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Celebrating His Greatness

“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the people in his truth.” (Psalm 96:10-13)

Microscopes and telescopes caught my interest as I was growing up. What is not to love for a junior high kid looking through the lens of a microscope and seeing all types of crawling and creepy things? It was as if I was looking at another world within a world. As for the telescope, I stood in wonder looking through it at the vastness of the universe. I suspect that in seventh grade the word “vastness” was not in my vocabulary. “Huge” and “gigundo” are words that better describe my thinking at that time.

Whatever the words, the lens of the microscope and the telescope gave witness to God. Microbes and stars shouted out with His praise:

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy” (Psalm 96: 11-12).

It is a pretty amazing universe when you think about, where rocks can talk and trees sing and clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). Just the picture of that in my mind makes me laugh. I especially like the way Psalm 96:11-12 reads in the translation from The Message:

*“Let’s hear it from Sky,
With Earth joining in,
And a huge round of applause from Sea.
Let Wilderness turn cartwheels,*

*Animals, come dance,
Put every tree of the forest in the choir.”*

Look with me through the lens of a telescope for a moment and behold the wonder of His glory and majesty. If you could travel at the speed of light (186,273 miles per second or 5,874,305,328,000 miles per year—a light year), then you could travel:

- around the Earth at the leisurely pace of seven times in one second.
- to the moon in 1 1/3 seconds.
- from the sun to Earth in 8 1/3 minutes.
- from the sun to Pluto in 5 1/2 hours.
- from the sun to the next star after Pluto in 4 1/3 years.

Gigundo! One more: At the speed of light, you could travel from Earth to the center of the Milky Way in 33,000 years. It is estimated that the Milky Way contains about 100,000,000 stars. It would take you more than 3,000 years to count them at the rate of one per second! That is just our galaxy. There are thousands of others.

“For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary” (Psalm 96:4-6).

Now look with me through the lens of a microscope and behold the wonder of His glory and majesty on a smaller but no less grand scale:

- Within the human body, one square inch of skin contains four yards of nerve fibers, 1,300 nerve cells, 100 sweat glands, three million cells and three yards of blood vessels.
- The human eye can distinguish up to one million color surfaces, taking in more information than the world's largest telescope.
- We have over 600 muscles; it takes 10 muscles to smile and 12 to frown. (So smile—it is easier.)
- We make one liter of saliva a day. (This statistic is for the seventh graders reading this who want to gross out their friends.)
- Every person has a unique tongue print.
- In one square inch of our hand we have nine feet of blood vessels, 600 pain sensors, 9,000 nerve endings, 36 heat sensors and 75 pressure sensors.
- The average scalp has 100,000 hairs. Redheads have 80,000 and blondes have the most at 120,000!
- It is normal to lose 100 hairs per day from the scalp. (I think I am above that average.)

Had enough? Oh well, two more: If it were possible to take from an average human body all of its arteries, veins and capillaries and join them end to end, they would stretch over 60,000 miles (the equivalent of two and a half times around the earth). Finally, the small air sacs in your lungs (if you were to cut and lay them flat), could cover half of a tennis court!

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From

the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet all flocks and herds, and the beast of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth” (Psalm 8).

The earth and the universe celebrate the majesty and glory of God. Talking rocks and clapping and singing trees. He is a God that just makes you stand back and smile and stand in awe. The awe of God is different than the fear of God. Fear makes us shrink back while awe draws us in. The awe of God is “to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in common and the simple, to feel in the rush of the passing, the stillness of the eternal” (Heschel, p. 75).

The lens of the microscope and the telescope reveal the glory and wonder of God in fascinating ways. However, they fall woefully short of revealing the most essential things about God. They cannot show me those things that matter eternally. I need a third lens through which I can see God—a lens that reveals to me what the microscope and telescope cannot: His holiness and grace. This is the lens of His Word. Take time to read Psalm 19:1-6. These verses refer to the lens of His creation. Read further, however, and see Him through the lens of His Word:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving

joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:7-14).

The words of that Psalm remind us that the Word of God reveals His law that warns us and convicts us. The same Word reveals His love that forgives us and allows us to call on Jesus as our Redeemer.

It is the Word of God, as Luther says, that is the very “cradle of Christ.” Each page is a lens through which I see Christ and the unfolding plan and wisdom of God.

