

Wisdom to Wonder and Share

Based on Psalm 104

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand, adapted from Loving Our Neighbours, "Season of Gratitude."

The United Church of Canada

Psalm 104 paints a picture.

You can imagine the canvas being filled in as it moves along: the waters flowing through the mountains and the valleys; teams of fish swimming in it; animals drinking off to the side; the birds singing while they circle and make nests; the cattle in the distance grazing; trees providing shade; a sunset; people working together peacefully, making wine, bread, and oil.

The scene is so picturesque, so perfect that the psalmist's heart is stirred. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live" (v. 33), he declares. Surely, we've all had such heart-stirring moments.

For me it was my first experience of mountains as I backpacked through Europe alone, travelling through the Italian Alps by train. During those same travels, an uncouth 20-year-old, visiting the great art galleries of Europe and seeing firsthand the masterpieces I had seen only in textbooks or in magazines before. Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was divine. Listening to the rustling of leaves on a breezy summer's day – and my heart and soul open to Creation's soundscape.

Countless times I have witnessed God's creativity at work, whether in nature or in the wonder of what people can do. How about you? Do you have such moments of wonder where your heart was stirred?

My faith is inspired, I experience the holy. Celtic spirituality calls those moments of holy wonder "thin spaces" where the separation between this world and eternity is removed – we walk in both places.

In his writings, Plato said that contemplating and wondering at the cosmos leads the soul to God because all of creation is a reflection of the beauty of the Divine. When we feel that sense of wonder at creation and we are energized also by experiencing God-presence in that wonder, for a moment perhaps as Plato suggests, our soul transcends time and space. We are totally present to the moment. Wonder transports us into something inexplicable.

"Teach me, God, to wonder" (VU 299), as the hymn goes.

If we stay with Plato a little longer, then wonder becomes like a portal to the Divine; maybe that's why Jesus often spoke of the extraordinary being found in seemingly ordinary things. Remember Jesus taking bread, an ordinary meal made so holy that millennia later we still re-enact that Passover meal when we share in communion. Jesus took ordinary fish and turned it into a revelation on a hillside feeding thousands

with inspiration. He took the brutality of a cross and turned it into redemption. He took a child onto his knee – with all of the wide-eyed amazement that children bring – and said to his disciples that children possess a faith that grownups need to seek in order to understand the kin-dom. Jesus called ordinary people like you and me and called us disciples.

Teach me, God, to wonder. That's my prayer.

Yearning to wonder for Christian living isn't a theory to be learned, it is a spiritual practice that we are all invited to accept, and, well practice in our everyday lives. It isn't about avoiding life – our emails, going onto Facebook, doing errands... It's about being faithful *in the midst* of all those things. Keeping watch for wonder, everywhere. Wonder about the world around us, taking time to wonder at beauty, at perplexing mysteries – wonder connects us with what is around us.

Psalm 104 not only wonders at the creativity of God, but it connects God's creativity with our own ability to be creative. The psalm says that God causes the plants to grow and we cultivate them. We make the wine and bread and oil. It's a team effort. We are united with God in a mission to cultivate the wonder. To ensure the world is wonder-full. To resist diminishing wonder by putting a price on it, restricting it, harming it, polluting it.

Teach us God, to wonder.

When we join with God's mission in our personal lives, together as a congregation and as a worldwide church, we are saying that the beauty, bounty, and peace in the picture Psalm 104 paints – the waters flowing through the mountains and the valleys, the teams of fish swimming, the animals drinking off to the side, the birds singing while they circle, the cattle in the distance grazing, the people working together making bread and oil – that abundance is for everyone.

Over the **next few weeks of our stewardship program**, we are going to **contemplate wisdom on the journey** and **what it means to live a meaningful, God-filled life**. We are going to listen to the wisdom of the Psalms in our sermons, those great Psalms that have accompanied the faithful for centuries – really, millennia!

Why? Because Psalm 104 and the others we are going to hear aren't just quaint words we can imagine hung on a wall. They represent a vision for our lives and for the world. God's wonder and abundance is for everyone.

Teach me, teach you, teach all of us, God, to wonder.

Verse 31 of Psalm 104 reads: "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works." You get the sense here of how deeply the psalmist longs for God, the divine artist, to sit back from the canvas of the world and say, "Yes! This is how I envisioned it. Yes! It is good. It is very good." On the seventh day, the story goes, God rested. But then what? Well, we know how artists work. After Da Vinci's Last Supper there was the Mona Lisa. Artists never stop creating. It's in their bones. Likewise, God

never stops creating. God's spirit beckons us into other wonder-filled visions of the world. Dreams of lions laying down with lambs, promised lands, and a vision of a new heaven and new earth. Wonder upon wonder to stir our hearts.

Let's allow ourselves to be wonder-struck. Allow our hearts to be stirred by the beauty of God. Allow our wonder to transport us to deep places where the waters of mission baptize, cleanse, and refresh us to live our mission. God, teach us to wonder. May we realize wonder... actualize it... share it. There's wisdom in that! Amen.

[This Message is adapted from Loving Our Neighbours, "Season of Gratitude." The United Church of Canada]