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Acts 2:43-47

Wonder

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Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Acts 2:43-47 New Revised Standard Version

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.  Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

 Seventeen years ago, Lee Ann Womack had a hit song called, “I Hope You Dance” and it has been going over and over in my mind all week, “I hope you never lose your sense of wonder. You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger. May you never take one single breath for granted and God forbid love ever leave you empty handed. I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean. Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens. Promise me that you'll give faith the fighting chance and if you get the chance to sit it out or dance. I hope you dance, I hope you dance.”

For the next few weeks we are going to be talking about Wonder, Love, and Praise, which is also the name that our very own Charles Wood chose for the document that he wrote on behalf of The United Methodist Committee on Faith and Order after a request from the Council of Bishops to prepare a new theological study document on ecclesiology, so it was a document on the theological understanding of the church itself. That is what we will be discussing more in depth tonight At the Table and In Conversation from 5:00-7:00 p.m. in Glory Be Hall and you all are welcome to come!

As you might have already noticed as we sang it earlier, the words wonder, love, and praise come from the great hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” which was written by Charles Wesley and is considered among Charles’ finest hymns. It is among his most successful, and not only in our hymnal, but in Anglican, Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren, Lutheran, Congregationalist, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic hymnals. It is in more hymnals than “Amazing Grace” or “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” or “O for a Thousand Tongues”

 Charles Wesley borrowed many of his lines from other writers. Joseph Addison was a poet who wrote “Hymn on Gratitude to the Deity” where he wrote, “When all thy mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys; transported with the view, I’m lost in wonder, love, and praise.” Charles Wesley changed that to “Let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee; changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

 Lost in wonder, love, and praise. That is what life is all about - knowing, loving, and enjoying our Creator. We see that sense of wonder in our scripture that we read today. This is right after that Pentecost moment when the disciples were gathered together in one place and there was a sound like the rush of a violent wind and divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. A crowd gathers and Peter preaches and it was the best day for a preacher ever because those who welcomed his message were baptized and about 3,000 people were added to the followers of Jesus. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And then we have our scripture for today.

 “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.  Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:43-47).

 “Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” Awe, the Greek word is phobos, literally means fear. It is the word that the writer of Luke’s Gospel uses to talk about the outsider’s response to the activity of God. Awe, phobos, fear. Those early followers of Jesus held everything in common. They would sell their possessions and distribute the proceeds to those in need. They broke bread together and praised God and more people were drawn to their community. Teaching, fellowship, sharing goods, and prayers are the religious practices that brought the church together.

There are many days that I wish the Christian Church was like that today. There are many days that I wish the United Methodist Church was like that today. This week someone shared with me that they don’t want to be called a Christian anymore because they don’t want to be associated with some of the folks who are called Christian in our world today. There are many of you who struggle with being a part of a Christian Church today because of the connotations that has. The church is a gift from God, but it is also a human community and institution.[[1]](#footnote-2) We are called as Christians to witness and foster the life of wonder, love, and praise that is the proper vocation of every human being.[[2]](#footnote-3)

A life of wonder, love and praise. I love the pictures from space that astronauts take of our world and the amazing thing is that there are no dotted lines, there are no national barriers. God calls us to help those in distress in every place, refugees, homeless people, hungry children, battered spouses, those affected by hurricanes and floods.   Welcoming the stranger is a core component of our identity as Christians. We are called to be people of compassion.  People of generosity.  We are to be a praying church because we realize that we can not meet life in our own strength.  We are called to be a church where things happen, where flood buckets are assembled and materials for hygiene kits donated.  We are to be a sharing church where we have a feeling of responsibility for each other.  Where we care about each other and miss each other when someone is absent.  We are to be a worshipping church, where we never forget to visit God’s house.   The church is the model for how God wants the world to be.

Lost in wonder, love, and praise. I was reading about the work of the church I grew up in in Houston. As the flood waters receded, one of the first houses to be cleaned belonged to an elderly couple, where the wife lived with her husband who has Parkinson’s Disease. In one day, the Chapelwood team moved valuables to an upper level, threw out ruined furniture, pulled up hardwood floors, removed sheetrock, dried the floor and treated the house to prevent mold. When the team prepared to leave the house and help the woman lock it, the homeowner said “Yesterday, I had given up on God and lost my faith. Then you all arrived and I now know God is alive and God answers our prayers. Your church restored my faith.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

As Christians, God’s mission of the world claims us, transforms us, and brings us together into a connection of support, accountability, and mission. The church is first a gift to be received by God’s redeeming love. God’s grace comes first and is our source, our foundation. We are called to reach beyond the door of Greenland Hills and live out the truth in our church that God’s saving love is for all people, is transformative, and creates community.

When tragedy strikes, we ask why. We try to make sense of the suffering we witness, in light of our Christian faith. We do not know why natural disasters and other suffering are part of our world. We don’t know why, but God does not send suffering. Suffering is not punishment for sin or a judgment from God. We suffer, and the world suffers, because we are human and part of a system of processes and a physical environment where things go wrong. We are never alone in our suffering. God is with us through it all.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We are an extension of God’s presence in the midst of the tragedy as we come beside those who are suffering. We are to be agents of healing, working to restore God’s order to people’s lives and communities. We are to be representatives of the day of resurrection to come, as we seek to rebuild and renew. We assemble [flood buckets](http://www.umcor.org/UMCOR/Relief-Supplies). We rebuild homes. We stand in the gap alongside the suffering. We support our local food banks, help build houses in our communities, take care of one another’s cars, visit those who are ill and imprisoned, and so much more. We are active in our communities, working to change systems that inflict suffering on people in our communities. In the aftermath of tragedy, we give witness to the love of God. We may not know why things happen, but we embrace the ministries of healing, renewal and reconciliation to which Jesus calls us, and in doing so, God’s mighty works are revealed.[[5]](#footnote-6)

May we be “lost in wonder, love, and praise.” God shines in our hearts, so we may share God’s grace and glory with all. As Lee Ann Womack sings, “I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance and never settle for the path of least resistance. Living might mean taking chances but they're worth taking. Loving might be a mistake but it's worth making. Don't let some hell-bent heart leave you bitter. When you come close to selling out reconsider. Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance and when you get the choice to sit it out or dance. I hope you dance, I hope you dance.”

1. http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\_Properties/council-of-bishops/committee-faith-order/documents/wonder-love-and-praise-full-en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\_Properties/council-of-bishops/committee-faith-order/documents/wonder-love-and-praise-full-en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://www.facebook.com/unitedmethodistchurch/photos/ms.c.eJwzNDA0NbUwMbYwM7Y0MjExNdUzRIhYYIiYWViiiZiboouYWYJEAC57Eiw~-.bps.a.10155843863159455.1073741840.9055099454/10155843863699455/?type=3&theater [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/ask-the-umc-how-do-united-methodists-understand-human-suffering-from-natura [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/ask-the-umc-how-do-united-methodists-understand-human-suffering-from-natura [↑](#footnote-ref-6)