

Message from Emerging Spirit Sunday Worship
Sunday September 28

For the Wonder of it all...
Cameron Fraser

*Note: Today's Message began with a clip from the movie Bella...
the clip can be found by following this link!*

http://www.wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16513&substring=bella

That scene comes from a movie called *Bella*, it's an amazing movie that I highly recommend. This scene sticks out to me for two reasons. First of all the man, this blind man, bargaining with Nina, that's the name of the girl, Nina, just to hear her describe the day. It's beautiful to think that this fella would put such value on hearing a beautiful day described to him.

But I especially love Nina's reaction to the whole thing. She starts by describing flowers, and we can see how they would be beautiful, and how a blind artist like this man might want to hear about them, see them in his mind's eye. But then he asks her what is going on across the street. She gives him a pretty simple answer:

It's just an ordinary day in New York City...

Nothing out of the ordinary, just a day like any other day – and that is when the old man says:

Oh, I wish I could see that.

I love what Nina's face does there. She's got that awkward and uncomfortable expression, that realization that she, not he, she who can see, not he who is blind, that she is missing something while he has got it.

Then we see his sign,

God Closed my Eyes Now I can See

But isn't that backwards? And in another way, isn't that just like God; sight coming from blindness, an indication that there is something greater, more important, something harder to peg down than the obvious around us?

And there is Nina, wondering, is she in fact missing something that this blind man can perceive? She is left wondering who, her fully seeing or this man, whose eyes don't work...is actually blind to what is all around them.

Speaking of again and again...Did anyone find a penny this morning? Did anyone pick it up?

Now, I confess a bit of a set-up here. I did in fact, hide, well, spread around in plain sight, quite a number of pennies this morning. The idea comes from a book called *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by an American lady named Annie Dillard (Dillard in fact won a Pulitzer Prize for the book in 1975). Dillard moved down to Tinker Creek, a small suburban area surrounded by forest near after a life threatening struggle with pneumonia reminded that she wished to live more deeply.

Throughout the book, she reflects on some aspects of her life, including, her childhood fascination with hiding pennies on the Pittsburg Street where she was raised.

For some reason I always hid the penny under a sycamore tree or in a crack in the pavement, and then I would take a piece of chalk and start from either end of the block drawing huge arrows, and then when I learned to write I would write under the arrows, surprise ahead, or money this way! I was very excited in all this arrow drawing that the first passerby would receive in this way, regardless of merit, a free gift from the universe.

While looking back, at the creek, Dillard comes to some profound realizations:

I've been thinking about seeing. There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises. The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside from a generous hand. But -- and this is the point -- who gets excited by a mere penny? It is dire poverty indeed when a man is so malnourished and fatigued he won't stoop to pick up a penny. But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get.

What you see is what you get.

Nina, our character who was walking down the street in New York, saw just fine...her eyes operated the ways eyes are meant to operate, light rays enter through her cornea which bends these rays of light, through the pupil, which are then delicately focused by the eye's lens which sends allows them to pass at just the right direction onto the retina which is full of photoreceptor cells and the optic nerve which turn the light rays into electrical impulses which travel to the brain to be perceived as an image.

But, what you see is what you get. Nina **sees** nothing precious, nothing wonderful, nothing magical, nothing worth the time or effort to stop and appreciate. And if what you see is what you get, she lacks tremendously. Because that blind artist has some problems in the way his eyes work. Light doesn't enter at the right frequency and is not focused in the way that eyes are meant to do, so his brain does not have the chance to interpret electrical impulses. But since what you see is what you get, and he **sees** magic and beauty and wonder, he has got quite a lot!

An idea like this makes me think differently about a comment in the Gospel of the Mark, in which Jesus gives an explanation for the purpose of parables being...

That they may see but not perceive

That certain eyes may operate with scientific perfection, but for certain eyes the seeing process would not be complete, and since what you see is what you get, for those who see in this way, only get little, for they see little.

The assumption here, as it is in Annie Dillard's writing is that one of the reasons we sometimes get so little by seeing so little is that we have so much. I read earlier:

if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days

Do we cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity? Do we leave room in our minds, hearts and view of the world, for wonder?

Now, I've heard it suggested that when we take the example of children, we see that wonder is our default setting as humans. We are hardwired to discover, engage in exploration and be rewarded with joy and excitement.

I've heard it stated that the average child, operating in this default of setting of wonder, asks, every single day, 125 probing questions. Why is...why is...why is...

Those of you who are parents know this better than I.

But you know what, the average child asks 125 probing questions a day, and the average adult asks 6.

Something about growing up, causes us to lose the need to ask 119 questions a day. Our week is so full of stuff that we set aside 833 probing questions that we would have asked had we been younger, and each year of our life, we drop 43, 435 questions, each with the opportunity to make us go **wow**.

