Camp and Conference Ministry Emphasis Sunday

Worship Service

Awe and Wonder

Camp and Conference Ministry has so many meanings and opportunities:

* to be in God’s creation
* to retreat from the busyness of the world
* to develop relationships full of diversity and significance
* for restoration and renewal so that being a faithful disciple at work, home, school and community can continue
* for leadership
* for self-development
* for connectionalism, covenant and communion all centered around Christ Jesus

Perhaps a meaning that envelopes all of these opportunities of how camp and conference ministry can be significant is *awe and wonder*. When someone comes to camp or conference, the awe and wonder for our triune God is so apparent:

* God’s sovereignty in all of creation,
* Christ’s sacrificing gift of grace and reconciliation
* the power of the Holy Spirit to be transforming and empowering

This amazement is real and wonderfully alive during a camp and conference experience. Awe and wonder have been attributed by some to be a significant contributing factor to the development of a personal spirituality. In fact, there may even be a relationship between the presence of wonder in our lives and our own personal spirituality.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Minute for Mission** Prior to Camp and Conference Sunday identify those in your congregation (or other local congregations) who have experienced the awe and wonder of our triune God at a camp and conference center. This could be an elementary, middle school or senior high camper(s), a summer camp staff member, permanent staff member, retreat attender or local board member (You could contact your nearest PCUSA camp and ask them for a list of names and their contact information. Visit pccca.net for listing of Presbyterian affiliated camps and conference centers.) Invite one or more of these children of God to share briefly how their experience at camp shaped them and helped them grow spiritually, physically and emotionally-how experiencing the awe and wonder of God in creation and community changed them.

**Call to Worship (Psalm 68:34, 35)**

**Leader: Sing to God, O kingdom of the earth**

People: Sing praises to the Lord.

**Leader: Proclaim the power of God,**

People: whose majesty is over Israel

**Leader: You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary;** **the God of Israel gives power and strength to God’s people**

People: Praise be to God!.

**All: Let us now worship God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer!**

**Hymn of Praise** A praise hymn that references God’s creation would be fitting. A suggestion includes, “How Great Thou Art”

**Prayer of Confession**

**Almighty and wonderful God, we come before you filled with sorrow for our actions and inactions. We have neglected to look at your creation and see your work of beauty and wonder. We look and see only a creation that can serve us without showing respect and love for you and all that you have done with and through this creation. We forget how you call us to be in covenant with you and in breaking that covenant, we break promises with all that you have created- relatives, neighbors, and the earth-life itself. Please forgive us for all of our sins. As you know us and search us Lord you know what they are. Even if they are just groans in our heart, hear them Lord and forgive us. Please instill in each of us, a new awe and wonder for you. Please provide us with the awe and wonder of grace and healing through Christ Jesus. Please empower us with the awe and wonder of the Holy Spirit to go out into the world, seeking justice, loving and practicing mercy and walking humbly with you oh God. …(silent prayer)…Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, hear the really Good News. Through the power and love shown by Christ on the cross, we are forgiven. We are each a new creation, filled with awe and wonder and love to share with the world. Let us be at peace as we know that we are forgiven.

Because we are each forgiven, let us each extend Christ’s peace to out neighbor, sharing our awe and wonder for our triune God. The peace of Christ be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

 **Prayer for Illumination**

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by your Word, O Christ. As we open your Word, help us to hear words that change us, transform us and empower us to serve You and only You. Silence in us any voice but your own so that we may grow closer to you. Send the Holy Spirit to empower us to love as you loved us. Amen.

**Scripture Readings Genesis 15: 1-6**

 **Mark 6:45-52**

**Proclamation of the Word**

Fourth of July fireworks, a beautiful bride, a rainbow, the Hallelujah chorus. All of these sights and sounds prompt the response of Oo!! and Ah!!! These experiences provoke the sense of joyful awe or amazement or wonder. Ordinary events of everyday life can particularly elicit these feelings of awe and wonder in children. Curiosity is piqued about the novel and unexpected. This powerful phenomenon promotes the development of imagination, memory making and spiritual growth. In such a time of technology in which we live, no matter our age all of us need some awe and wonder in our lives. We think that as humans we are dominant and in control. This awe and wonder can help us to realize the presence of God in our lives. With awe and wonder there is the comprehension that there is God that is bigger than us, all sovereign, all knowing, full of grace and love that is the only source of power in our lives. With these realizations, we may even desire a deeper, fuller relationship with our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Bible is full of stories of awe and wonder. Often times those stories of awe and wonder happen in the outdoors. God’s creation is an amazing place and space where wonder and awe just happen naturally.

Imagine in the Old Testament passage the awe and wonder that Abraham experiences:

* Abraham is an old man without any children. Children were a blessing that carried on the family name and participated in the family’s business, necessary to help support the family’s daily needs. Not having children was dishonoring. Imagine being told by God that children will come to a barren wife. Children whose number will be more than the stars.
* Having children lay on their backs during evening worship, looking at the stars, seeing how many stars there are, how far away yet how bright helps the child realize how bountiful are God’s blessings. How huge God is to create all those stars. How much love God had for Abraham to bless him with not only the view of the stars but to give him so many children that outnumbered those stars.
* When was the last time you looked up at the stars in awe and wonder and thanked God for all of God’s blessings in your life? It is a life changing experience.

