

“Wow”

Psalm 65

Luke 5:17-26

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Psalm 65 (CEB)

God of Zion, to you even silence is praise.

Promises made to you are kept—
you listen to prayer—
and all living things come to you.

When wrongdoings become too much for me,
you forgive our sins.

How happy is the one you choose to bring close,
the one who lives in your courtyards!

We are filled full by the goodness of your house,
by the holiness of your temple.

In righteousness you answer us,
by your awesome deeds,
God of our salvation—
you, who are the security
of all the far edges of the earth,
even the distant seas.

You establish the mountains by your strength;
you are dressed in raw power.

You calm the roaring seas;
calm the roaring waves,
calm the noise of the nations.

Those who dwell on the far edges
stand in awe of your acts.

You make the gateways
of morning and evening sing for joy.

You visit the earth and make it abundant,
enriching it greatly
by God’s stream, full of water.

You provide people with grain
because that is what you’ve decided.

Drenching the earth’s furrows,
leveling its ridges,
you soften it with rain showers;

you bless its growth.
 You crown the year with your goodness;
 your paths overflow with rich food.
 Even the desert pastures drip with it,
 and the hills are dressed in pure joy.
 The meadowlands are covered with flocks,
 the valleys decked out in grain—
they shout for joy;
they break out in song!

Luke 5:17-26 (CEB)

One day when Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and legal experts were sitting nearby.
 They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea, and from Jerusalem.
 Now the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal.
 Some men were bringing a man who was paralyzed, lying on a cot.
 They wanted to carry him in and place him before Jesus, but they couldn't reach him
 because of the crowd.
 So they took him up on the roof and lowered him—cot and all—through the roof tiles
 into the crowded room in front of Jesus.
 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The legal experts and Pharisees began to mutter among themselves,
 "Who is this who insults God? Only God can forgive sins!"
 Jesus recognized what they were discussing and responded,
 "Why do you fill your minds with these questions?
 Which is easier—to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?
 But so that you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive
 sins" —Jesus now spoke to the man who was paralyzed,
 "I say to you, get up, take your cot, and go home."
 Right away, the man stood before them, picked up his cot, and went home, praising
 God.
 All the people were beside themselves with wonder.
Filled with awe, they glorified God, saying,
"We've seen unimaginable things today."

We've arrived to the third and final week of my sermon series based on Anne Lamott's
 book, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*.
 Each week we've examined one of these simple, yet essential prayers.
 These prayers are, as Lamott says, "Communication from one's heart to God."

And she believes in keeping it simple.

The first week we explored the power of the prayer “Help” and considered the ways it opens us up, often changing us even before we find an answer or feel a shift in perspective.

Last week we examined the role gratitude can play in our lives, lifting us and others around us up as we send joyful, sincere prayers of “Thanks” to God.

Today, we turn our attention to Lamott’s third great prayer, the prayer of “Wow.”

This heart conversation with God often begins without us consciously initiating.

And there’s not a hint of it being transactional.

This week’s prayer is the word that falls out of our mouths before we even realize it. It’s the great prayer that’s

“often offered with a gasp, a sharp intake of breath, when we can’t think of another way to capture the sight of shocking beauty or destruction, of a sudden unbidden insight or an unexpected flash of grace.” (p. 71)

Sudden.

Unexpected.

In times of beauty or destruction.

It can all prompt a “Wow.”

Just this past week many of us remembered where we were when we gasped as we watched planes fly into the Twin Towers, and then fall.

And then in the hours and days that followed as we began to see the tremendous loss...and also the tremendous courage and kindness from fellow human beings.

Wow.

“Wows come in all shapes and sizes, like people” Lamott instructs us. (p. 74)

“Wow!” can be proclaimed with a giant exclamation mark on the end...or uttered with a content sigh.

Enough said.

Simply, “Wow.”

Do you remember the first time “Wow” came tumbling out of your mouth?

Or maybe the most recent time?

What was happening?

Who was with you?

Was it the first time you held your new baby or grandbaby?
 Was it the moment you stepped up to the rim of the Grand Canyon to finally see its
 beauty sprawling below?
 Was “Wow” the only word you seemed to know when you were in a tough place and
 suddenly saw a shooting star winking at you across the sky?
 Or when you stumbled upon those flowers growing in an area previously devastated by
 a horrific wildfire?
 Did a recent monsoon storm leaving you proclaiming “Wow”?
 Did last night’s rain?

