

Acts 2: 42-47

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 30, 2023

The Rev. Katherine Bush

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” When was the last time awe came upon you? I’ll wait.

While you’re thinking, allow me to tell you a story about the other day. Usually, when I have a day off I can sum it up by saying, “I did some laundry and ran a few errands.” This accurately describes a recent day for me, but also there was more to it. A friend came by for an early visit, which in and of itself was lovely, but as she was leaving we heard a thud. After some puzzling around, I discovered that a small bird had flown into our kitchen window and was now lying on the brick patio, a wing at an impossible angle. I feared the worst, and I sat and watched. A few minutes later, she tucked the wing up against herself. I left the window for a while, and when I came back she was sitting up. At that point, I leashed the dogs who were due at the vet (errands still calling), and we carefully skirted her and left for about an hour and a half. When we returned home, I took the dogs around the long way, and then went and discovered that she was still there, but had moved up one step near our backdoor. Friends, another hour passed while she sat there, mostly with her head tucked under her wing - impossibly still. When I came back to the window at lunchtime, I took her picture, and a few moments later, she flew up and away. Almost three hours after she had crashed into our window.

This is not a healing. I mean, it is, but hardly miraculous, even if it did capture my attention for the better part of a day. Have you come up with a moment when you were in awe? I hope so but indulge me a little bit longer.

That same day, in the afternoon, I needed to get out of the house for a bit (avoiding the aforementioned laundry), and I chose an errand that I knew would also be delightful. I’ve been meaning to go see the Harmonia Rosales exhibit at the Brooks, and it counted as an errand or work-ish because I needed to do it before we welcome Zoe Kahr, the executive director of the art museum, to our Great Hall class next Sunday. As I said, kind of an errand but also potentially lovely. And indeed, there isn’t a good way for me to impress upon you what it was like to see the work created by this artist: gorgeous black bodies, Biblical and African stories intertwined, and flowers, and gold-leaf, and haloes. It’s wonderful, a wonder.

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” It’s possible, even easy, to read the stories from the Bible and specifically from the Acts of the Apostles, and say “Well, things like that don’t happen anymore.” Or maybe even to say, “Things like that never happened, people were exaggerating or confused.” “Things like that” being wonders and signs like healings and mass conversions. And some things even more amazing: *selling their possessions and distributing to all, as any had need*. What about *having the goodwill of all the people*? In a toxic landscape that can sound pretty farfetched.

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.” However you think about the early days of the early church if you do at all, and however you consider the stories of healing and of courageous proclamation and of building a network of bonds that were beautiful and supportive and practical, however all of that sifts in your imagination, consider that they were open to awe. Everyone experienced awe, delight, wonderment.

Just this last Wednesday, not a day off - a day filled with classes and conversations, twice awe emerged and showed its beautiful face. In a conversation about Isaiah’s description

of the suffering servant, we mused together over how this prophetic vision seemed so completely manifested in Jesus and then how the qualities of sacrifice and bravery and love and wisdom do keep showing up generation after generation in the large and small acts of ordinary people. And suddenly a discussion that had been marked by despair at the world around us took on a slightly different light, a little bit of hope sparked. Later in the evening, a different group read a few poems by Mary Oliver about attention as prayer, and we considered the economy of attention - what we pay attention to and what it costs us. We called to mind ordinary, beautiful moments from a typical Wednesday and those moments bloomed into expressions of love and joy and yes, awe.

And in so many other ways, we are reminded that awe didn't close up shop two thousand years ago, rather it's about our staying open with a wide-reaching understanding of what wonders and signs are still being done. The first followers of Jesus had years of listening to his heart-opening stories, his way of turning the world upside down not for the sake of chaos but for the sake of showing that things could be different. They watched him touch people and, yes, heal people of illness and of callous indifference. They felt awe come upon them. And they practiced being in awe - a mix of amazement and surprise with a dash of bewilderment at the extraordinary possibility this world contained and contains. They were primed in a way, and so they continued to experience awe even after he was gone.

"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles." When was the last time awe came upon you? Have you seen the Grand Canyon? The pictures from the James Webb telescope? Have you been moved by collective voices in song or voices in protest? Have you seen a story that you thought was over keep unfolding? Have you known someone to rise from the dead?

Awe is a feeling that, as scripture proposes, comes upon us. When our notions of scale are thrown into sharp relief - how small we are in the cosmos is one way, and how powerful we can be when we stand up or make something beautiful is another way. We can be knocked for a loop and surprised by awe. And awe is also a practice, we can look for it sit and watch for it outside the kitchen window; prime ourselves to pay attention to our lives with a notion that elegance and grace do abound. That's some of what we do here when we come to church: practice awe. Sure, we're often stumbling and clumsy, but we are also reminded of the astonishing capabilities that lie within us, the scale of the story that we are part of, and the height and depth and breadth of God's love. Practicing awe and thinking about attention one day helped me to see my day off with an injured bird and some art as filled with wonders and signs. I learned to do that here. We learn that together in this place.

"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.... Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people." Awe comes and we are changed. And when we are changed and change our way of being and seeing the world, awe comes upon us all over again on any ordinary day.