look up at the stars, and you would wonder. Marveling in the sensation of the soft grass tickling you. In awe of the beautiful stars. Amazed in the scent of soil and plants. Marveling in the serenade of the crickets. In admiration for God who lovingly made a vast cosmos for us to enjoy. Wondering who made all this? Wondering who made me? Wondering what is it all about? Are you living with a sense of wonder?

We grow up, have responsibilities, have other things to think about, school, job, bills, caring for others. Life becomes busy. Often as one ages, they lose their sense of wonder. God fills creation with glorious wonder so we can worship and enjoy God forever.

Pastor John Westerhoff describes faith like rings in a tree. Robust faith is nourished by five rings that are permeated with wonder.

The first ring is experienced faith. The faith of our senses. When Spencer was 1 not long after he learned to walk, we took him to a playground. He spotted a small slide. He labored up the ladder and joyfully squealed with delight as he slid down the slide. Leslie and I were amazed by the wonder he discovered on that slide. We sat and watched as he climbed and went down the slide 32 times enjoying every trip. Finally, he climbed up to the slide platform, put his head down to rest and fell asleep.

Abigail experienced faith through her sense of sight. She laughed with wonder every time she saw a butterfly or bubbles. A great joy of being a parent is rediscovering your experienced faith, your sense of wonder, through your child.

God fills our lives with faith experiences, with wonders that are free to enjoy. The warmth of the sun, your favorite food, the beauty of a flower, your favorite aroma, the sensation of a hug, your favorite song, the refreshment of a swim. God is constantly pouring wonder into you.

The next ring is relational faith. It is the sensation of love, the joy of being together, the warmth of compassion, the wonder of people caring for you, the energy of laughter. Relational faith is the love a baby experiences in their parent’s care--a love so powerful that screaming, in an instant, can be replaced with a peaceful, loving look as the child is picked up and lovingly rocked.

Relational faith includes the sharing of our experienced faith. A young child is not blinded by judgment or prejudice; unfortunately, children learn both from adults quickly. A young child is oblivious to skin color, fashion, status, and hygiene. Have you wondered what the world would be like if we adults could forgive, accept, and love everyone? One of the wonders of the Kingdom of God is all people flourishing living in synergistic harmony.

Young children are open, freely receive, are humble and do not compete for status. Previously the disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest. Jesus called a child to them and said, **Matthew 18:3-4 “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of God. Therefore whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of God.”** God’s kingdom is a free gift to be received. It cannot be earned or taken by force. The Kingdom of God is to be freely shared and enjoyed by all. Enjoy relationships. Never seek to use anyone or put anyone in a box. Excluded no one, encourage, include, and welcome everyone. Our wonder grows as our sharing grows.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry he was saddened by people’s inability to love, by their exclusion of certain people. In Jesus’ day, children were viewed vastly different than today. A child was the lowest person. Actually, a child was not even considered to be a person. The disciples did not count the children in Jesus feeding of the crowd. In today’s

scripture the disciples are chasing the children away. Be quiet, listen to Jesus, sit down, stop asking questions, pay attention, quite looking at that bird. **Mark 10:14-16 “When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. Jesus said to them, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

Jesus is making two points. First, absolutely no one is beyond the reach of God’s love. Every person no matter their, age, status, lifestyle, etc., is a beloved child of God. God wants everyone to experience the Kingdom of God. Second, we are to have faith like a little child, which is more complex to discern. Is wonder the key aspect to having faith like a little child?

The next ring is searching faith. This is the child characteristic that at some points wears every parent down. Searching faith is the questions. Why this? Why that? Searching faith is a hunger for understanding, for discovery, for meaning and purpose. Life becomes abundant when we fill our hungers with God the bread of life. Always asking ourselves: What is God doing in my life? How is God involved in the world around me? How can I partner with God? How can I be more loving? How can I sense more of God’s blessings that permeate my life? How can I become more Christ-like? What are the distractions that diminish my perceiving of God who is everywhere, always filling me with love and every goodness? Searching faith is endlessly questioning, so you can grow more and more like Jesus bringing more and more of God’s kingdom to earth. Unlike earthly parents God never grows tired of our questions rather God cherishes them as opportunities to perfect us. Searching faith readily admits that it does not have most of the answers so searching faith wonders in the quest for the answers. Augustine put it this way “Our hearts our restless until we rest in God.”