When has “Wow” fallen from your mouth, almost leaving you breathless?

Take a moment to remember.

Today’s psalmist proclaims that even silence can be praise to God.
 We don’t have to have the right words all the time--thanks be to God!
 We can be in awe in silence or with the simple prayer of “Wow.”
 No need to fill in the gaps.
 Sometimes there truly is nothing more to say than that.

Sometimes, Lamott says,

“you can manage, barely, this one syllable.

And then when we are stunned to the place beyond words, we’re finally starting
 to get somewhere. It is so much more comfortable to think that we know what it
 all means, what to expect and how it all hangs together. When we are stunned to
 the place beyond words, when an aspect of life takes us away from being able to
 chip away at something until it’s down to a manageable size and then to file it
 nicely away, when all we can say in response is ‘Wow,’ *that’s a prayer.*” (p. 73)

The crowd in Luke’s story were filled with awe after watching the miracle before them.
 They said to God, **“We’ve seen unimaginable things today.”**
 And they had.

They saw a man previously paralyzed get up and walk.

They witnessed unexpected grace and forgiveness.

They watched Jesus do something they could never do.

Wow.

When was the last time you saw something unimaginable?

What was happening?

Who was with you?

Did praise fall from your lips?

Take a moment to remember.

We might assume that we are all easily Wowed by the sights and celebrations around us.

That we're seeing, and responding to, things that are pretty incredible.

But are we?

Do we really pay attention enough to appreciate the awe-filled moments around us?

The times when God's up to something unimaginable to us?

Honestly, I think we, as individuals and the church, can get too busy to see them at times.

Life's demands get, well, quite demanding.

And we let them take control.

To-do lists wind up dominating our thoughts.

We move too quickly through things.

We let ourselves get distracted even when we sit with others.

We stop paying attention.

And before we know it, our hearts have hardened to feelings like awe, joy and wonder.

These days, we're not always so good about letting ourselves really *feel* things.

So can you remember?

Can you remember the last time your mind shut off and all your heart could say was "Wow"?

Lamott says that

"'Wow' has a reverberation--wowowowowow--and this pulse can soften us, like the electrical massage an acupuncturist directs to your spine or cramped muscle, which feels like a staple gun, but good.

The movement of grace from hard to soft, distracted to awake, mean to gentle again, is mysterious **but essential**. As a tiny little control freak, I want to understand the power of Wow so I can organize and control it, and up its rate and frequency. But I can't. **I can only feel it, and acknowledge that it is here once again. Wow.**" (p. 83-84)

Are our hearts soft enough to feel it?

Can our hearts say to God, "Wow"?

Are we brave enough to linger in that moment?

To let that feeling sink deep down? To possibly change us a bit?

We might not always be able to do that individually.

But that's why we have each other.
 It's why we're community.
 We can help each other see these moments.
 And feel the awe!
 And together we say to God, "Wow."
 Just, "Wow."

What around this place makes you pray "Wow"?
 Who in your life helps you to feel awe??

Help.
 Thanks.
 Wow.
 These three great prayers might just change us.
 And deepen our relationship with our Loving Creator.
 For our hearts offer them in times of distress, in moments of joy, and those times when
 we can say nothing more.
 These prayers are a letting go--of control, of the need to do things perfectly.
 Of the subtle pressure we might feel to pray the perfect prayer.
 But our heart conversations with God don't need to be perfect.
 They just need to be honest.

Can you learn to pray them?
 Help.
 Thanks.
 Wow.

Lamott says,

"You've heard it said that when all else fails, follow instructions. So we breathe,
 try to slow down and pay attention, try to love and help God's other children,
 and--hardest of all, at least to me--learn to love our depressing, hilarious, mostly
 decent selves. We get thirsty people water, read to the very young and old, and
 listen to the sad. We pick up litter and try to leave the world a slightly better
 place for our stay here. **Those are the basic instructions, to which I can only add:
 Amen.**" (p. 101)

Amen.
 Which means...
 "May it be so."

“And so it is.”

“Truly.”

For thousands of years prayers have ended with Amen.
And ours do, too.

Help!

Thanks!

Wow!

Amen.