

The 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany
January 27, 2019
The Rev. Jedediah D. Holdorph
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
Luke 4:14-21

My wife, Barb, and I took a hike this past Monday. Well, more than a hike actually. We snowshoed up Tumalo Mountain. Barb called it “the death march of beauty.”

It felt like quite a challenge. (Fist-bumps were exchanged at the top.) But that’s not why we did it. It was a sunny day, and we wanted to get up high and look out over the valley below and take in the snow-capped mountains all around: the Three Sisters; Broken Top; maybe Mount Hood ... and everything in between and all around.

We snowshoed up Tumalo Mountain to experience a bit of grandeur.

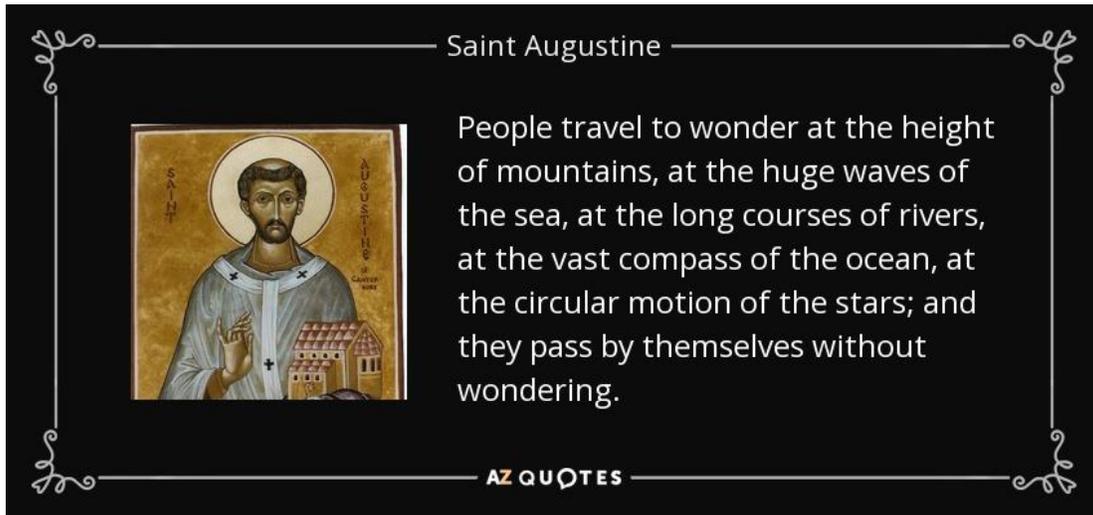


We weren’t the only ones, of course. There were plenty of tracks and ski trails in the snowfields. We met a young couple from Cleveland, Ohio. As we were coming down, they were heading up. Lots of folks come to central Oregon for the mountains and rivers and wildlands – places that inspire reverence, awe, and wonder. Some come to visit. Most of us came to stay.

You know, there's a chance that these big places could make us feel small, even insignificant.

If so, that's a shame. Because we, too, are an amazing piece of creation. Our very bodies ought to inspire reverence, awe and wonder, as well. But, too often, they don't.

St. Augustine once offered this pointed observation:



Our bodies are, indeed, wonder-full ... and, as the Psalmist once put it in a prayer:

*I will thank you because I am marvelously made;
your works are wonderful, and I know it well.*

Psalm 139:13

And yet we often don't really know it so well. If we even notice the work of God that is the human body, we are not filled with wonder ... at least not all the time.

Rather than be marveled by our bodies, we are preoccupied with the details of daily living: the clipping of toe nails; the brushing of teeth. These are activities that do not automatically inspire reverence and awe.

And when we are sick, we are more likely focused on how fragile our bodies are and not so much on how wonderfully-made they are.

In one of her sermons, Barbara Brown Taylor offers her own reflections on the matter:

In order to pick up a glass of grapefruit juice, it is not enough to have an arm and four fingers. Without an opposable thumb you are lost. Likewise, do not even think about walking with your inner ear messed up. It is not enough to have working legs and feet. You need an inner gyroscope to tell you which way is up.

There are all kinds of things inside of us that we need without thinking about them at all, at least not until one of them gets sick and has to come out. Few of us get up in the morning and thank God for our colons, our collarbones, or our mitochondria. We do not even know the names of half the things that keep us alive, but that does not bother them. They go right on keeping us alive in spite of our alarming ignorance about them. ⁱ

And she's right, of course. We don't need to know all about the different parts of our bodies -- or even be able to name them -- for the parts of our body to work to keep on keeping us alive.

And yet, as St. Augustine's words suggest, there is something at least vaguely unsettling, something disturbingly ungrateful, about passing ourselves by "without wondering."

So it's worth considering another option. Even in the midst of our daily routines and human frailties, it's worth taking a bit of time to stop long enough to remind ourselves to wonder at the fact that a toe nail can grow at all, or that a body can come into being in the first place.

I say all of this very much mindful of our epistle this morning. The day that St. Paul was inspired to describe the Church as being like a human body was a good day for the Church. The idea still gives us something to ponder, especially on this day, as we prepare to gather for our Annual Meeting later today.

For the most part, we are not filled with wonder. We are preoccupied with the details of our daily life together – the ecclesiastical equivalent of clipping our toe nails and brushing our teeth. We do not perceive the wonder of it all. We are distracted by the foibles of our human frailties.

But, for all that, the Church is indeed a wonderful creation.

To borrow from the imagery of Barbara Brown Taylor's reflections on the human body, hardly anyone really thinks much about all that goes on or could name all of the parts different people play to keep the body whole and healthy. And yet those parts continue to work to keep on keeping the body alive. And they will likely continue to do so whether we notice them or not.

And yet there is still something vaguely unsettling, if not out and out ungrateful, about passing ourselves by "without wondering."

It is astounding that the Church ever came to be some 2,000 years ago in the first place. It is astounding that the Church has survived as much as it has these past 2,000 years.

And, with all that is less than perfect about it – and there's a lot that is far from perfect down through the centuries – it is astounding, nonetheless, that the Church is still a medium of God's grace and love. And it is. And we – you and I – we "ARE the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Today's Annual Meeting is a bit like a hike up Tumalo Mountain. I don't mean to say it's a "death march of beauty" ... though it is a challenge in its own right. It's also an invitation to look around and all that is so good all around us, and NOT to pass ourselves by without wondering.

By virtue of being a part of this parish family, we are part of that larger reality of the Body of Christ. And it's a good thing to pause and take a moment to wonder, to take in the breadth and depth and width of all that goes on in this place and all that goes forth from this place.

The written report on the life of Trinity – the range of groups, committees, individuals – gives a hint of all that goes on here. Even so, these written reports can only hint at the real scope of the life of this congregation. They don't fully speak of the care and concern shown one another. They don't do justice to the efforts of so many who have given of themselves to build up the health and vitality of our common life.

I'll have more to say later. And so, too, will others, as they offer their reports.

But for now, let me leave off with the simple encouragement to pause. Let us not pass ourselves by "without wondering," without wondering at the miracle of the body that each of us has been given, without wondering at the treasure of a parish family such as this, without wondering at the mystery of the Church universal. For all that demands our attention in daily living, for all that challenges our health and well-being along the way, we have been blessed. We ought to be grateful. We have many reasons for giving thanks.



Grateful
thankful
blessed

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, "Deep in Christ's Bones," in *Bread of Angels* (Cowley Publications, Boston, Massachusetts, 1997), p. 85.