

Is There Any Wonder?

I get it- I really do. I, along with everyone here, totally understand King David's motivations for wanting to build a special place for the presence of the Lord to reside. David is a pious king- a flawed, very human king- but a pious King nonetheless. David truly desires that every activity of his be viewed by all as being in the best interests of Israel. We can compare this to contemporary politics: who hasn't heard a politician frame his words and works as "being in the best interests of the nation?" We can agree or disagree as to whether an activity is in the best interests of the nation, but unless presented with evidence to the contrary, we must take him at his word.

David's closest friend and advisor, Nathan, took him at his word. And why shouldn't he- the King of Israel was an anointed position- chosen by God to be filled with the wisdom of God.

In fact, our ancestors believed this so completely, prophets called the seat “The Throne of David.” But did you hear what happened next? The Lord came to Nathan and said, in no uncertain terms, “Who does David think he is to presume that I am not already establishing my space among my people? For generations now I have moved from tent to tabernacle, over borders and through various wildernesses, bringing blessing and curse as I have seen fit. Has the wonder of my Word been diluted so much that the King of Israel believes he will prepare the way for me? No (the Lord says), it is I who will prepare the place...I will establish the people...I will be the God I have been from the beginning, shattering expectations, and bringing new light into the world.”

“The wonder of God’s word.” Is that really it- is that what David was missing in his life as a believer and as king? From God’s point of view, David has lost his sense of wonder and has replaced it with his desires and his activities. The God who once performed in unexpected ways is now the God who will enjoy all the comforts human ingenuity can buy. Now I am all about planning and having an idea about how a day or a season ought to go, but God, in his explanation to Nathan, reveals an uncomfortable truth that we all must take to heart every now and again- God’s ways are not our ways, and God’s purposes are not our purposes. Is it possible that when we find our Christmas goes totally according to plan, we have removed room in our hearts for the wonder; for God to do the unexpected thing?

“But John, that all sounds good- I mean, I understand that God’s ways are not our ways, and I even understand Mary and her response, at least according to Luke. But seriously, Mary was just a young girl- she didn’t know enough to put up much of an argument. “Let it be with me according to your will” is the response of someone who doesn’t have expectation. I am not saying Mary was wrong, or weak, but “unexpected” is not something we in the 21st century embrace.”

You are right- broadly, we are not good at unexpected. Wonder has taken a back seat to planning and predicting. But wonder is still necessary for the believer. Wonder- being open to surprise, allows some space- some holy space- for God to shake us again. Albert Einstein, famous for his theories and formulas that are still used today to tell us about the nature of light and time and space wrote,

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of true art and science. He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.” Wonder is an openness- an emotion maybe- that begins with a confession that correctly states, “I have no idea what God is about to show me, and my most sincere desire is that I may graciously accept whatever it is.”

Following the patterns of our prophets, some characters in the Christmas stories, and especially of Mary the mother of Jesus, shouldn't our first thought at Christmas be something along the lines of, “God, help me to give less weight to my thoughts and desires and more sight to see what you are doing?” Isn't it true that we more adequately witness to the Savior of the world when we embrace the unexpected...when we leave room for wonder?

My prayer for you, and for us as a gathered people, is for the unexpected gift of Jesus, of Emmanuel, God with us, to be experienced as wonder again. God is always ahead of us in this way- always preparing in the realm of wonder- and God desires that we leave room for surprise. Gifts will be given and received, songs will be sung and stories will be told. Children young and old will gain memories, they will establish patterns, and will consider Christmas in new ways. We will gain truly when we allow the new ways to include the sense of wonder.

Oh great Marvel of the mind of God- you break into the world as the most unexpected gift for all humankind. We desire to receive you, to come into the light of the Word made Flesh, and stand in awe of your love. Precious Lord Jesus, thank you for your presence, the life of perfection, and the gift of salvation. We live because you lived- we are closer to each other because you are so close to us. On this day of joyful celebration, open our eyes to your wonder. And let every heart have room for your coming. In the name of Emmanuel. Amen.