

I’ve been working on a theory for about a year now that concerns what we mean when we try to instill balance into our lives. Attempting to balance is as old as civilization. The Greek poet Hesiod (c.700 bc) wrote, ‘observe due measure; moderation is best in all things.’ We are taught moderation as the proper way to live modestly.

However, I assume according to the box office results, that most of you have seen Wonder Woman. Was there any place in the film where you wanted Wonder Woman to act in moderation? Try to imagine some moderation slipped into the scene where she storms from the bunker into the town and ends up on top of the church. If you were one of the townspeople, if you are an oppressed person seeking justice, you aren’t hoping for it in moderation.

I have a 10 month old baby at home. When I see him after a few hours of being away, he begins to kick with his legs and with his arms and smiles and coos and lights up the room. I pick him up and hug him, and then he pulls back from my face with his mouth open showing his two little teeth, and he grabs both my cheeks and looks at me with that same bursting smile and then buries his forehead into my face, which is how he hugs.

And then ... I pull back and say, “Everything in moderation child. If you love too much, you’re bound to get hurt.” No. I do not quell his excitement in order to instill moderation or balance. Nor do I temper my response. Instead, I become a fool myself, shaking my arms and legs and making silly faces and then holding him as close as his tiny body can handle. Balance is not my goal.

Today, we’re not going to try to balance our understanding of Jesus as both God and human. If we did, we would inevitably end up with a Christ who was 50% human and 50% God. Rather, we are going to push into Christ as 100% God today, and next week JR will push into Christ as 100% human.

This summer, we’re in a series walking through the Apostles Creed and talking about the basics of our faith. And we’re asking how these beliefs affect our daily lives. As JR helpfully showed us the first week, these are not beliefs you must fully understand and hold dear, or really even believe, in order to be in these seats this morning. Rather, think of them as the goal of our faith. Some of these beliefs have likely become deeply true and meaningful in your personal spirituality, but others you may not have come to know intimately yet. So, when we confess these beliefs, we do so with a little ambivalence, a little inescapable doubt, but we confess them all the same out of a respect for the wisdom of the larger body of Christ around the world and through time whose collective wisdom is greater than our own. These are the essential beliefs that the church has found to be true and good and useful for over 1,500 years. When a certain man in the gospels asked Jesus to heal his sick child, Jesus responded, “All things are possible for those who believe.” The man answered with some ambivalence, some doubt, but with honesty. He said, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.” The beliefs in these creeds are the goal of our faith. And so we confess with that man, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.”

Today we are addressing the phrase “Jesus Christ his only begotten son, our Lord.” Next week JR will address the next line that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and suffered under Pontius Pilate. Today we’ll try to understand Christ as fully God and next week we’ll talk about Christ as fully human. Now this is a great mystery, but mystery and awe is what I want to talk about today. That Jesus is 100% God + 100% human does not make sense to us. When we do math $100 + 100$ equals 200, not 100. This is like the mystery of the trinity where $1+1+1$ doesn’t equal 3, but instead equals 1 God. I think God’s math is different than ours because we are used to working with limited resources. If you have three apples and you take away one, you now only have two apples. Love, however, is not a resource of scarcity. When we had our 2nd kid or our third or fourth, the love in our household was not divided each time. Instead, it was multiplied. I believe that’s because God is love, and God is greater than the whole of God’s creation, so love is not limited. The more love we give the more it multiplies. This is a mystery.

I also believe that all of us have had contact with that mystery. When Robin and I were in seminary, I became friends with the husband of the student that lived next door to us. His name was Erik Graham. The day we became close friends was when we took a ride up into the mountains to watch the sun set over Los Angeles. The smog there makes for some amazing colors. As we chit chatted, the sun set rather fast and the stars began to come out. And two or three shooting stars caught our attention. We laid down on the ground and just looked up at the stars, and suddenly the kinds of questions we were asking became different. They became more honest and more along the lines of the meaning of our lives, especially in relation to this enormous expanse above us.

You’ve all seen those little videos online that start with a house in a suburb and then zoom out to the city, then the country, then the whole earth and then past our solar system and past our galaxy and just keep zooming out to unimaginable distances. It leaves us with an odd combination of feeling very small, but not exactly unimportant. It’s more like how can all the conditions necessary for life and beauty be present here in this smallness of my life? What’s so important about earth? About life here? About me?

This is the sentiment behind Stephen Colbert’s ongoing segment Big Questions with Even Bigger Stars, where he and his biggest guests lay down on a fake outdoor landscape look up at fake stars and ask big questions of one another. The segment is silly, of course, but it works because we’ve all had that feeling of mystery and awe.

If you don’t care for Colbert’s version, how about King David’s version in Psalm 8? The chapter begins and ends with the exclamation, “Lord, Our Lord, How majestic is your name throughout the earth!” The middle of the Psalm is that same feeling we’ve all had,

“When I look up at your skies,
at what your fingers made—
the moon and the stars
that you set firmly in place—
what are human beings
that you think about them;

what are human beings
that you pay attention to them?

We get this sense of cosmic awe when sitting silently looking at the stars, or watching a sunset, or on a majestic hike, or when we witness new life or pay close attention to the intricate delicacies of a flower. Practicing moments of awe, sitting with them, allowing them to expand inside of us, is good for us. We have sayings to remind ourselves of this: Slow down. Stop and smell the roses. Or one I hear very often - savor every moment, they grow up so fast.

