

July 29 – Expect Wonder

Psalm 148 1-10, 13

I have been enjoying the pictures of our grandchildren and great grandchildren that we have been sharing. I wish I had time to talk with you about each of those pictures for I know how precious they are to you. As we continue to think about what children can teach us we recall last week how they remind us to love unconditionally, without prejudice or barriers.

Today I want us to look at life through the eyes of a young child. If you need to be made aware anew of the incredible awesome world we live in go for a walk with a three year old. Everything needs to be examined. A leaf or a bug is reason to celebrate. I recall a walk with Sophi one fall when she was in that three to four year old age. The woolly bear caterpillars were out. As we walked along Railroad Bridge, she was looking intently for them. Soon, all three adults started looking for them and, when we found one, we would yell and point naming how many we had spied. All would come running to see. It took us forever to get across the bridge that day but never had we been so aware of our surroundings. As we get older we let the awe fade. If it had just been Jenny and I walking we would have noticed the caterpillars, maybe remarked about them and moved on. They would not have caused us to stop and shriek with joy. Today, I want us to experience anew a bit of the awesome joy in life that we sometimes are too busy to pay attention to.

The psalm we read a part of today celebrates the wonder in nature. The Psalmist sees the sun, the moon, the stars, animals, the mountains, hills, trees and...you get his point, and, for him, all are praising the Lord. They don't have to do anything. Just by being what they are, they are proclaiming the glory of God. We live in a beautiful area and so we are probably better at seeing and celebrating the wonders in nature than some. We should never take it for granted. Also, when we are in places not so endowed with God's beauty we still have the beauty of nature around us. I recall when we lived in the dessert area of eastern Washington. At first, it seemed to be a barren land but as you looked you would see little flowers or a cactus shaped by the elements into an interesting shape and soon you saw that this area had its own majestic beauty. I think

we need to remember, each day in our prayers, to say specifically thank you to God for some particular beauty in nature.

I remember reading about someone who did this. They took a calendar and each day wrote about something in nature they saw and celebrated. Their goal was to do this for a year and not repeat any item. The first month or so was relatively easy. She listed mountains and birds flying and a gorgeous sunset. By October with the cold winds of autumn and the land going to sleep for the winter it became harder. She had to look, really look, for new things to celebrate. I recall a couple of things she listed towards the end of the year, a dandelion blooming in a sheltered spot in November, dry rustling leaves blowing in the wind and a maple seed twirling down from a tree.

We worship many attributes of God and one of those is God as creator. We should be reminded by the children in our lives, to slow down, really see the beauties of this world around us and celebrate. And because we celebrate, we should also live in ways that protects it and pass it on as a treasure to those who come behind us.

The second thing I celebrate and pay attention to is the wonder in life giving relationships. I see people married for 50+ years and still holding hands and celebrate the sustaining power of love. I see mature people in new relationships and celebrate how the power of love never dies. I have people talk about friends they have had for 40, 50 or more years and I celebrate how nourishing friendships can be. We sometimes take these for granted.

In my role of pastor I am acutely aware of when relationships are not life giving. I weep with people as they prepare for a divorce acknowledging that those pledges of love were not forever. I hold the hands of parents whose children have turned against them. I console people who thought they had friends but found out they were being taken advantage of or the friend moved on to other people leaving them wondering why.

Children celebrate relationships. Last week, I talked about how they love unconditionally and how God is a God of Love. So think about your life. Think about those relationships that have nurtured you. If the person is still alive tell them anew how much you appreciate them. If they have joined the saints of heaven, give thanks for their

life. Look around you and see the people you are connected to, friends, family and acquaintances from church or other groups. Ask yourself, how can I improve those connections. Give thanks for what you have and be in awe of how they nourish and enrich your life.

The last thing I want to lift up regarding being filled with wonder is seeing how courageously and faithfully many of you face the trials and struggles of life. This is only something we begin to appreciate as we mature. It is not something a child is aware of. The courage you have shown as you have fought major health battles leaves me in awe. Sometimes we have celebrated when, with God's help and medical miracles, that health concern has been left in the dust of history. Sometimes I have held your hand as the life force flows from you. Not everyone faces health issues with courage and grace so when I see it happening I celebrate what God is allowing you to do.

In the same vein, I am in awe how some of you have been able to deal with the loss of a loved one with such strength and grace. More than once in my ministry when I have buried one-half of a devoted team the one remaining seems ill equipped to continue on. For some men, the kitchen is a mystery to them and they have never washed a load of clothes. How, I wonder, will they manage? Or the woman has never paid a bill or put gas in their car. How will they manage? On a rare occasion the sad truth is that they don't manage very well. But for most I am amazed at their resilience. A man had his daughter come home and teach him the basics of cooking. A woman went to her accountant and learned what she needed. They were feeling the loss but they also moved forward in life.

You see, I believe we are called by God to go through life expecting to see wondrous things. Whenever I do this, I am not disappointed. Also, as the Psalmist shows, we are to praise God, to point out the wonders around us to others.

That is harder to do, at times, than we like to admit. I am sure we all have the friend who only sees the negative. If it is sunny it is too hot. If they hear good news they are sure tomorrow will bring bad. They think life is bad. They think any statement about

being positive is just not being realistic. Yet, how much better our lives when they are filled with awe and wonder instead of negativity.

Just this week in the Upper Room Devotional we had a reminder of this thought. "We had a bumper crop of dandelions. During this time, I was stuck gazing out my bedroom window at the lawn because I had a cancerous tumor. While I watched nature reclaim five-years of hard work on our lawn, I wanted to cry. Then one day as I was looking out the window my four-year-old daughter, Gracie, nudged in beside me for a look. I heard her gasp. "Oh, Mommy!" she said, "Look at all the beautiful yellow flowers! Can we go pick some?" Wow! I had been so focused on the negatives that I didn't see the beauty. I realized that I was only focusing on what I was missing out on because of my tumor. Now I have begun to see that bed rest has given me more time for prayer and reading God's word. Gracie made me determined to stop, no matter what circumstances surround me or how things or people appear, focusing on the negatives and find the glory in all of God's creation."

We have a choice on what we are going to focus on in our lives. We have little ability to alter what happens around us or to us. What we are in control of is where we choose to focus our energy. Too often, we focus on the negatives, the things we lack, the problems we face, the worries we have and more. This is the curse of growing older. We become too aware of all the realities of life and if we are not careful the negatives of living can suck the life and joy out of our existence. On the other hand, we can focus on the joy and awe and wonder of life. This is not living in denial about those other issues, we will have to deal with their realities whether we want to or not. It is saying that we will not be consumed by them and controlled by them. To be a child is to focus on the wonders of life. This is something I intentionally try to do each day. I know I have no choice as to what will happen to me but I have all the power to decide how I am going to face life and I choose joy and awe. I try to share that wonder with others so they too know the joy of life. And it has been my experience that I am a better person when I live this way. So may I always remain childlike and filled with wonder and praise. I hope you will too. Today, maybe slow down and enjoy a dandelion filled lawn or a butterfly sailing by and give thanks. You will be glad you did.