

Wonder (Part Two)

The heavens declare the glory of God

Reflection 13 in the series "A New World in the Morning"

Part of the way back to God then is learning to see the sacred all around us. Ralph Waldo Emerson would write in his essay on "Nature" of the nighttime sky: "If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their astonishing smile." Or in the words of Mary Oliver's "When I Am among the Trees":

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and pines,
they give off such hints of gladness,
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves,
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

It's the wisdom and Edenic imagery of the song "Circle of Life" from *The Lion King*.

From the day we arrive on the planet
And blinking, step into the sun
There's more to see than can ever be seen
More to do than can ever be done
There's far too much to take in here
More to find than can ever be found
But the sun rolling high
Through the sapphire sky
Keeps great and small on the endless round

It's the circle of life
And it moves us all

Through despair and hope
 Through faith and love
 Till we find our place
 On the path unwinding
 In the circle
 The circle of life

And knowing this now I can look out over the Grand Canyon, now I can enter the Yosemite Valley, now I can look out over the pounding waves of the Atlantic on any of a thousand northeastern shores, now I can see New England in all its autumn glory, now I can look up at a starry, starry night, and just let the awe and wonder wash over me. But as things often stand, we have lost touch with creation, and so we have lost touch with those resources for healing and renewal that are part of God's creation. We take too little time to stop and look and see. We don't see the universe of meaning in a fallen leaf, in the exquisite rich color of a chestnut, in the astonishing glory of the nighttime sky. We don't see the sacred all around us.

Consequently we have lost our sense of wonder, and with it our sense of who we are, and who God is, and what life can be on this precious, sacred, enchanted planet. We do not want to die this way. Again in the words of Mary Oliver, this time from her poem, "When Death Comes":

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
 I was a bride married to amazement.
 I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
 I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

So our psalmist back in Psalm 19 invites us to be at home again with the nighttime and with the night sky, to live mindfully, consciously in the wonder of God's creation – to know its beauty, its rich fulfillment, its deep rest, to see again the poetry, to hear again the music of the night, with its eternity of stars lighting the heavens.

We forget sometimes how much the Bible, and especially Hebrew Scripture, is an outdoor book. Wendell Berry once wrote in his book *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* that the Bible is "a book open to the sky. It is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better. ... Passages that within walls seem improbable or incredible, outdoors seem merely natural. This is because outdoors we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence."

Now again back to Psalm 19, this time in the words of Joseph Addison from 200 years ago, put to the music of Haydn:

The spacious firmament on high,
 With all the blue, ethereal sky,
 And spangled heav'ns, a shining frame,

Their great Original proclaim:
 Th'unwearied sun from day to day
 Does his Creator's power display,
 And publishes to ev'ry land
 The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,
 The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
 And nightly to the list'ning earth
 Repeats the story of her birth;
 While all the stars that round her burn,
 And all the planets in their turn,
 Confirm the tidings as they roll,
 And spread the truth from pole to pole.

...

In reason's ear they all rejoice,
 And utter forth a glorious voice,
 Forever singing as they shine,
 "The hand that made us is divine."

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.

We are called always, and over and over again, to new birth, to starting over, to a change in perspective so large, so large, it's being born again. And you can, whoever you are, whatever you have done, start over, begin again, experience the forgiveness of God, and encounter inside yourself the Spirit of God. And part of that is to be reborn in wonder, to realize that you are full of light and you can shine. You will listen to your heart, and you will pick up the vibrations all around you: the heavens declaring the glory of God, the skies proclaiming the work of God's hands, day after day pouring forth speech, night after night displaying knowledge.

For you the world will once again be re-enchanted. And you will be at home again with the nighttime sky. You will know its beauty, its rich fulfillment, its deep rest. You will see again the poetry, you will hear again the music of the night, with its eternity of stars lighting the heavens. You will sense again the wonder that is all around you.

– Dale Pauls