

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, December 17, 2023

“How Does a Weary World Rejoice? We Allow Ourselves to Be Amazed”

“Young at Heart” Message

Today, on this third Sunday of Advent, we lit the candle representing joy. Our sermon series addressing the question, “How does a weary world rejoice?” continues with this week’s response: we allow ourselves to be amazed.

Amazement is a precursor for joy. Joy can’t be coerced out of us.

If we are having a hard time finding joy, we can stop, take a breath, and allow ourselves to notice and take in the amazing wonders in each day.

There are things to be amazed by in the mundane parts of our daily life – it doesn’t need to be big, spectacular things.

The swirl of the creamer in our morning coffee or tea. The carefully crafted spider web glistening in the dewy morning sun. The frost that makes designs on your windows.

Children tend to live their lives filled with wonder.

Often, we hear kids ask questions of adults that adults find silly or even embarrassing, but the kids are just allowing themselves to be amazed by things they haven’t seen before as they learn about the world around them.

I wonder when humans transition from this life of simple wonder to, often, forgetting to notice the amazing things all around us?

As I was preparing for today’s sermon, I remembered something that we did during my very first spiritual companioning session with a small group of women via Zoom.

Our group leader shared a video with us with a series of photos set to music. We essentially did Visio Divina, where we looked at the photos and let ourselves connect with God.

Many of us found ways to be amazed as we looked through the photos, bringing to light some of the ways we saw God in our own life.

So, I thought we would take a few minutes this morning to do the same thing. I couldn’t find the video we used that day, so I made one for us.

May you allow yourselves to be amazed as you watch the following short video.

If there are any photos that bring something to mind that you would like to share, we will take a few minutes after the video ends to share anything that bubbled for us as we watched.

<https://youtu.be/KXAxWUyZTkY>

The Message

I hope that as you watched the video, you opened your heart to some of the ways you can allow yourself to be amazed.

Some of the images are of fairly mundane things – a sunrise over the houses in Calgary; a praying mantis chilling in the middle of the road; a duck hanging out in a pond; mushrooms; my dog laying in a field.

Most of these things are part of the every day, and yet, I took a moment and allowed myself to be amazed by them at least enough to snap a photo.

Our scripture passage today shares a rather mundane thing that everyone did in the ancient world after they had a baby – a naming ceremony.

This particular naming ceremony was unique not because it was particularly amazing by today's standards, but because it was amazing by the standards of the day.

First of all, when everyone asked what the name of the child would be (after suggesting to the parents that the child be named Zechariah after his father, as is likely the tradition), they did not believe Elizabeth when she said the child's name would be John.

They turned to Zechariah, as though he would step on Elizabeth's toes, tell them she wasn't right in her head, and agree with the tradition of naming his son after himself.

But, even in this rather ordinary interaction, which should have followed tradition and shouldn't have been anything special, we witness more than one amazing thing.

Zechariah, still unable to speak, writes on a tablet that the child's name is John. He amazes everyone by agreeing with his wife.

These parents shunned tradition, choosing a name that had never been part of their family history. This was highly unusual.

Then, after Zechariah confirms that the child's name will be John, he suddenly is able to speak again after not being able to speak for the entire duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Both of these things amazed the crowd of people gathered to witness the naming of this child.

This scripture demonstrates the ways in which we can allow ourselves to be amazed even by ordinary, everyday things.

Sometimes, our weariness can overcome us, and we forget to allow ourselves to be amazed, and therefore we miss out on the simple joys and pleasures in life.

We can find it easy to get so focused on what we're doing that we don't notice the things going on around us that spark joy.

I'll give you two quick examples:

As I was sitting on my couch, writing this sermon, one of my dogs crawled onto the couch and curled up next to me.

He does this every time I sit on the couch to write my sermons, and most of the time, I barely notice he's there.

Strangely, I find tremendous joy in being physically close to my dogs, and it makes my heart happy when they curl up next to me.

But, when I am in the writing zone, I forget to notice, and therefore I forget to be amazed by the simple warmth and joy I feel when he lays next to me.

And, that actually makes me a little sad that I might forget to allow that joy to enter into my heart because I'm so focused on what I'm doing.

Likewise, last weekend when I went snowshoeing, I initially got caught up in making sure my snowshoes were on right, my poles were the right length, and I wasn't going to trip and fall over.

I completely forgot until we were about halfway through the trail to stop and take in my surroundings.

It was beautiful! There was snow on all the trees, there were footprints of animals all over, and we could see the wind kicking up snow on the tops of the mountains.

It wasn't until I realized I was so focused on what I was doing that I was missing the whole point of getting out to snowshoe!

God created so many things for us to be amazed by that we could find something new every single day.

And, admittedly, humans created a great many things to be amazed by, too.

Today's passage reminds us that God created us for joy, even in those times when we feel weary, overworked, underappreciated, or burnt out. And, allowing ourselves to be amazed by simple things is just one way we can rejoice in a weary world.

So, as you leave here today and go into this final week of Advent, make sure you don't get so focused on the things you need to do before Christmas that you forget to allow yourself to be amazed.

Especially if you are finding yourself weary for any reason.

If you are feeling weary, it is even more important to stop, breathe, and look around (or listen) and allow yourself to be amazed by what you see or hear.

And, in that amazement, may you allow joy to enter into your hearts.

Like Elizabeth and Zechariah, may you allow yourself to be amazed by the work of God in all areas of your life – from the ordinary and mundane to the extraordinary and special.

God is there through all of it, and God is amazed by you, too. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of the universe, make our hearts porous. Open our eyes, as if for the first time, so that we might see your world with awe and wonder once again. We often approach life with an analytical lens, intellectualizing and analyzing everything we see and hear. Help us to pause those instincts to make room for wonder.

Help us greet each day with awe and gratitude before we begin overthinking and overanalyzing. For I am confident, that in doing so, we will not only find you in the hallways of our thoughts, but in the pathways of our hearts. With gratitude we pray: keep us open. Amen.