

**The Divine Gift of Wonder**  
**Mark 10:13-16; Psalm 8**  
**World Communion Sunday**

**Psalm 8**

<sup>1</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign,  
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
    You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>2</sup>Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
    you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
    to silence the enemy and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup>When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
    the moon and the stars that you have established;

<sup>4</sup>what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
    mortals that you care for them?

<sup>5</sup>Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
    and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup>You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
    you have put all things under their feet,

<sup>7</sup>all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,  
<sup>8</sup>the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
    whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup>O Lord, our Sovereign,  
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**Mark 10:13-16**

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

**The Sermon**

Among the lines in Ina Hughs' now legendary prayer-poem called A Prayer for Children are these:

“We pray for children  
 who bring us fistful of dandelions and sing off-key,  
 who have goldfish funerals, build card-table forts,  
 who slurp their cereal on purpose,  
 who get gum in their hair, put sugar in their milk,  
 who spit toothpaste all over the sink,  
 who hug us for no reason, who bless us each night.

“And we pray for those  
 who never get dessert,  
 who watch their parents watch them die,  
 who have no safe blanket to drag behind,  
 who can't find any bread to steal,  
 who don't have any rooms to clean up,  
 whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,  
 whose monsters are real. [...]

“We pray for children  
 who want to be carried,  
 and for those who must.  
 For those we never give up on,  
 and for those who don't have a chance.  
 For those we smother,  
 and for those who will grab the hand of anybody  
 kind enough to offer.”<sup>i</sup>

Children need and are entitled to—*all* children are entitled to—a life of freedom from the fears and dreads of adulthood in so many parts of the world.

All children need and are entitled to the sense of security that comes from being in a loving, caring environment.

They need and deserve that stability and nurturing in order to be able to do one of the things they do best—better than anyone else on the planet: to wonder.

I once saw a toddler on the floor in a room inside that toddler's home, and she was looking at something, almost contemplatively, with great concentration but no apparent sense of urgency. She had what seemed like a laser focus, so I followed her sight line and realized she was looking at a door hinge—about as mundane a thing as you can think of.

And I thought, “I used to be able to wonder like that.” To look deeply at new sights in a world of daily discovery.

A pine cone,  
a phone jack,  
a dandelion,  
the illustration on a book cover,  
the thousand details of my grandfather's hand  
    resting on the table in front of him,  
the pattern in a carpet,  
the steam rising from somebody's coffee cup.

I could get lost in absorbing all the details, with no agenda other than to be sitting there in curious contemplation.

Behind everything is wonder. Who manufactured that wall socket? Who was the trucker who transported it? Who stocked it in the store; who installed it in the house? What kind of life did they have? What did they dream about when they were little?

Who planted the seed that grew into that tomato plant? What mysteries have they contemplated in the small hours of the night? What was God

thinking when God called that person into being? And how is it that whoever that person is and I have come to share at least a little bit of time existing in this universe, on this planet, tied together only by our common humanity, and the unpredictable off-chance that led me to happen to be looking at this tomato plant right now.

But nowadays I usually forget to wonder, and then I don't take time for awe, and then I miss out on joy.

But every once in a while, along with our spiritual ancestors in the Palestinian wilderness, I look up at the night sky.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars that you have established;  
 what are we, that you are mindful of us?  
 what am I, that you who beyond infinity care about me?

In the early evening of October 9, 1992, an 18-year-old in Peekskill, New York named Michelle Knapp heard a loud crash out in the garage.<sup>ii</sup> She went to check it out and found that the trunk of her 1980 Chevy Malibu was bashed in, and the right rear tail light was obliterated, and so was a very small piece of the garage roof.

Moments earlier, fans out watching Friday night football games all over the northeastern United States<sup>iii</sup> had seen the bright, shining light of a falling meteorite, which completed its epic, four-and-a-half-billion-year, multi-multi-million-mile journey in outer space by tearing through the trunk of the 1980 Chevy Malibu in Michelle Knapp's garage.

