

Wonder (Part One)

The heavens declare the glory of God

Reflection 12 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

Now in our series of reflections on “A New World in the Morning” we set out on another quest, and that is to regain our sense of wonder, that feeling we had as a child when we woke up and morning smiled or maybe that feeling we sometimes have when we walk through our great Northeastern woods amidst towering oaks and pines and spruces and we sense that we are in God’s great cathedral, that God is all around us, that God is as close as the air we breathe, that everywhere there is that which is sacred, that we live in an enchanted and enchanting world. People everywhere hunger for this. We are wired to feel this way and we suffer when for too long we let the cares and concerns of our lives keep us from this sense of wonder.

Consider Psalm 19:1-6. With this text we return to the Psalms, these ancient Hebrew poems often set to music in which we find some of life’s most timeless truths, songs from the heart, songs for a thousand years, songs aglow with wonder and a sense of the presence of God. Certainly this is true of the great 19th Psalm which begins,

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
 the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
 Day after day they pour forth speech;
 night after night they display knowledge.
 There is no speech or language
 where their voice is not heard.
 Their voice goes out into all the earth,
 their words to the ends of the world.”

Here the Psalmist, according to tradition, David, as inscribed in the superscription to the psalm, a truly great poet, personifies the heavens as declaring the glory of God, the skies as proclaiming the work of God’s hands, day after day their pouring forth speech, night after night their displaying knowledge. Their voice goes out into all the earth. And it’s all marvelous and mysterious. The visible becomes vocal. Catch this! What begins as seeing is experienced as hearing. We hear the heavens! The heavens are heard, they pour forth speech, almost in anticipation of the knowledge that in the end everything – matter, energy, light, sound, color, even emotion – is vibration. All is vibration – uncannily what science today tells us. And everything is possible to the One who has mastered the frequencies.

With this text we are reminded again of what our hearts have always known – that we encounter the presence of God in his creation, out in nature, in the wind in our face or the heat of the sun on our back, in rippling brooks and thunderous waterfalls, in purple mountain majesty, in the sound of songbirds, in the astonishing wonder of the nighttime sky. John Rowlands in his classic book *Cache Lake Country* records a full year spent living on a hidden, little lake deep in the northern forests of Canada in the 1940s. He begins the book by telling how he had seen maybe a thousand northern lakes and how

they all looked alike in many ways, but how when he first came upon Cache Lake there was something different about it that caught him hard. He sat there for perhaps half an hour, under its spell, just looking it over. He had the strange sense that he had been there before. The tall pine tops swayed in the first soft breeze of morning. And as the mist drifted away dark shadows began to edge across the water into the woods just as they had somewhere, sometime long ago. Then as the sun cleared the hills and turned the still black water into shining gold, he remembered. This was the lake of his boyhood dreams. This was the lake he would picture when he camped out with his best friend by the farm's little millpond. Here it all was, as he had imagined it. He realized he had found the place he had always wanted to be. And this happens often to many of us. And we catch our breath. And feel that we have been here before. We resonate with the vibrations of this place.

For me it was a perfect autumn morning out on Lake Waccabuc with my friend Jim Jenkins. Jim told me I had to be at his place no later than six that morning. I know Jim, and I know what nature does to him, but still I thought this was a bit much. But at six o'clock I was there, and we shoved off shore in our kayaks heading out into the absolute stillness of the lake just before dawn. As the mists lifted from the water, there it was at the end of the lake – an autumn full moon above forested hills clothed in their full seasonal splendor, glorious reds, yellows and oranges against a blue black sky. And always that full moon. We rowed in silence the length of the lake, and then Jim quietly said, "Let's turn around," and I turned and gasped. There at the lake's eastern end the sun was just edging above the tree tops, turning the dark waters first silver, then gold. And it was impossible to deny what the heart knew – that we were in the presence of God.

As the psalmist knew, the composer of the great 19th Psalm, it's in the wonder of creation that again and again we encounter the presence of God: in the sky at sunset, the astonishing beauty of autumn along the Merritt Parkway, the dazzling illumination of the nighttime sky caught just before bedtime, fresh fallen snow, the earth awakening to spring, a summer breeze, red roses in bloom, the colors of the rainbow, the glee on the face of a small child well-loved. We are summoned to hear the music of the universe everywhere we go, the heavens declaring the glory of God, the skies proclaiming the work of God's hands, day after day their pouring forth speech, night after night their displaying knowledge.

We are invited to see the sacred all around us, to realize that there is beauty and meaning and truth and love and mystery in the world at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. And this is what people everywhere hunger for. This is part of their way back to God. This is part of the Great Global Spiritual Awakening.

– Dale Pauls

Part Two (of two) next week