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July 21, 2024

1 Corinthians 2:9-11; Psalm 65

*Captivated by Beauty: Wonder & Mystery*

We will explore Psalm 65 this morning through the lens of wonder – marveling at the big picture, adjusting our perspective by zooming out and zooming in, and seeing detail we may never have noticed before. We begin with these words of assurance from Psalm 65:

God of Zion, to you even silence is praise.

Promises made to you are kept—

you listen to prayer—

and all living things come to you.

When wrongdoings become too much for me,

you forgive our sins.

How happy is the one you choose to bring close,

the one who lives in your courtyards!

**This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

This morning we are celebrating the gift of wonder and mystery in our faith. Presbyterians and others in the Reformed fold often pride ourselves in our “head” knowledge of the intricacies of theology and scripture. While we do leave ample space for questions and doubts, we sometimes fail to embrace the mystical, mysterious, and wonder-full aspects of our faith. As we have been exploring various contemplative practices in our worship series *Captivated by Beauty*, we have opened ourselves up to seeing, hearing, feeling, and yes, even smelling scripture in deeper ways.

Wonder and mystery may not immediately pop into your minds as practices of our faith

**Preparation:** “Mystery recognizes the provisional nature of our explanations and the inexhaustibility of our investigations. ... Mystery is being grasped by something larger than ourselves, ever compelling us to stretch, rather than limit, the horizons of our awareness. Under the rubric of wonder, mystery has its place alongside understanding.” – Rev. Dr. William Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation*, 2010. P5

As Rebecca shared in the reading from 1 Corinthians, *God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.* God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit. So let us take a moment to breathe in

We are filled full by the goodness of your house,  
by the holiness of your temple.

- <sup>5</sup> In righteousness you answer us,  
by your awesome deeds,  
God of our salvation—  
you, who are the security  
of all the far edges of the earth,  
even the distant seas.
- <sup>6</sup> You establish the mountains by your strength;  
you are dressed in raw power.
- <sup>7</sup> You calm the roaring seas;  
calm the roaring waves,  
calm the noise of the nations.
- <sup>8</sup> Those who dwell on the far edges  
stand in awe of your acts.  
You make the gateways  
of morning and evening sing for joy.
- <sup>9</sup> You visit the earth and make it abundant,  
enriching it greatly  
by God's stream, full of water.  
You provide people with grain  
because that is what you've decided.
- <sup>10</sup> Drenching the earth's furrows,  
leveling its ridges,  
you soften it with rain showers;  
you bless its growth.
- <sup>11</sup> You crown the year with your goodness;  
your paths overflow with rich food.
- <sup>12</sup> Even the desert pastures drip with it,  
and the hills are dressed in pure joy.
- <sup>13</sup> The meadowlands are covered with flocks,  
the valleys decked out in grain—

they shout for joy;  
they break out in song!

1977 version

The film begins with an overhead view of a man and woman picnicking in a park at the Chicago lakefront — a 1-meter (3.3 ft) overhead image of the figures on a blanket surrounded by food and books they brought with them, one of them being *The Voices of Time* by J. T. Fraser. The man (played by Swiss designer Paul Bruhwiler) then sleeps, while the woman (played by Eames staffer Etsu Garfias) starts to read one of the books. The viewpoint, accompanied by expository voiceover by Philip Morrison, then slowly zooms out to a view 10 meters (33 ft) across (or 10<sup>1</sup> meters in scientific notation). The zoom-out continues (at a rate of one power of ten per 10 seconds), to a view of 100 meters (330 ft) (where they are shown to be in Burnham Park,[5] near Soldier Field, then 1 kilometer (3,300 ft) (where we see the entirety of Chicago), and so on, increasing the perspective and continuing to zoom out to a field of view of 10<sup>24</sup> meters, or a field of view 100 million light years across. The camera then zooms back in at a rate of a power of ten per 2 seconds to the picnic, and then slows back down to its original rate into the man's hand, to views of negative powers of ten: 10 centimeters (10<sup>-1</sup> meters), and so forth, revealing a white blood cell and zooming in on it—until the camera comes to quarks in a proton of a carbon atom at 10<sup>-16</sup> meters.[1]

1 Corinthians 2:9-11

But this is precisely what is written: *God has prepared things for those who love him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being.* God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, including the depths of God. Who knows a person's depths except their own spirit that lives in them? In the same way, no one has known the depths of God except God's Spirit.

