

## Wonder and Awe

One Sunday night my son Joel woke me up at midnight, “Dad, you’ve got to see this!”

We went out into the night and looked up into the Pleiades. There, above Custer’s black hills, was the Auroa Borealis. Splendorous ribbons of color in the sky drifting to earth in every directions. North, south, east, west – the entire sky filled as I’d never seen before (nor seen since). All I could say was, Wow LORD!

In his book *Whistling in the Dark*, Frederick Buechner recounts, “I remember seeing a forest of giant redwoods for the first time. There were some small children nearby, giggling and chattering and pushing each other around. Nobody had to tell them to quiet down as we entered. They quieted down all by themselves. Everybody did. You couldn’t hear a sound of any kind. It was like coming into a vast, empty room. Two or three hundred feet high the redwoods stood.”

Celebrating Creation: be it gazing at the Milky Way or seeing for the first time or hundredth time the Grand Canyon, or, as Pam and I in spine-tingling amazement, stood at the edge of the Great Meteor Crater near Winslow, Arizona – we were bathed and baffled in awe. I love it. We all treasure it when we are ushered into Wonder and Awe. It takes my breathe away when I try to comprehend space, the birth of my child, or holiness.

Creation always drives me to God. The Psalmists knew it and sang it: “The heavens declare the glory of God: the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). And, “The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy” (Psalm 65:8).

My neighbor, the late Bill Parret, who in his 90’s still played golf, amused me and fellow golfers by always teeing up his golf ball anywhere on the fairway. Bill Parret was an Episcopalian. We had no Episcopal church in our community, so I frequently brought him the body and blood of our Lord Jesus in the sacrament.

Then one day, I stepped into his little rustic cabin offering Holy Communion. Bill was wide-eyed, eager, bursting to tell this story: he explained how he and his wife had attended the Passion Play pageant when it was presented at Spearfish, South Dakota, many years before. Just when Christ was being lifted up on the cross, a flock of doves were released as part of the pageant. Then, obviously not in the script, a marauding hawk came from the clouds swooping down. Everyone was stunned. Then Bill Parret said, “As Christ was nailed on the Cross, I and a thousand eyes looked up to see the ominous blinking lights of Sputnik, the Russian satellite fly over. Glory and Death! Wonder and terror! It was the most spiritual experience I have ever had.”

Testimony said, Bill and I knelt down on his dated and worn carpet and shared the grace, forgiveness and love of Christ in the Sacrament.

Wonder and Awe happen not only in creation, in dramatic pageants, but also and especially in music.

At Outlaw Ranch Bible Camp, guitars strumming, campers surrounded by stately ponderosas, granite outcroppings, and a hundred young voices, sang around the glowing campfire. Our song by Rich Mullens: “Our God is an awesome God; He reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and love, our God is an awesome God!”

Music is magic. Music soothes and heals as it ushers us into the presence of holiness.

It might be Mozart; or Alison Krauss singing, “Down to the River to Pray;” or the hymn I grew up with in my boyhood church, “My God how wonderful thou art, thy majesty how bright.”

Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast or beyond human comprehension that transcends our current understanding of things. That moment is called the healing power of awe.

Most often, we bask in wonder and awe in ordinary experiences like undeserved forgiveness, unexpected kindness, and unconditional love given and received.

“Our God is an awesome God” proclaims its pinnacle message in the verse, “Mercy and grace he gave us at the cross.”

Just try to absorb that—the wonder and awe of “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”

“Mercy and grace he gave us at the cross.”  
Try it! Just try it!

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--Printed from the 2021-2022 current publication of *The Lutheran Message*