

## AWESOMENESS

*Sermon for Pentecost A: Ps. 104, Acts 2:1-21, 1Cor 12:3b-13, Jn 20:19-23*

LPC, 6/4/17

Someone has said that the classic sermon is three points and a poem. Today's sermon, I give you advance warning, is two bits of mind-bending awesomeness plus a reality check. All of the above are suggested by today's lectionary readings.

The first bit of mind-bending awesomeness is about how great our God really is. I sometimes wonder if this stupendously important point is adequately represented by churches and by individual Christians. I further wonder, insofar as mainstream churches like the Episcopal Church have lost ground to more evangelical churches, how much that lost ground is due to the fact that they pay more attention to God's awesomeness than we do.

If people are going to believe in God, they need to know that God is indeed great. And who better to share the Good News of God's greatness than those of us who claim to believe in it? It is possible that everyone at one time or another has experienced God's greatness, but not everyone has known to put God's name to it. Helping people to put God's name to it is one thing we Christians can do

What are the ways that God's greatness is experienced? Some of these ways are so commonplace that they are celebrated in Hallmark cards and YouTube videos: things like beautiful sunsets, rainbows, a baby's smile. But the fact that they are celebrated in such banal ways must not blind us to the fact that many of them do, in fact, represent something of God's extraordinary awesomeness.

If you were asked to describe a time you experienced God's awesomeness, what would you say? The first time you saw the Grand Canyon? Or perhaps a time you looked on your spouse and thought, "How did a fool like me get so lucky?" Perhaps hearing about an act of such extraordinary kindness that you got goose bumps? These are just some of the ordinary ways that ordinary people experience God's extraordinary awesomeness.

Surely it was one of these ordinary experiences that inspired Carl Gustav Boberg to write the words to the old hymn *How Great Thou Art*:

*O Lord my God, when I, in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the worlds thy hand hast made:  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder:  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed,  
Then sings my soul, my Savior, God, to thee,  
"How great thou art! How great thou art!"*

If you are of a younger generation perhaps you have heard more or less the same experience expressed in a Christian-pop song called, *Our God is an Awesome God*.

God's mind-bending awesomeness, or, if you prefer more traditional language, God's glory, is apparently the inspiration for today's psalm, Psalm 104: "O Lord, how manifold are

your works!” and so on. I especially love the part about Leviathan, that legendary sea monster, whom God is said to have made “for sport.” God is so great that God has created earth’s greatest creatures just for fun, almost as an afterthought.

The second bit of mind-bending awesomeness I wish to reference today is that this awesome God, who filled the world with creatures and renews the face of the earth, who causes the earth to tremble and the mountains to shake, this same awesome God chooses to breathe a portion of God’s awesomeness into each human being for that person to use for the common good. This bit of mind-bending awesomeness is brought to you by today’s Epistle: Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Here we hear about how God’s awesomeness is manifest in the various services human beings provide for the common good: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation.

As a crowning example of God’s bestowing portions of awesomeness on people, we also have the narrative about Pentecost, from the Book of Acts. Here the doors blow open, disciples burn with enthusiasm and inspiration, and each is miraculously given the capacity to share the good news of God’s awesomeness in ways that others may hear and receive it. Let us not get too hung up here on the gift of tongues. The point here is that through the Holy Spirit the disciples are given the ability to share the Good News in ways that others may hear and receive it.

As awesome as God is, God desires that each of us, no matter how un-awesome in and of ourselves, participate in God’s awesome project of redeeming the cosmos. To that end, God shares God’s awesomeness by providing us with opportunities to serve, along the ability to fulfill them. That is truly awesome. But, as today’s Gospel Lesson from John makes clear, this is God’s plan. As the Father has sent the Son, the Son sends us.

Now for the reality check. The work is God’s. The power is God’s. The awesomeness is God’s. This lesson is also brought to us courtesy of the Corinthians. Paul is writing to these people because of a particular crisis which threatens the Corinthian church community and its ability to share the Gospel of God’s awesomeness. The Corinthians had accepted the Gospel with joy. They had been open to and actively sought the gifts of God’s awesome Spirit. They had indeed received awesome gifts and many of them had displayed their gifts awesomely, in the miraculous speaking of tongues, not so differently from the disciples at Pentecost.

Paul was disturbed however. Why? Why were tongues awesome at Pentecost and not at Corinth? The reason lies in the fact that the disciples used the tongues to reach people all over the known world with God’s awesomeness, while the Corinthians got stuck on their own awesomeness. The disciples used their awesome gifts to build up the church, while the Corinthians used their awesome gifts to build up themselves. As we prepare to be awesome through the gift of God’s awesomeness, this is our reality check: it’s all about God.

We can’t go wrong if we remember that our God is awesome, and that this same awesome God chooses to be in relationship with us in order that we share the awesome work of establishing God’s kingdom on earth.

First we gape in awe. Then we go and share.