

Awe

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

October 8, 2017

Alleluia.

You sing it quietly and confidently. You sing it loudly and joyfully. You sing it urgently. You sing it plaintively. You sing it gratefully.

You sing it, you say it -- "alleluia" -- in so many different ways. There is no one right way to say it. There is no one right time to say it. Our lives are filled with alleluias. We must stand in awe of God.

Our lives are filled with alleluias. Every time I hear the Randall Thompson "Alleluia," every time I sing it, I am filled with awe. Oh, my!

And every time I emerge from the trees onto the crest of Blue Hill, I am filled with awe as I look out over land and water, deep green trees and bright blue waters, hills and bays and shoreline and islands and ocean, vast ocean stretching endlessly to the horizon. Oh, my!

I was filled with awe on the afternoon of August 18, 1978, on the shores of Lake Huron when I caught my first glimpse of a young woman in a veil and long white dress walking up the aisle of the meetinghouse toward me on the arm of her father. Oh, my!

And I am filled with awe when I look at the cross and consider Jesus, consider the choice Jesus made, the choice this human being -- this one like me and like you! -- the choice he made to follow the path of obedience to God's will all the way, all the way to death. Out of love for us. Out of love for me. Out of love for you. Oh, my!

What do these experiences have in common: being filled with awe by a piece of music, being filled with awe by a particular outlook, being filled with awe by a particular person, being filled with awe by Jesus? What is awe?

Awe is being moved, being enthralled, by something or someone outside yourself, being utterly engulfed, overrun, overwhelmed by the beauty, by the mystery. For a moment, or for a long continuum of moments, what you hear, what you see, what you feel entirely consumes you, so much that you lose consciousness of other cares and worries, other troubles or desires. You forget yourself.

And yet, you are there. It is your experience. You are so filled with awe that you are not aware of yourself, and yet the awe itself comes from the sense of being connected, intimately connected to the one, to the thing, that fills you with awe. What you see or hear or feel is part of you, or, rather, you are part of it. It belongs to you, or, rather, you belong to it. You belong to that song. You belong to that place. You belong to that person. You belong to Jesus.

And you always will. Because awe changes you, forever. You can't un-ring the bell. You can't un-hear the song, un-see the view, un-feel the love, un-know Jesus. Forever, you will see the world differently, because of awe. Forever, your world will be different, because of awe. Forever, you will be changed, because of awe.

You wouldn't un-ring the bell even if you could, because without that experience, you wouldn't be who you are, you wouldn't be you. What would it be like? What would it be like to live your life entirely without awe?

No matter how much you dream, how much useless work you do, or how much you talk, you must still stand in awe of God.

In awe of God. Engulfed, overrun, overwhelmed by God's beauty, by God's mystery. So consumed by the awareness of God's presence that your awareness of who you are and what you want and even what you need disappears. And yet it is you aware of God, and you know in that moment, and forever after, you are more you than you have ever been before.

And standing in awe of God leaves you changed.

You stop talking, or, at least, talking so much. No more jibber-jabbering. No more foolish opinionating. No more talking just to hear yourself talk. Standing in awe of God, what can you say? What would you want to say? Just looking, just listening, just feeling, just being is enough. It's all you can handle.

And you stop working, or, at least, you stop working as if your life depended on it, because it doesn't. You work not by necessity or under obligation, not for what the work can gain you, but with happiness and with gratitude, because working itself is a gift.

And you stop dreaming: dreaming about being somewhere else, dreaming about being someone else, dreaming about having a different life. Because being where you are, standing in awe of God, is better by far than any dream. Oh, my!

The best thing we can do is eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for during the short life that God has given us ... If God gives us wealth and property and lets us enjoy them, we should be grateful and enjoy what we have worked for. It is a gift from God.

Alleluia!