

On this third Sunday of Easter, we hear how Jesus, once again, came and stood in the midst of his disciples. At first they were troubled, thinking they were seeing a ghost – he showed them his hands and his side – and then they became “incredulous with joy and were amazed.”

Instead of just reading through that phrase as I have done countless times before -- my dictionary came out this time. *Incredulous with joy* – means that even if they were still skeptical, or disbelieving, which is what incredulous means -- they, the disciples, experienced a feeling of high pleasure, or delight; happiness or gladness.

But the real word I want to dwell on today – is the word *amazed or amazement*: which means the disciples were affected, overcome, overwhelmed --- with surprise or great wonder. And I simply want to pose the question: when was the last time you were AMAZED at anything? I think, perhaps, amazement is a lost art in our technological age – which is a sad thing for Christians – because amazement, awe or wonder – can be a very holy and forceful thing: that is why it is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – which will be called down upon our young people at Confirmation this afternoon [one which was called down upon Shey-ann and Cindy at the Easter Vigil].

According to journalist, Bill Moyers, amazement has the power to make people moral. . . as explained in his book, *A World of Ideas*. There Myers describes being present for the launch of Apollo 17.

For the younger ones present today – those were the rockets we used to send up into space – many of them destined for the moon -- with three men aboard – no women astronauts at this point – because we are going all the way back to the last century – 1975! When even I was just learning to drive at the ripe old age of 16. . .

I digress. . . For Moyers describes the rocket rising off the launching pad amid brilliant flames and deafening thunder.

He tells how a sense of wonder fills everyone as they watch the mighty ship go up and up and up. They gaze in amazement as the first stage ignites a beautiful blue flame. Moyer writes, the rocket “becomes like a star, but we realize there are humans on it.” As the ship soars out of sight, a hush falls over the crowd.

Later, as the people begin to leave, Moyer describes the effect that the launch has had on them: “People just get up quietly, helping each other up. They’re kind. They open doors. They look at one another, speaking quietly and interestedly.

These were suddenly moral people, who cared about one another – because the sense of wonder, the experience of wonder, had made them moral.”

The lives of the disciples and those in the early church *had been touched* by the power of the resurrection. Their hearts had been changed. And they witnessed to the power of that change by what they said and did – their lives gave witness to the risen Lord. And that change was brought about, in part, because of the amazement they experienced at seeing the Lord. . .

Sunday after Sunday, throughout the Easter season, through our reading of Scripture – we will be given a way, a challenge, a characteristic of how we can give witness, give testimony, give evidence of our belief in the risen Lord in our lives. Last week’s word was MERCY: we have to become merciful just as our heavenly Father is merciful.

This week’s word is: AMAZEMENT. If you and I want to be on fire with our witness to the risen lord – then we have to get in touch with -- and nurture our sense of amazement – which one of my old seminary professors – meaning I had him many years ago, not that he was elderly –

describes as “a total attitude of life that recognizes a marvelous dimension to all existence, delights in it, and is open to its re-creative power.” [Matthias Newman, OSB]

I love that phrase “a marvelous dimension to all existence.” That means anything possesses the potential to dazzle us with its re-creative power: a tulip bobbing in the wind, an owl hooting, the scent of newly cut grass, the kindness of a stranger, the embrace of a friend. For all existence has the power to put us in touch with our incredibly marvelous, amazingly wonderful – God.

Writer David James Duncan says: “Wonder may be the feel of truth touching our very skin.” Perhaps, then, amazement is the feel of truth touching our very heart. . . . As Christians we need to get in touch with – and nurture our sense of amazement.

I asked some friends this week of how they do this in their lives. And these were some of their responses:

Go on a picnic.

Fly a kite.

Go for a walk – with nothing in your ears – like an ipod – and just listen to the sounds around you.

Plant a garden.

Read the first two chapters of Genesis – and know that when God made you – God saw you not just as good --- but very good.

Intentionally spend time with a child – and play.

Ask an older person to tell you stories of their childhood.

Read poetry.

Laugh out loud – at anything!

Take a drive – with no destination in mind – just drive – preferably with the windows down and the wind blowing your hair. . . .

Watch a sunset or a sunrise. . . . For as W. Phillip Keller writes of this: “It must be hard for skeptics, atheists, and agnostics to view sunrises and sunsets. The splendor of their glory, the beauty of their colors, the intensity of their inspiration that comes from God’s loving heart –are to the unbeliever nothing more than mere chemical and physical responses to external stimuli. No wonder their world is so bleak, their despair so deep, their future so forlorn. My reaction is: how does God come up with all those colors?”

Spend some time down on the floor – at their level, with a dog or cat—and accept a generous lick on the cheek. . . .

Stay in the moment – quit reliving yesterday and stop worrying about tomorrow.

Don’t take things for-granted – develop a sense of gratitude.

The book club I am in -- is currently reading The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World, at my suggestion.

The other night I came across this quote which resonates with my rural upbringing and speaks to this sense of amazement: “All children should have a creek wandering through their childhood.”

“When Jesus showed them his hands and his side – they became incredulous with joy and were amazed.”

If you and I want to be on fire with our witness to the risen lord – then we have to get in touch with -- and nurture our sense of amazement – a total attitude of life that recognizes a marvelous dimension to all existence, delights in it, and is open to its re-creative power. Go forth this week – and be amazed at something!

