

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
May 6, 2018, The Sixth Sunday of Easter
 John 15:9-17, Psalm 98
PRAISE!

When I was a teenager and young adult, my church youth group would go to the Oregon Coast each year right after Christmas for a few days. I would get up early each morning, grab my Bible, and climb up the huge hill at the end of the beach to the top of the cliffs.

I would then step over the chain and sign that said no hiking beyond this point, and walk to the edge of rocks and dangle my legs over the edge of the cliff, several hundred feet about the waves pounding into the base of the rock.

Let me be very clear that I am not advocating this for any of you. It was a dangerous thing I was doing, and I would go nuts if I knew a youth group kid was doing what I did, but it was so amazing!

I would be so high above the ocean that the seagulls would be flying down below me. The sound of waves would echo up the cliffs, and the wind would be whistling through the grasses of the hillside around me.

Looking to my left and right I could see up and down the coastline, and watch the long lines of waves come in down the miles of beaches, and the hills of the Coast Mountain Range rolled back to the horizon.

Then I would take out my Bible and read the Psalm we heard this morning:

“O sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things...
 Let the sea roar and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord...”

I loved that the Bible had a Psalm that was perfect for days on the beach, and I loved that picture of creation joining in the praise and celebration of our God:

“The sea roars,
 The floods clap their hands,
 The hills sing for joy.”

Isaiah (55:12) adds to this picture:

“The mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
 and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Creation joins in the praise of God. And as part of God’s good creation we are invited by Psalm 98 and other Psalms to join in the joyous praise of our Creator. With music, with songs, with our very being we are called to revel and rejoice in the creative gifts of our God.

One of the reasons I so appreciate Celtic Christianity is that our early mothers and fathers of faith in the British Isles and parts of France and Europe saw the presence of God in all of creation. They believed that “the heartbeat of God pulses in all things.”

(John Philip Newell, in the introduction to *Great Creative Spirit, A Celtic Earth Mass*)

As they rose with the dawn they had songs and prayers to praise God: As they washed the clothes, tilled the field, fed the animals, kindled the fire on the hearth, greeted the sunrise and watched the sun set on another day,
 our early Celtic teachers sang songs of praise and prayed prayers of thanksgiving to God.

They believed God was in all the creation around them, God's heartbeat pulsed in the creation around them, and they didn't forget it. Throughout the day they saw God all around them, and they praised!

Psalm 98 calls to us this morning: "O sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things."

The author Anne Lamott used to say there are two essential prayers: "Help me, help me, help me," and "thank you, thank you, thank you." Several years ago she wrote a new book and added a third essential prayer: Wow!

Psalm 98 is about the Wow! Moments that take our breath away and show us the amazing creativity of our God.

Wow moments make it possible to believe that the trees of the fields are clapping their hands, the mountains are singing, and the sea is roaring with life from their Creator.

This kind of praise moves beyond a mere thank you, to wanting to shout out with a huge "wow." "Wow! God has done marvelous things!"

What are the wow moments and wow places for you?:

Have you heard the heartbeat of God pulsing in creation under a night sky filled with stars?
Or when the colors of a sunrise or sunset are so beautiful you can't help but say and pray:

"Wow! God has done marvelous things!"

Have your wow moments come at the birth of your child, or grandchild?

Have you felt that "wow!" rising in you on one of our local rivers, or at the base of a waterfall, or as another monarch butterfly comes into your garden?

Do you have "wow places" like the Oregon coast is for me, or the high desert of New Mexico, where you are aware of God's presence at every turn? Can the memory of those places help you pray a prayer of "Wow!"

One of my wows these last couple weeks have been the flowering trees around the Quad Cities.

I strongly encourage you to not just look at them from a distance, or through your car window,
but to walk up to those amazing trees
and look at the individual blossoms

that are painting those trees, pink and white and magenta and rose.

And then let that mighty wow prayer rise up in you: "Wow! God you have done marvelous things!"

Our praise is a gift we give to our God who has put so many "wow" moments into our days. We are called to join our heart and voices with the creation around us in praising our God, whose heartbeat pulses all around us..

If you haven't yet looked at the bulletin cover

and you are wondering what a prayer of "Wow" looks like,
this picture captures it pretty well.

This picture is from a card that has been on a shelf in my office for over 20 years.

It brings me such joy every time I see it.

Our wow prayers should look like they start at our toes and rise up through our bodies until we are dancing for joy.

Now some of us may no longer be capable of exactly this dance of joy, but I believe our hearts can dance that joy at any age.

So if your feet can't quite come off the ground like that anymore,
know that your heart can dance that way any time.

And if you are younger and that joyous dance of praise is in you, then dance!

That wow prayer of praise is our gift to our God, whose heartbeat pulses through all of creation.

The words of Psalm 98 call to us:

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.”

Because isn't it true: “Wow!, our God does marvelous things!”

Amen!

Introduce:

Hymn #80 You Shall Go Out with Joy! (The Trees of the Field), remind them of clapping, sing through two times!



