

### “Baptism: Small Wonders”

**Prelude before scripture lesson:** I was driving down Clopper Road yesterday when I was overcome with emotion. At strange moments, life’s emotions tend to creep up on us and seep through that tight, stoic lid we keep on them. For some reason, I was reminded of the fact that when Bill Danoff (*John Denver’s brother*) and his wife Taffy were driving to a family reunion back in the late 1960’s, Clopper Road inspired them to write the song that Denver made famous: “Take Me Home, Country Roads.” Most of us traveled these two roads to come to church this morning ... how inspiring were they? One person’s spirit is moved by his natural surroundings to write a classic song, while most people curse the winding, narrow, bumpy pavement, inconvenienced by traffic, and the time it takes to get to church! I asked myself and you should, too: “What am I missing?”

So I paused and threw out my so-called Pentecost sermon from Acts and John, and asked the Spirit “how does one know or sense God’s Spirit, God’s presence in this life? Where are the hidden songs to be written? What am I missing as I rush through one day after another keeping a schedule, “performing” my job, multi-tasking, and “blah-blah-blah!” Then I thought about this morning and how special it is. Today we will ... by baptism ... adopt four young lives into the life of this church. This is very significant! The service may be pro forma, but underneath, there is so much more. There is the spirit and power of relationships and community all joined together. I have had the honor and privilege of performing each child’s parent’s marriage service, and in one instance, I actually married Trever Martin’s grandparents.

When I think of Pentecost, I think of the Holy Spirit, which is the glue that binds believers together into the Body of Christ ... which is that mystical force that sustains us as a church ... which is God’s presence in our relationship, one with another. These thoughts and many more directed my attention to the lesson from the psalms ... Psalm 104, begin reading at verse 24.

**Message:** There is classic 1957 sci-fi film entitled “The Incredible Shrinking Man.” Scott Carey, the leading man, first shrinks to the size of a three-year-old boy ... then to a mouse ... and finally to a cockroach. In each stage, he discovers ever new, minute forms of life and is amazed at the phenomena he had been ignorant of ... all his life. The final scene of the movie shows Scott Carey squeezing into his garden from a window ledge in the basement, and gazing at the impossible distant stars and all the muddled galaxies. The final voice-over narration of Carey is heard saying:

*That existence begins and ends is a human being conception, not nature’s. And I felt my body dwindling, melting, and becoming nothing. My fears melted away, and in their place came acceptance. All this vast majesty of creation, it had to mean something. And then I meant something, too. Yes, smaller than the smallest, I meant something, too. To God there is no zero. I still exist!*

Helen Keller appreciated the wonders of the world, both great and small. She said that wonders possess “angels of the Lord.” Thomas Carlyle wrote that wonder is the basis for all worship; a note that is sounded throughout the Psalms, and no less in today’s reading. After recounting the wonders of the Lord, both great and small, the poet of the Psalm builds to a climax of worship and praise: *May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works ... I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to God, for I rejoice in the Lord.*

The musical cords within our soul will not be denied. They burst forth in adoration upon recognizing the handiwork of God in the creation ... upon acknowledging the beauty, the peace, and the harmony of Nature. Sunsets and sunrises! Thunderstorms with lightening! The ocean pounding itself upon the beach! The lush green of a deep forest! The swaying of miles and miles of golden grain! The majesty of tall mountain peaks! The fresh snow covered road with the only sounds being the crunching of your steps and the pounding of your heart!

When we truly stand in God’s creation and behold its wonder, our soul can not help but burst forth in praise: *O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder; Consider all the worlds thy hands have made. I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; How great thou art, how great thou art.* Verse one of this popular hymn celebrates the great wonders: stars, thunder, and power of nature.

