



Alexander Sorsher's *New Jerusalem*

My earliest memories as a child are interwoven with music. What I remember from my first few years growing up on a military base in Germany include going into my father's tiny study in the on-base housing unit we'd been assigned, and sitting down on the floor in front of the giant Philips record player – the one with a beige, cloth-front cover which concealed a mammoth monophonic speaker; a piece of furniture that looked something like a cross between a china hutch and a pie safe. My father and I would listen together for hours to recordings like the Vienna Boys Choir, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, or my parent's LP of Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*, the very first gift my father ever gave my mother when they were courting. There was this overwhelming sense of wonder as these strange and beautiful sounds would mysteriously emanate from that magical acoustical wardrobe, surrounded by the comfort and the presence of my father, there in the peace of his tiny study.

That sense of wonder is what ties all of the readings together today. There is the wonder of Paul as he recounts this mysterious vision of the Macedonian man who beckoned to him and his companions Silas and Timothy to "come over to Macedonia and help us." (See Acts 16:9). And after the companions sailed from what is now Northwestern Turkey across the Aegean Sea, there is the wonder of Lydia as she hears the great good news of the Gospel for the first time, and is so moved by that sense of wonder that she has her entire household Baptized, giving us in fact what could very well be one of the earliest Biblical examples of the Baptism of children. (See Acts 16:11-15)

There is this same sense of wonder all throughout the Psalm this morning, a wonder which is manifest through delirious ecstasy, when we are all instructed to sing for joy in praise to our God (see Ps.67:4). And the pen of the Psalmist concludes Psalm 67 with this victorious sense of wonder when he proclaims, "may all the people to the ends of the earth stand in awe of God (see Ps.67:7)."

We are near the end of John's Revelation in this morning's epistle lesson. And John's description of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven with its crystal river flowing from the throne room of God, with its twelve different fruit trees bursting forth with nothing less than the fruit of life and healing, with the Lamb of God as its eternal shining light – all of this glorious vision is just brimming over with a sense of awe-stuck wonder (see Rev.22:1-5).

A few years ago, Nissan cars coined a remarkably successful slogan: "Life's a journey, enjoy the ride." Now while the theology of this saying might be about as deep as a fortune cookie, never-the-less there is some wisdom here. We should indeed enjoy this particular journey that you and I have embarked upon toward the Cross of Our Savior, and so vast a part of truly enjoying this journey is provided by our renewed sense of child-like wonder.

Yet, this sense of wonder is completely antithetical to the pursuits and imposed perception of this secular modern world. We don't seek wonder anymore. Rather, we are constantly in pursuit of analysis. It would appear that modern man's worldview is obsessed with quantifying and weighing and measuring and postulating and theorizing. It would seem that we have launched ourselves into a grinding commitment to actually analyze the wonder right out of our world. We don't want wonder anymore; we want rational formulas that bring everything down to freeze-dried terms that the limited scope of human understanding can view without being challenged beyond our restricted comfort zone. No, we don't have much truck with wonder anymore.

And yet, in the Gospel reading for today which takes place on the night just before Our Lord went to his agony and glory – in this Gospel passage from John 14, Jesus points out to His disciples that this sense of wonder, even puzzlement is part and parcel of the salvation process.

Here, Jesus informs his 12 friends, “I’m telling you all of these things now knowing full well that you’re not going to understand. Yes, I’m going to be with my Father, and I know that this news is hurting your hearts right now. But I have to do this so that you can finally feel real peace, my peace, the peace that passes all understanding. And I know it’s going to be hard to take in right now. But someone’s coming after me who will grant to you this full understanding. But right now, dear ones, I need you just to be willing to let yourselves be in wonder. Because that wonder is such an important part of the journey toward heaven. You see, before you can know – before you can really know the width and breadth and height and depth of my love, you have to be willing to dwell for a while at least in wonder.”

It’s Ascension Day on Thursday. That’s the day when Jesus’ friends will go to a hilltop outside Jerusalem, and they’ll stand there in open-mouthed wonder and awe as they watch their dear Lord rising into heaven to assume his rightful place at the right hand of God the Father (see Lk.24:50-52; Acts1:9-11). It’s an experience I’ve often recreated in congregations I’ve pastured with a kind of re-commemorate of that day through a festival of kites. When you something like 40 children standing in a beautiful field flying their kites with faces beaming up to heaven, it can’t help but fill you with child-like wonder.

And you and I are children too – children of God and heirs of our Heavenly Father. And one of the most precious legacies that heavenly inheritance has bestowed on us is the gift of wonder – the awesome wonder that there is in being a child of God. So in the days ahead spend some time with Our Lord. Listen for his voice in your life. Feel his loving hand upon your shoulder. And dwell anew awhile in the wonder that there is in being heirs with The Lord Jesus of Our Father in Heaven.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen jwb+ 05-02-13

