

January 1st, 2016 John 1:1-14

“What are you doing? Why are you making that noise?” Jessica said to me. That’s when I noticed it, (breathe in) I was breathing in loudly, inhaling deeply because the landscape around me was literally leaving me breathless. Two years ago Jessica and I took a trip to the Grand Canyon. We spent a morning walking along the trail that runs the edge of the canyon. For most of that time we were both left speechless, the only words we could find to express what we were encountering was “wow.” As we looked over the large, open, sculpted, landscape I thought to myself – this is the type of place where religion was created – where people felt the divine filling their lives and the need to express and share it through words and rituals. But mostly I just looked out feeling a profound sense of Awe.

Have you ever found yourself in a state of awe before, of taking in the immense beauty, wonder, holiness of a moment?

What did it feel like?

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Here we are, on the eighth day of the season of Christmas. But today there are no maids a milking to greet us just the stary-eyed author or authors of the Gospel according to John; sith an ancient community who reflecting on the ministry of Jesus, listening to the holy stories, parables, and wisdom sayings attributed to Jesus, want to sing to us a song, a song about the cosmos, about creation, about the essence of all life and the incarnation of the holy in our midst. There are no angelic announcement, no stables or shepherds, no magi and a tyrannical, paranoid, and

murderous King for the Gospel according to John. Instead there is a song of cosmic wonder:

In the beginning was the Logos, the creative word, the essence.
This essence was with God and was God,
All things came into being through it,
and it was life and light to all.
And the logos became known, became incarnate, fleshy,
and lived among us.

Scholars John Dominique Crossan and Marcus Borg point out that the Christmas stories we celebrate at this time of year are the overtures of the Gospels – they are the Gospel in miniature, inviting and leading us into the stories of Jesus’ ministry and his teachings. The Gospel of John’s overture is an ancient hymn, proclaiming that in Jesus we encounter the creative word, the essence, of God that brings life and light to this world. The song is an invitation to inhale, to breath in, and to stand in Awe before the good news as we open ourselves to the holy in our midst.

Moments of Awe are life giving, they draw us out of our small selves and into the holiness of creation but they can seem so rare.

Jason Silva says that one of the great barriers to our encountering Awe is that our brains block them out. We stop noticing the magnificence of life because of something called the Hedonic Adaptation – when we encounter the same thing over and over again our brains have already mapped it and we are no longer engaged by it. If you drive the same route each day, you know what this is, your brain goes into automatic pilot. That’s why it is easy

to stop noticing the beauty of the world around us, to take for granted the love of friends and family, to miss the moments of Awe that fill life.

We also miss out on the richness of life because our brains have a negative bias. Scientists have discovered that negative experiences are like Velcro, they stick to our brains and get absorbed into our lives. Positive experiences, on the other hand are like Teflon, they slide right off. Again, we know this, we experience it all the time. How many of you have ever had a really good day, all is going right, people are friendly to you, and then one person says something hurt or thoughtless, and all of the good things disappear and life feels pretty miserable. This is why it can feel like the world is a dangerous, horrible, and frightening place because the negative news stories and the painful moments stick to our brains and many of the good moments of life slide right off. But did you know that if we just savour a positive moment for 10 seconds our brains absorb that experience.

The holiness of life, the awe-filled moments are here all the time, we just need to step out of autopilot, notice and savour them. This is what is happening in our reading today. The Gospel according to John could easily have skipped the opening hymn, skipped the overture and jump right into act 1. Instead it breathes in the gospel, and exhales poetry, inviting us to slow down and savour, to stand in awe before the good news of Jesus the Christ.

Imagine what it would be like if we took the Gospel's example and made more room in our life for Awe, if we took the time to look at the beauty and

wonder of the world, the sacredness of life, and to savour the good and holy everyday moments for the 10 seconds it takes for them to stick in our brains and fill our lives?

Today we are standing together looking out over a vast landscape, not the Grand Canyon, not the poetic, beautiful, and complex Gospel According to John, but a new year – 365 unwritten and unlived days. What will 2017 be like? What joys and sorrows, what ease and pain, what beginnings and endings will this new year bring us? What would happen if we stood at the edge of this vastness, breathed deeply, and encountered the awe of another year?

The amazing thing about the experience of Awe is that it is never content to be a passive or private moment. How many of you were here on Christmas Eve? Do you remember what happened when I was talking about the Gospel of John, about stars, and I asked “Did you know that we are made of stardust?”

There was a boy in the congregation whose face lit up with joy as he shot his hand in the air and stepped out into the aisle calling out “I do.” And it was like he was giving a testimonial as he began to share the holy story of Creation – how through the explosion of stars, supernovas, and the collision of elements oxygen was created on this planet. He embodied the awe he encountered in science and he was excited to share it.

Awe is an embodied experience that leads us towards others. Moments of Awe empowers us, inspires us, and connects us. When we allow

ourselves to experience more awe-filled moments we allow our faith to take flesh, to become incarnate. Moments of Awe helps us to celebrate life and relationship, to look at creation and echo the joy of Genesis “it is good.”

Awe gives us the strength and courage to walk into the broken, pain filled, needing places of life and not be overcome. It gives us the wisdom to be a prophetic people, to proclaim that darkness cannot overcome light, to take our place standing up against the violence, oppression, discrimination, hopelessness, fear, and everything else that threatens to dim the holy light that shines in all people and all creation. Moments of Awe are the fuel of an incarnational faith – of an embodied faith that leads us to being a more loving and compassionate people, filling the world with holiness and life.

Maybe this year, our new years resolution should be to take more time and make more space in our lives to stand with the Gospel of John, looking out at the wonders of creation and the richness of our faith, seeing each other more clearly, seeing ourselves with holy eyes, open to the holy gift of Awe that is all around us.

In the beginning was the Logos, the creative word, the Christ, the essence, the gift, and all life comes from this, and all life is filled with it. It is the light and life for this world. Darkness can never extinguish this holy light

Let us step into this new year open to the holy gift of awe as we take in the wonders of life, encountering the Christ, the Logos, the Holy essence in ourselves, in all people, and all creation. Come, let us be filled with God’s gift of awe for we are part of a holy story and this is good news indeed.

Amen