A tangible, physical item whose interplanetary journey staggers the mind, an element from the inconceivable vastness of the cosmic reality of which we spend most of our lives only vaguely aware,

had made its entrance into our regular, mundane, daily world,

and reminded us that we are part of something almost as infinite as the God who created it.

And that astonishing Creator has a personal interest in how your day is going today, and cares about you to the point of a willingness to come into this world and die in order that you might learn to live.

The poet Denise Levertov wrote,

Days pass when I forget the mystery.  
 Problems insoluble and problems offering  
 their own ignored solutions  
 jostle for my attention, they crowd its antechamber  
 along with a host of diversions, my courtiers, wearing  
 their colored clothes; caps and bells.

And then  
 once more the quiet mystery  
 is present to me, the throng's clamor  
 recedes: the mystery  
 that there is anything, anything at all,  
 let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,  
 rather than void: and that, O Lord,  
 Creator, Hallowed one, You still,  
 hour by hour sustain it.<sup>iv</sup>

How is this possible? How am I here?

And how does that connect me  
 to all my neighbors, all my siblings—  
 all the people that Jesus died to save  
 and lives to set free—  
 which is to say, everyone?

The cross is the center of all that is.

That center is not locked in a European abbey or sequestered out in a North African desert, and it's not impossibly far away from us, out in space somewhere.

It's not owned by liberals or conservatives;  
it's not the sole property of academics or Bible thumpers.

It is universally available and freely given.

And all who come to it with the wonder of a child will find a friend, a teacher, a Creator who will say,

“It is to children just like you that my kingdom belongs.”

The siblinghood of all the different peoples of the world is more than an urgently needed understanding in a world that at the moment seems hell bent on tearing itself apart and reverting to a prehistorically ignorant, moronically self-indulgent, pathetically xenophobic idea of what it means to share this earth and this life with others.

The siblinghood of all the peoples of the world *in Christ* is a cosmic truth, a divine wonder, an astonishment of beauty.

When Carl Sagan unveiled the first and, so far, last photograph ever taken of all nine planets in the solar system, sent from the Voyager spacecraft as it sailed into the unknown, infinite beyond, he pointed to a speck most people couldn't even see. The first two scientists who looked at the photograph had each thought it was a tiny speck of dust.

Standing in front of a TV monitor in the NASA press room, Carl Sagan said, “you can see it is in fact less than a pixel. And this is where we live. On a blue dot... On that blue dot, that's where everyone you know, and everyone you ever heard of, and every human being who ever lived, lived

out their lives. I think this perspective underscores our responsibility to preserve and cherish that blue dot, the only home we have.”<sup>v</sup>

The wonder of a child is a cosmic matter.

But what we do with a faith full of wonder has consequences that are earthy and gritty and physical and urgent.

Love one another just as I have loved you, said Jesus.

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,  
and love your neighbor as yourself.

John Wesley’s application of that was:

Do all the good you can,  
by all the means you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.<sup>vi</sup>

O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Keith Grogg  
Montreat Presbyterian Church  
Montreat, NC  
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<sup>i</sup> Ina Hughs, “A Prayer for Children,” in Hughs, *A Prayer for Children* (New York: Fireside, 1997), XIV-XV. This prayer-poem is widely circulated, practically always inaccurately. You would think there must have been a contest for people to try to recite it from memory, and all contestants had posted their well-meaning but garbled attempts online. Some even appear to have adapted it, trying to add a soft glow for worship or a personal touch for their own prayers, and inevitably butchering it. Ina’s original is in print, is easy to find, and should be better respected.

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If you come across it online and any line in it seems trite or contrived, be immediately suspicious.

<sup>ii</sup> Cody Cassidy and Paul Doherty, *And Then You're Dead* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 27.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/top-five-strangest-meteorites-you-can-buy/>

<sup>iv</sup> Denise Levertov, "Primary Wonder," in Levertov, *Sands of the Well* (New Directions Publishing, 1996)

<sup>v</sup> This moment can be seen in the documentary *The Farthest* (2017)

<sup>vi</sup> Alas this cannot be presented as a direct quote as it comes to me online and unsourced, so I can only presume it has been given the same treatment as Ina's poem.