And verse two recognizes the smaller of wonders: *When through the woods and forest glades I wander; And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees; When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, And hear the brook and feel the*

*gentle breeze. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee. How great thou art! How great thou art!* Small wonders! Saint Augustine wrote: “The smallest and commonest things of nature have qualities and characteristics which are stupendous. They are a revelation to the persons who study and analyze them. Most people, however, find only strange and unusual things worth wondering about, while they take ordinary things for granted.

Have we become so busy ... distracted ... that we have taken the ordinary for granted? Have we lost our ability to wonder? Have we forfeited our sense of being connected with the creation? I hope not because if so ... then we also have separated ourselves from God. Psalm 104 teaches us why our souls must bless the Lord ... and how all God’s works do that very thing. For it is God who is the real hero of this psalm, not Nature ... and certainly not human beings.

Writes one author: *God is the perfect poet. Who in his person acts his own creation? ... Man can think of the Divine Being only as a Person, because pure Spirit is beyond his comprehension. As a Person, then, God is clothed. The Creation that He has brought into being is here pictured as His outer garment, as it were, for of course God Himself we cannot see; what we see is the revelation of His greatness ... that is ... the robe of light that is worn by the Creator.*

Have we lost our ability to wonder ... to see God in Creation ... to stand *in* the creation as if to stand with God? Have we lost the spirit of our voice ... does our soul not sing? Are we too busy doing things that we fail to stop and wonder ... fail to contemplate the meaning of all this and our place and time upon God’s earth ... fail to commit ourselves to the role for which we were created ... the role of caretaker ... helping God to keep the peace and harmony of His creation? God the Creator is our friend, but what kind of friend does God’s creation have in us?

The last verse of Psalm 104 lashes out and cuts deep. We, human beings, are the one element in creation that single handedly can act destructively as a counter-force in the framework of the creative event. That is why the final petition of the psalm reads: *Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!* Why? Because their evil practices in the political and social sphere infringe upon the order of life ... which is part of the creative event.

Are we so caught in the sinful trap of our life styles ... styles that waste the resources of earth ... styles that violate the natural order of things that our souls no longer sing ... our spirit no longer wonders? Be reminded that Christ died for the redemption of the whole of God’s creation. Christ died for the rabbit and the tree, as well as for you and me. Listen to what Paul tells the Christians at Rome: (*read Romans 8:22-27*)

We only need to recall the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and the consequences that led to the cursing of earth itself. Genesis 3 tells of the suffering of the Creation because of Adam’s sin, and in its turn is a further part of Adam’s punishment. When God first created, all things He created were called “good”. Then human sin violated the creation, ... and since that time ... the earth has been suffering and in pain. But it is a good suffering ... a good pain ... a pain much like child birth rather than death? The Creation, both human and nonhuman, is moving towards a fulfillment beyond itself. The final result of the pain is to be the birth of a new heaven and a new earth.

We are a part of creation, and so we also grown in pain experienced as human suffering. In faith, though, we are to gather confidence from God’s promise to restore creation to its original goodness. God’s promise is our hope ... the beginning of the end has started. Our hope is sure. God sent Jesus to open the lines of communication between Himself and us. These lines our kept open by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, we are at a loss to know how to communicate with God. That is the legacy of human rebellion and sin.

At Pentecost, God restored communication between Himself and human beings. The Spirit restores our ability to wonder ... our ability to look at the creation and be changed by it. The Spirit restores our soul, in order that we may sing like the Psalmist: *O Lord, how manifold are Thy works ... living things both great and small!* I think baptism is a small wonder! I can not look into the face of such innocent, new life without wondering about God’s creation. At baptism the Spirit stirs within us and we truly see the beauty of God’s Creation.

And when we see ... then our souls must sing ... we must rejoice with humble voices ... and we must we pray ... pray like this: *Thank you, God, for this dear life ... and forgive me if I do not love it enough!* Thanks and forgiveness! Appreciation and contrition! Obedience and loyalty. These are the things the Creation requires of us! For what we do to the Creation ... we do to God! And we will be held accountable!