

The Capacity to Wonder

Nearly 40 years ago, the Eastern Orthodox Church came up with the idea of having a season of the year when Christians would – to quote their statement - ‘offer prayers to the Maker of all, both in thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and in petition for its protection and salvation’. Many denominations now keep early autumn as the ‘Season of Creation’, and today we are in the last week of that period.

While there is plenty to worry about because of global heating and the cavalier way we treat God’s earth, there is also much to give thanks for. It’s the sense of wonder and gratitude that we will be thinking about today. How can we recover the sense of awe and wonder? Many of us will say we find God and feel a sense of wonder in high mountains, or facing a stormy sea, or enjoying a beautiful sunset. There is something huge and impenetrable in such vastness that it makes us feel small. We think of the awesome power of God - as the early 20th century hymn says:

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 Saviour God, to thee: How great thou art!

But God is there in small things too. Last week we visited a garden where, at the beginning of the month, everything had looked dead; but a few hours of rain brought the whole thing to life. Different kinds of tiny flower came up, apparently from nowhere. ‘That’s amazing. That’s wonderful,’ I thought, squatting down in silence to admire the wonders of God’s world.

Scientists are recognizing more clearly our inter-connectedness with Creation, our inter-dependence, and that is another cause for wonder.

We mustn’t forget God the Son and God the Holy Spirit too! It is truly awe-inspiring that God, whose artistry and creativity have produced an amazing planet and a human race that is capable of great kindness and self-sacrifice, should spend thirty-three years as a vulnerable human being. As the same hymn says:

And when I think how God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit, comforter, activator, inspirer: it is literally awesome that God works within the world. We all accept that a painting by Michaelangelo or a cantata by J S Bach is inspired – filled with God’s Spirit. But the Spirit’s work is also seen in small things. One wet day on holiday in the Alps this month we visited a village church that was dominated by a huge wooden altar piece. At first I thought, ‘That’s awful – ornate, bad taste, unrealistic!’ But then I realized that a local artist 300 years ago in this isolated valley was showing his devotion to Jesus Christ in the vast haloes; what looked like golden arrows being fired at the heads of Jesus and the saints head were flames of the Spirit giving light to all around. It was an expression of awe and wonder.

So at home, the profound silence in a prayer group like this, the devotion on the face of someone receiving Communion, and many other small ways, we find the awesome wonderful personal presence of God, and express our wonder.

To lead into silence ...

Glorious God,
the whole creation proclaims your marvellous work.
Increase in us a capacity to wonder and delight in it,
that heaven’s praise may echo in our hearts
and our lives be spent as good stewards of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Leading from the silence

O God we praise you,
for the world sings
of your infinite love.
Help us not only to hear its song
but to join in the chorus of creation
in what we think, what we say and how we live.