Imagine in the New Testament passage the awe and wonder that the disciples experience:

* Stranded out on the middle of the lake with the wind blowing hard can be a frighten experience. Working the oars, rowing and rowing and not getting anywhere is scary.
* Imagine your fright intensifying as a man walks across the water, coming toward you. It’s Jesus, actually walking on the water, coming closer and closer, turning toward the disciples, getting in the boat with the disciples, telling them not to be fearful and as he got into the boat, the winds calmed. They disciples were amazed, filled with awe, wondering how could this be. The Scripture tells us they didn’t get it when Jesus had just feed the 5,000 men plus the additional women and children with the 5 loaves and 2 fish. Imagine and wonder just how amazed and awed they were then to see Jesus walking on water. They had to get it now. Their awe and wonder led to their understanding of just who Jesus was, Son of God!
* Campers and retreaters can be amazed when they are able to float a canoe on the creek or lake or even swim in the pool. But a man actually walking on the water! Imagining how much Jesus cared about the disciples to walk on the water, climb in the boat and calm the water is unbelievable. Imagining in awe and wonder stretches our faith, helps us to realize how immense God’s love is for us. Do you really realize how deep God’s love is for each of us?

 John Calvin is certainly right when he writes in the Institutes that the Lord rendered many things attractive to us. It is through this rendering that we experience awe and wonder and that we can know of God and feel God’s presence with us. It is by experiencing the light of the morning sunshine breaking through the darkness of night that we have a general revelation of God. It is by hearing, feeling, seeing the water flow over the rock in the creek that we can sense the presence of God. It is by seeing the deer run through the field that we feel God with us. It is by watching the sun set with all of the colors of the rainbow unfolding that we can have that “aha” moment that God is present with us and is a personal God for us in all of God’s goodness. It is through experiencing God’s creation that we can know of God and draw closer to God.

 Life can be overwhelming. Obligations and responsibilities to work, to school, to church can come tumbling down upon us. We too can feel like we are out in the middle of the lake, late at night-paddling, paddling, paddling and not getting anywhere. Taking the time to wonder and to stop and look for Jesus can provide true healing for our soul. Being in awe about all that God has done for us provides a healing balm that draws us closer to Christ. Looking up and seeing an immense amount of stars in amazement and wonderment can lift away that sense of feeling overwhelmed. Camp and conference ministry can provide that opportunity to get away to mountaintop, just as Jesus did, and soak in God’s creation and wonder. And then just as Jesus and the disciples continued their ministry of healing and teaching when they landed and anchored at Gennesaret, so we can come home to our own ministry at work, at home, at school and in the community and be more vibrant than when we left.

 *Pictures often say so much more than words. If your facility allows you could conclude by showing pictures of children at camp and God’s creation at your local camp and conference site and give the congregation time to stop and wonder.*

{Reference #1: Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder from Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006)

Reference #2: Pam Harris and Garrie Stevens, “Then Sings My Soul: Wonder as Prelude to Worship” Run River Enterprises}

**Affirmation of Faith (Excerpts from the *Brief Statement of Faith*)**

We trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve. We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God’s image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator, ignoring God’s commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God’s condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

**Hymn Suggestion:** Walk by Faith (#3903041-CCLI)

**Presentation of Tithes and Offerings** (part of the offering might be designated to your local camp and conference center)

**Offertory**

**Doxology**

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Pastoral Prayer and Prayer of Thanksgiving**

After the pastoral prayer conducted in “typical fashion”, conclude with the Popcorn Prayers of the People. Utilizing Psalms 146-150, the congregation can “pop up” phrases or verses of thanksgiving, awe and wonder for all of God’s blessings.

**Hymn Suggestion:** God of Wonders (#3118757 CCLI)

**Charge and Benediction**

Depart now in peace, for your eyes have seen the salvation which God has prepared for all people. Grow in strength, wisdom and wonder bringing forth a harvest of righteousness and praise.

May God smile upon you and make you strong and wise.

May Christ Jesus and his humble birth fill you with awe.

And may the Holy Spirit open your eyes to the presence of God’s Messiah**.**

**Adapted from Nathan Nettleton, www.laughingbird.net, ©2002**

Following the service offer a time of fellowship and invite those who shared their stories for the proclamation to be available to talk with worshippers. Set up tables with pictures from camp and retreats. Invite member to bring photos to share. Put together a slide show and let it run throughout the fellowship time. Set up a table with lists of the PCUSA Camp and Conference centers and invite people to take home the list and include them in their prayers. A list of member camps of the PCCCA can be found here <http://www.pccca.net/directory_of_sites.php?ViewRegion=all>

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1. Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder from Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)