The next ring is serving faith. It is the wonder of giving a thoughtful gift. Serving faith is the wonder of partnering with others to enhance life. Serving faith gives meaning and purpose to life. Serving faith is mentoring, teaching, discipling, and parenting. Serving faith is the wonder one enjoys as they help another.

Another ring is owned faith. It is moments of pure joy, peace, and love. If you ever had a moment where all was well with you and you wanted to linger, to savor that situation then you were in an owned faith moment. Many owned faith moments are found in the ordinary. Growing up some of mine were my mom’s delicious Sunday lunches usually roast beef, mashed potatoes & gravy with all the fixins, climbing a tree, swimming in a lake, playing catch with my dad. Today it is walking pain free. Owned faith is the wonder of all that makes you smile.

Owned faith is peace that comes from living in the present. Children excel at this for they are neither regretful over the past, nor anxious about the future. Children live in the present.

Owned faith is dreaming. Think back to the days of your childhood, before cynicism, before doubt, before your options were narrowed. Remember the days when you envisioned endless possibilities. How you were going to grow up and change the world. The image of God was still fresh enough within you that you believed yourself, all people, and the world to be beautiful. You believed that you were safe and invincible. You believed that the love of your parents could fix everything and everyone. Remember the times when you dreamed of who you would become. What was your dream? Remember the days when you imagined you were a superhero. You are a superhero. Owned faith is sharing the supernatural power of God. Owned faith is experiencing the wonder of God in you that is redeeming the cosmos. Owned faith is believing that with God nothing is impossible, everything is possible. Owned faith is the wonder of imaging resurrection, imagining the glory of the entire cosmos perfected.

The ultimate earthly owned faith moment is described in the original conclusion to the gospel of Mark. **Mark 16:7-9 “Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. On the way they were asking each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, but the angel said, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. Jesus is not here! Jesus is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there, just as he told you before he died.” The women fled from the tomb, trembling and amazed, and they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.**

The last verse is translated numerous ways. Perhaps it is an owned faith moment beyond words. They were trembling. The Greek word often translated trembling means jolted out of position, the shattering of one’s world view. The resurrection filled them with a glorious view wonderful beyond words. The Greek word often translated as afraid means suddenly finding ourselves in possession of considerably more energy than we are used to, inhabiting a larger space, a feeling of sacred holiness. The resurrection filled them with wonder, amazement, in the grand ever-expanding space of resurrection, ever expanding love, joy and peace all permeated with glorious holiness.

In Luke, we find an account filled with wonder. The wonder of friendship, serving, healing. The wonder of forgiveness, searching for a way, the ability to jump. The wonder of God's love unhindered by oppressive forces. The wonder of realizing God's love is far more powerful than any of the restrictive beliefs and rules of humanity. The wonder of perceiving God making everyone glorious, making the entire cosmos glorious. **Luke 5:18-26 "Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to take him inside to Jesus, but they could not reach Jesus because of the crowd. So they went up to the roof and took off some tiles. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat down into the crowd, right in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven." But the teachers of religious law said to themselves, "Who does Jesus think he is? That is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!" Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God. Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, "We have seen amazing things today!"**

Perhaps Jesus' harshest teaching is this, **Matthew 18:6 "If anyone causes one of these little ones who trust in me to lose faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck."** Perhaps Jesus means if anyone diminishes the wonder, diminishes the child like faith that enjoys the simple delights all around us and in us, diminishes the child like faith that believes all things are possible, that searches, that shares, that serves, that dreams. If anyone diminishes the wonder, then life for them will seem like dragging a heavy burden, every day they will feel like they are drowning.

Frederick Buechner wrote, "To repent is to come to your senses. It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying, "I'm sorry," than to the future and saying, "Wow!"

Jesus invites us to wonder. Amen