“No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,’ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2: 7-10).

The Word of God alone enables me to answer the question that God asked to Adam and Eve in the Garden: “Where are you?” Ever since then, people have been trying to respond and answer that question. Scripture alone is able to give us the answer. It is one that can only be found at the foot of the Cross.

As the Lord is revealed through the lens of His Word, we are then invited to magnify that view through one more lens—the lens of worship.

God-pleasing worship is about Him. When Mary was told that she was pregnant with the Christ, she worshipped. Her first words were, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” What a great definition for worship: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Helping me to get a handle on this, I find these words helpful from the King James Version of the Bible:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing . . . Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:12-13).

“As we worship in this manner, giving careful attention to the details of God’s actions and to his ‘worthiness,’ the good we adore enters our minds and hearts to increase our faith and strengthen us to be as he is” (Willard, p. 178).

Worship focuses on Him. Along with this, He even provides me with the words to offer Him, the water that cleanses, and the bread and wine that nourish me. He gives me the Spirit to enlighten me as to His goodness. It is truly all about Him. He serves me before I can serve Him.

For me, the joy of worship is that it gives me the opportunity to celebrate His goodness and faithfulness with other believers. I hear someone once in a while say, “I can worship God at home or in the woods.” I suppose they are right, but why would you want to, in place of celebrating it with other believers? The questions I want to ask someone who says that are, “Would you want to celebrate

your birthday alone?” “Would you want to celebrate a Super Bowl win alone?” It is only natural that at times of celebration we seek to share that joy. This, to me, is the beauty of congregational worship. It adds to our joy while, at the same time, uniting us as one Body. God asked Israel in the Old Testament to gather together three times a year to celebrate His goodness. Those were festival holidays. Those moments gave them joy and strength and unity.

The Christian Church of the twenty-first century needs this no less. One of our most enticing mission responses that we can offer the world is the witness of believers in the celebration of worship.

On a clear night, look up at the stars and try to count them. Stand in awe of Him. Look at your eye in the mirror. Your retina is thinner than paper, yet its tiny surface contains 137 million light-sensitive cells. Blink your eyes in wonder. Then look into His Word and see Him on the Cross. He is there for you. See the empty Tomb. You need not fear the grave any longer. Then, with other believers, let your soul magnify Him in worship.

Prayer: I stand in awe of all that you have created. The universe declares your glory. Even greater, though, I stand at the foot of the Cross in awe and wonder of your mercy and love for me. All praise be to you, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Challenge: Make a list of the top ten things you see today that demonstrate the wonder and majesty of God. Give God thanks for each of these and, above all others, express to Him what the Cross means to you.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

From the Book of Concord: “The chief articles of our Christian faith constrain and compel us to maintain this distinction. First, in the article of creation, Scripture testifies not only that God created human nature before the fall but also that even after the fall it remains the creature and work of God (Deut. 32[:6]; Isa. 45[:11]; 54[:5]; 64[:8]; Acts 17[:25, 26]; Rev. 4[:11]).

“‘Your hands,’ Job said, ‘fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit’ (Job 10[:8–12]).

“‘I praise you,’ says David, ‘for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed’ (Ps. 139[:14–16]),

In Ecclesiastes 12[:7] it is written, ‘The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.’

“These verses testify clearly that even after the fall God is the creator of human beings and fashions the human body and soul. Therefore, the corrupted human being cannot be sin itself, without any distinction between the two. Otherwise, God would be a creator of sin. This is also confessed in our Small Catechism, in the explanation of the first article, where it is written, ‘I

believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties.’ Likewise, it is written in the Large Catechism [‘Creed,’ 13], ‘I hold and believe that I am God’s creature; that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding,’ etc. It is of course true that this creature and handiwork of God is tragically corrupted by sin, since the *massa* [lump] from which God forms and makes the human being is corrupted and perverted in Adam and is bequeathed to us.

“Here upright Christian hearts should remember the indescribable goodness of God, that God does not cast such a corrupted, perverted, sinful *massa* immediately into the fires of hell. Instead, out of it God makes and fashions human nature as it now is, so tragically corrupted by sin, so that he might cleanse, sanctify, and save it through his dear Son” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article I: Original Sin, pp. 537-538.34-39).