

The Importance of Wonder

One night I was in Nebraska with Carol and my best friend Matt. We were bored, as was often our state of being, and we were trying to figure out something fun. Dancing, eating out, a movie? All of these things left us cold. So, we decided to drive somewhere. We had often taken drives out in the country. Carol, Matt and I were armed with CD's and would each play a song for each other to listen during our drive.

Of all the albums we loved to play for some reason the soundtrack for *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* by K.D. Lang was in constant rotation. We loved its otherworldly sound.

This night we had decided to visit one of my childhood haunts. It was a place called the Reservoir or as we fondly referred to it in my childhood as "The Rez." Now if you are thinking of something like the Hoover Dam, I would suggest that you lower your expectations a little bit and remember that I grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska.

There was no water that could be seen, but there was a perfectly symmetrical hill in the flattest region of the United States. I remembered when it opened by the Water works in our county. It was basically a fake hill that was built over a gigantic room filled with pipes. These pipes pumped clean water up from the Ogallala Aquifer beneath the prairie. On top of the hill were concrete slabs in two locations. Otherwise it was a perfectly good fake Nebraska hill.

If it were not for this fake hill, I would have never been able to sled or toboggan as a child in winter. It was also the place when things got crazy at home I would retreat and listen to my Walkman lying on those slabs. Between the Smiths album *Meat is Murder* and the fabulous *Clouds Above* I was able to nurture as healthy a teenage angst as anyone.

This was also the place that my midget football team practices, but that is another story for another day. That was around the days of my perm haircut.

That night the three of us determined to hike up to the top of that hill and lay down on one of those concrete slabs to talk.

It was getting late in the evening. This was a perfect place to watch the sundown. We sat watching the colorful spectacle, but realized that a darkness was filling the sky. Before we knew what to do dark clouds had covered the sky above us.

It was then that I saw one of the most amazing light shows that could have only occurred in nature. Instead of lightning reaching down to the earth from the heaven, it was streaming across the cloud bottoms and returning to them. Streaks of lights, countless streaks, made like strange lights in the sky. Some never left the clouds and the inside of the clouds lit up as well. It went on for the longest time. No rain, only a celestial show that no amount of money could have created.

The other day I asked my wife if she ever thought of that night and she replied, "all the time."

It was a seminal experience for me in my spirituality. Just as my friend and Carol think about this evening often, I do as well.

Jesus says to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." To me these are some of the most haunting and foreboding words in the New Testament. We live those words daily as followers of Jesus Christ.

So, how do I keep my faith in someone I have never seen? Every time I think that I will throw in the towel, that this life of faith is irrelevant I am returned to my faith by one simple concept. It is the idea of wonder.

It is in those moments when I allow myself to stop and look around, I can see something that is more common than I admit. Look over at the forsythia whose blooms are just finishing their declaration of Springs beginning. Kale survived the winter in my garden bed. A breathtaking brushstroke in a painting I see at the Whitney. An unexpected act of kindness. I am caught breathless. I am not alone in this universe. I know that I am one part of something that is much greater than myself. I know that Christ is somewhere among this wonder that catches my breath.

So, when that charismatic beauty is lost, we feel it in a way that is almost unutterable. On Monday when I saw a police officer staring at the side of our building, I hurried to put a shirt and hat on. When I saw the tree's bulk entering where a stunning stain glass window used to hang tears immediately welled into my eyes. I immediately knew that no insurance policy could pay for that incalculable loss.

In the days since this tragic event I have looked closer at the other windows in the sanctuary. They are stunning reminders of the stories of our faith in Jesus Christ. But more than reminders they are creative palates of wonder that point to something greater than one stained glass window could capture.

As I look around at the empty pews it is absence that heightens my gratitude in your presence. We know that the church is not a building. The church building, at its best points us beyond it to the one our faith consists. Without people inside it is filled with the ghosts and apparitions of a cloud of witnesses who inhabited it for so many years. I

close my eyes and imagine children running down the pews and Bucky sitting in the back chair.

When I stand here, even with plywood on one window I am filled with wonder like that night of the storm so many years ago. In the midst of wonder my doubts are stilled and I know that when we are able to practice our faith together again, we will be forever changed. You are loved by something greater than yourself. You are important in so many ways that you do not even know yet. We may only be one speck in the echo of time, but without us the mosaic of faith would be missing one of its colors.