### **The Practice of Wonder**

Seeing the Big Picture: *Psalm 65: 5-6*

Zooming Out: *Psalm 65: 7-8*

Zooming In: *Psalm 65: 9-10*

Appreciating the Details: *Psalm 65:11-13*

(Howard Thurman: *Meditations of the Heart*) I seek this day an active wonder. An active wonder is the desperate need of my mind and spirit. The awareness of the unexplored and the untried until I find my way into their secret places, this I need and I seek. The

illumination of wonder over my familiar landscape, revealing in ordinary things, fresh glories; making manifest in my familiar heights and depths that which I have never known – this I need and I seek this day. Teach me this day to expose to Thy scrutiny, my Father, the frayed edges of my aliveness until they are renewed and freshened by Thy Healing and Thy Love.

<https://blogs.bu.edu/sermons/2012/04/15/thurman-and-resurrection/>

## Spirit

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20: 22).

“God is With Me” and “God is Present,” two meditations of Howard Thurman from his book, *Meditations of the Heart*.

God is with me, in the sense that He is the Creator and the Sustainer of life. This is a part of my general thought and experience. There is something so big and vast about God as Creator and Sustainer of all of life that it is hard for me to feel that I am included.

God is with me. All around me are certain expressions of orderliness, of beauty, of wonder and delight. The regularity of sunrise and sunset, the fragile loveliness of a wisp of cloud fringed with silver, the wonder of day dawning and the delight of companionship – all these are His handiwork.

God is with me. Again and again I am stirred by some experience of tenderness, some simple act of gratuitous kindness moving from one man to another, some quiet deed of courage, wisdom or sacrifice or some striking movement of unstudied joy that bursts forth in the contagion of merry laughter. I know God is with me.

God is with me. Always there is the persistent need for some deep inner assurance, some whisper in my heart, some stirring of the spirit within me – that renews, re-creates and steadies. Then whatever betides of light or shadow, I can look out on life with quiet eyes.

God is with me.

God is present with me this day.

God is present with me in the midst of my anxieties. I affirm in my own heart and mind the reality of His presence. He makes immediately available to me the strength of His goodness, the reassurance of His wisdom and the heartiness of His courage. My anxieties are real; they are the result of a wide variety of experiences, some of which I understand, some of which I do not understand. One thing I know concerning my anxieties: they are real to me. Sometimes they seem more real than the presence of God. When this happens, they dominate my mood and possess my thoughts. The presence of God does not always deliver me from anxiety but it always delivers me from anxieties. Little by little, I am beginning to understand that deliverance from anxiety means fundamental growth in spiritual character and awareness. It becomes a quality of being, emerging from deep within, giving to all the dimensions of experience a vast immunity against being anxious. A ground of calm underlies experiences whatever may be the tempestuous character of events. This calm is the manifestation in life of the active, dynamic Presence of God.

God is present with me this day.

## The Mystery of resurrection

From *Meditations of the Heart*

There is ever something compelling and exhilarating about the glad surprise. The emphasis is upon *glad*. There are surprises that are shocking, startling, frightening, and bewildering. But the glad surprise is something different from all of these. It carries with it the element of elation, of life, of something over and beyond the surprise itself. The experience itself comes at many levels: the simple joy that comes when one discovers that the balance in the bank is larger than the personal record indicated – and there is no error in accounting; the realization that one does not have his doorkey – the hour is late and everyone is asleep – but someone very thoughtfully left the latch off, “just in case”; the dreaded meeting in a conference to work out some problems of misunderstanding, and things are adjusted without the emotional lacerations anticipated; the report from the doctor’s examination that all is well, when one was sure that the physical picture was very serious indeed. All of these surprises are glad!

There is a deeper meaning in the concept of the glad surprise. This meaning has to do with the very ground and foundation of hope about the nature of life itself. The manifestation of this quality in the world about us can best be witnessed in the coming of spring. It is ever a new thing, a glad surprise, the stirring of Life at the end of winter. One day there seems to be no sign of life and then almost overnight, swelling buds, delicate blooms, blades of grass, bugs, insects – an entire world of newness everywhere. It is the glad surprise at the end of winter. Often the same experience comes at the end of a long tunnel of tragedy and tribulation. It is as if a man stumbling in the darkness, having lost his way, finds that the spot at which he falls is the foot of a stairway that leads from darkness into light. Such is the glad

surprise. This is what Easter means in the experience of the race. This is the resurrection! It is the announcement that life cannot ultimately be conquered by death, that there is no road that is at last swallowed up in an ultimate darkness, that there is strength added when the labors increase, that multiplied peace matches multiplied trials, that life is bottomed by the glad surprise. Take courage, therefore:

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

<https://thevalueofsparrows.wordpress.com/2016/03/31/resurrection-the-glad-surprise-by-howard-thurman/>