Because wow is often the response, usually followed by another question, but wow makes it in there.

Virginia Stem Owens compares a child to a spy – they are on a mission of discovery, she says, and they pursue this mission with vigor and excitement obsessed with data, bent on discovering the secret of this life source that surrounds them. Resisting sleep to encounter more data, and the task is nothing but a joy.

But over time, something, as she puts it, goes wrong...the spy forgets her mission, that she becomes her cover...goes to school, grows up, gets a job, buys stuff, waters her lawn, and each day she wakes up with her mission grown a little more foggy in her mind, until one morning, she wakes up and just yawns.

Wows turn into **Yawns**. And what we see is what we've got – and if all we see causes us to yawn, what have we got?

I think that we need to work on wows...I know that I do. Because the world that amazed us when we were tiny, hasn't changed, it's still as full of reasons to ask 125 probing questions as the day we turned 4. It is still as strewn with pennies as ever it was.

I think that this realization, that the world is full of wow potential, is the lesson to be learnt in today's Scripture. Harvey read with great drama from Eugene Patterson's *The Message*, the whole of the Bible transposed into modern language. He read the first portion to us, the account of creation.

First this: God created the heavens and the earth – or maybe we're more familiar with...In the beginning, God created...**Bereshit bara elohim**

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and the really important word in this sentence is *bara* it is the word that is translated as created. It can be directly translated as create but implies much more, chose, set up and my favourite, *make fat*. Imagine that the Bible began like that...

In the Beginning, God made the Earth Fat!

But, isn't that what this passage is suggesting. This is an amazingly active passage, skies and waters and land and vegetation and creatures in the skies and in the water and on the land, all sorts, each able to reproduce after it's own kind...and all of it is good.

In the Beginning, God made the Earth Fat with good things!

There's an orderly chaos in the opening of the Bible, and it's full of such potential...the world is fat with good things...full to the brim with wow potential. And when we allow for moments of wonder we poise ourselves to live life full of humility and thankfulness.

I was talking earlier about eyes, and how all these amazing processes happen in such a small organ...wow!

I've been reading the book *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson, about the History of Scientific discovery...in the chapter I've read recently I learned about quarks, a fundamental particle, a building block of matter. At the time, people knew about protons and neutrons and electrons, so apparently one of the scientists involved wanted to call these *partons*...but the similarity to a certain country singer caused this suggestion to be rejected. But the neat thing about quarks, and I am about to butcher some quantum physics here...is that they can be at two places at once...wow!

At the tiniest level, the world has been fattened with wows!

And the bigness of the universe is very wow worthy as well isn't it. I've come across this story, this anecdote about former US Theodore Roosevelt. The story goes that he is spending some time with a friend named William Beebe (a naturalist and writer and builder of deep-sea diving crafts). It is said that would regularly walk outside together, find a particular shimmering spot in the sky and recite:

"That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun."

The president then turned to Beebe. "Now I think we are small enough," he declared. "Let's go to bed."

Wow...It reminds me a bit of my favourite line from Douglas Adams' book *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*:

Space is big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mind- bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist's, but that's just peanuts to space.

At it's biggest, and it's smallest and everywhere in between, when we take the time to see it, the world is full of wow! And what we see is what we get...when we pay attention, take the time, allow ourselves to see wow...what riches we begin to own!

In the past two weeks, in preparing for today's service, I've been challenging myself to be more wow focused, to observe clouds take on brilliant colour as the sunsets, to notice leaves on trees, to let myself enjoy what I see.

It is said of William Wilberforce, an Independent Member of the British Parliament, that he once commented, while so enamored with creation, that he sometimes felt pulled between his passion and drive to end the injustice of the slave trade, and his desire to look at cobwebs, sparkling with dew, hanging on the tree in his yard.

There is a small activity in your bulletin an encouragement to pause and recognize what simple, ordinary, miraculous wonders surround you. There is space to highlight things that you love, I'd like to encourage you to think ordinary, plain, unspectacular as well as sweeping mountain vistas and the sound of the ocean crashing on the beach in the Bahamas. And there too, is space to recognize the miracle of those around us.

C.S. Lewis was known for stating, that along with the Eucharist, our fellow people were the most divine thing we were ever likely to encounter.

As we take the offering we'll be singing a song, we'd invite people to take a moment to fill some of this out, or perhaps leave it for another time, but make sure that you find the time to remind yourself of what, normal everyday moments make you go **wow**.

(to go along with the message)

Ordinary Miracles in the world around us....

I love the smell of _____.

I love the sound of _____.

I love the feel of _____.

I love the sound of _____.

I love the feel of _____.

Ordinary Miracles ~~in the~~ are the people around us...

One thing I love about _____ is _____.

One thing I love about _____ is _____.

One thing I love about _____ is _____.

