

“Awe and Wonder”

Exodus 3:12-16; Hebrews 12:28-29;  
Psalm 33: 1-9; Mark 4:35-41

February 23, 2014  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

They had heard those words, “Let’s go to the other side.” They had lined up the boats, ready to go. There were a few of them who maybe were beginning to think, “Finally, we get to go out on the lake again.” Peter, James, and John probably said, “We have been walking these dusty roads way too long. Let’s get out on the lake.” They were accustomed to being out on the lake. I can see them getting the boats all ready. Some of them have already shoved off, and the last one is about ready to go, and then someone taps Peter on the shoulder and points, and there’s Jesus, lost in thought. So Peter goes over and says, “Come on, teacher, let’s go,” and Jesus gets in.

I don’t know that they really did this, but it seems like they handed him a blanket and pillow and he got in back. After all, this is their bailiwick. They know what to do. They are used to going out on this Sea of Galilee. I can see they put John in the back of the boat with the rudder—he’s the youngest, after all. James and Peter get the sail up and go sit up front so they can get the full effect of the wind coming across. As they head out, perhaps they are lost in reflection. Maybe being out there helped them remember something from a long time ago. Perhaps they are a little bit lost in their reflection so that in the back, John is beginning to wonder if they are paying any attention as he tries to steer up and down the waves and not let the wind blow them over. Something catches their attention, perhaps—a change in the air, a feel that’s different, a smell of the storm coming. I can just see Peter and James jumping up and tearing down the sail and jumping to the oars. I would assume they are already a good way out into the lake and perhaps with the way the wind is coming it doesn’t make sense to turn around, so they are striving mightily to go on. Yet, the boat is getting swamped. They’re not sure they are going to make it.

It reminds me a little of my own life in some ways. Oftentimes I think I’ve got this all under control and everything is going to go just perfectly. I think how wonderful it is to be back in this place and doing this thing because I know what it’s all about. And I get myself in trouble again because it doesn’t go quite the way I expected it to, or I run up against something I didn’t know was there.

A little like life, we run into certain storms at times. Sometimes those storms are things we’re not sure how to get through. Perhaps it’s then we want to go wake up Jesus, God, and say, “Can you get me out of this? I feel like I’m perishing.” That’s certainly what the disciples did. They remembered after a little while that Jesus was with them. It’s an interesting question they ask: “Don’t you care that we’re perishing?” He was asleep. How he slept through that, I’m not quite sure. But they went to him in that moment.

Now when I read Jesus saying, “Peace, be still,” I wondered how he said that. I generally think he said it like a command: “Peace! Be still!” But I wonder if he said it

with a yawn: “Peace...be still...” because he knows who God is. He knows God’s power and grace. It’s really curious that he has this conversation with his disciples: “Why are you afraid?” And then he says, “Do you still have no faith?” It feels to me like he says, “Why did you come to me?” “Well, we felt like we were perishing.” “Do you have no faith?” What does that mean?

There’s a lot in this. Anybody hearing this story in the first or second century as these things were being written would have realized that this is not only a story about crossing the lake. Wind and waves represented chaos and evil as well. This is about life, and when we are in the middle of chaos and evil, do we just want to go and get Jesus so he can make it calm for us again? Where is that calm?

Why was Jesus unconcerned? It’s a tough one because in the middle of our lives, in the moment we feel like we are perishing, there’s nothing else. They thought it was over. We only think of it being over. It’s hard to think past it being over. I realize if I really had faith, through those moments when I think it’s going to be the end, it’s not the end. But in the moment, it’s hard not to think it’s the end. I’m perishing. It’s in those moments I think, for me, it’s helpful to have recognized a little bit about who God is.

When Jesus says, “Peace, be still,” and the wind and the waves are gone, when the water becomes flat and smooth as silk, the disciples then look at Jesus and wonder, who is this, then, who can calm the wind and the waves. There’s part of me that wants to go, “Well, duh.” Except that I’m the same way. I don’t really expect God to do anything.

I don’t think this is really a story that says God is going to be calming all our wind and waves. But it is a reminder of who God is—that in the midst of our wind and waves, in the midst of all the chaos when we can remember who God is, as we trust in that one, there’s something that gets us through, it gets me beyond myself and helps me remember the awe and wonder of our Lord and Savior.

This all feels pretty close to me because it feels like one of the things we do is as we go along through life is we get so caught up in the things that we are doing that we say, “Yeah, God, we can handle this one.” In fact, we don’t just handle it, we put God out of sight and go on with life as if God is somewhere over there. We can think about maybe some of the things God wanted and sometimes we even think about who God is, kind of a problematic kind of thing we have to deal with. Or we think about God as some piece of creation and if there are these kinds of circumstances, God shows up—a force that we need and we can go get it and bring it into our lives. It’s interesting how we can talk about God as if God is just somewhere else and that all that we do is not really present to God. And yet God is creator, and I don’t hear that God went away. It’s helpful for me to remember a little bit about who that God is—not only a God that can still wind and waves, but a God that can create all that is. How incredible that is.

In the midst of the moments when we feel like we’re perishing, can we look beyond? Remember what we talked about last week. Because we have a God that is so great,

we can look up. We don't have to circumscribe our lives. We can look up. We can look up and go into our lives. Well, not only can we look up, we can look for the awe and the wonder of the world around us. So often it's hard to look up because what we tend to look at is what's not right and what we struggle with. I invite you to look up and look for the awe and the wonder.

As you go through the week, notice that creation itself is so incredible! There's so much beauty to it. So much complexity to it. While I'm thinking about it, it seemed to go on pretty well over a long, long, long period of time without me controlling it at all. Sometimes it feels like if I don't get everything under my control, life will fall apart. The world hasn't done that yet. There's an awe and a wonder that God can do this without us.

There's an awe and wonder in what creation is, but there's also that awe and wonder in relationships we have, those moments we share, the love we give, the caring and grace. There's a lot of awe and wonder.

Sometimes we feel like in the midst of the stuff that's hard we can't do that. Well there's this story, and I think it comes from Elie Wiesel, but I'm not sure, about a guy in a concentration camp. Someone asked him how he made it through. One of the ways he said he made it through was that over the wall he could see a branch. He watched that branch as it budded out and green leaves came again and he knew that all the world was not what he was experiencing and that there was hope and there was more. That's what we do when we remember who God is. There's more.

We can come in reverence, and awe, and wonder to worship our God and to know that he lifts our eyes up and invites us not only to live into life but to see with awe and wonder all that he has created, all that God has given us, and to live with hope even in the midst of chaos. Look for it this week: awe and wonder.

Let's pray:

Lord, how easy it is for me to begin to do the things I know how to do, keep my head down and not see what's coming, and think you are somewhere else, asleep, perhaps. Lord, help us remember you are present; that you, who are a God who created all that is, are here; that we can trust you; and that there is always a tomorrow with you. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.