It is this sense of cosmic awe that the New Testament writers directly link Jesus to, and we’re going to look at two of those writers today. Last week, JR talked about God as creator and began where the Bible begins in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John, the writer, of one of the gospels about Jesus’ life, begins with the same sentence structure, even the same words, in order to put Jesus’ birth into this cosmic context.

Writing about Jesus, he says,

“In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

2 The Word was with God in the beginning.

3 Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being

4 through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light. -- John 1:1-5

Further down, John goes on to say, “And the Word became flesh.” And so you have the story of this man Jesus being connected to that cosmic sense of reality, but not just connected. He’s actually responsible for the cosmos coming into being.

“Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word, nothing came into being.” This means that when we sit and look at the stars, we are in a very real sense being drawn into the mystery of Christ as the creator of all things. Our awe is not toward the vast expanses of emptiness we call space, but is actually connected to Jesus who brought it all into being and yet is mindful of human beings, mindful enough to become a human being.

This is a great mystery. But it’s not a mystery to be solved. As I noted, our math doesn’t work here. Rather, it’s a mystery to be encountered. It’s a mystery to be practiced. It’s a mystery that has the power to transform you. We all know when we experience those moments of awe that they are priceless, that we should make more space in our lives for them, that they somehow make us better people, but we’re just ... so ... busy that we don’t practice awe nearly enough.

Let’s look at another writer in the New Testament, this time Paul, who wrote a letter to a church in Colossae. He begins the letter with normal greetings and then quotes what scholars think was likely a hymn of the very early church, a hymn about the cosmic significance of Jesus. In Colossians 1, Paul writes (and likely the early church sang) -

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,
16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created in him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him.
17 He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him.
18 He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.
19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son
20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven. --
 Colossians 1:15-20

This is truly amazing. It’s the reverse of that little video that makes us feel small by zooming out away from our planet and distantly through the universe. These New Testament writers begin with the cosmic greatness and then zoom in toward our little world and find all that cosmic majesty present within the vulnerability of a small baby who grew up slowly and lived in the mundaneness of this world for 33 years. Or maybe not so mundaneness, because they then connect the smallness of our daily lives with this cosmic project of reconciliation and making peace with all things seen and unseen, things on earth and things in heaven.

Ok, so, yeah. Jesus was cosmically significant. What’s that have to do with us? Well, first of all, it’s kind of a big deal to claim that Jesus is cosmically significant. When Scorsese made the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988 his whole purpose was to put on screen a Jesus who was as human as possible. This was a scandalous move at that time. People could not imagine a Christ who struggled with his mission or who was tempted to live a normal life with a wife and kids and old age. Today we have our Buddy Christs on our dashboards, and we think of Jesus as our best friend. We’re more comfortable with a human Jesus than we’ve ever been, and since our human math doesn’t really allow for Christ to be both 100% human and 100% God, we’ve begun to think of Christ as less God and more human. In regaining our sense of Jesus as 100% human, we’ve lost some of our sense of Jesus as 100% God. Our current ratio may be something more like 80% human and 20% God. Most of Jesus’ life, and certainly his suffering, was very human and we can relate to that. And then he did those miracles and well, that resurrection, which were Godly and we have a harder time accepting those things.

Maybe you’ll find this to be a bit of stretch, but I believe our prayer lives directly reflect this ratio. We live about 80% of our lives out of our own effort and then we feel we need God to come along to help with the other 20%; well, 20% if we are praying, sometimes it’s a lot less. And so

our prayers tend to be along the line of “help me, help me, help me.” In other words, I’ve done all this other part, but I need some help right here with this or that aspect of my life that is beyond my control.

Cosmically speaking, in relation to John 1 and Colossians 1, that’s weak. I mean really weak. The creator and sustainer of the universe did not become a human so that God could help us out a bit. When you lay on the ground staring at the stars and feel the grandness of the universe, and yet the significance of your own existence, a “little help” isn’t going to get you very far. If you’re the oppressed person in the small village that Wonder Woman liberates, it’s not a little help that’s needed. You’re not looking for balance or moderation. When you consider the great forces of evil that exist in the world today, like continued slavery and sex trafficking and racism, it’s not a little help that we need.

A more appropriate prayer is “Save me, Save me, Save me.” We are unable to fix our own problems. The same scientific advances that allow us to draw energy out of an atom also create a bomb that can wipe out an entire city at once. Our evils require a force greater than humanity, something larger than ourselves that uses a different kind of math and is willing to enter into where we are and reconcile all things into peace. We don’t need help, we need salvation.

And that is who Jesus is. He is fully God through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together. Nothing less can save us.

So, again, you may be asking, “OK, Christ is cosmically significant, but what’s that look like in my everyday life?”

I’d like to suggest a deceptively simple answer to that question. Practice awe. That’s my recommendation. Practice awe.

First of all, we all know it would be good for us. We feel a tug inside toward places of awe, toward feelings of awe. We all want to get back to them, to sit in them and bask in them. I believe the reason for that draw inside of us is that Christ is working in all things reconciling all things unto God. When we practice awe, we somehow participate in the mystery of Christ-as-creator of all and reconciler of all.

To understand the possibilities of that just a little, let’s return to that feeling of awe. It’s composed of a feeling of smallness and need, and yet a feeling of significance. That sense of smallness helps us put our lives into perspective. Suddenly the problems at work or home become much less significant than we thought they were. There’s a bigger picture. The actual problems in the world are much, much larger and way out of my control. It can be fearful to realize I can’t solve the world’s problems, but also peaceful to admit I’m not responsible for fixing the whole world. It’s not at all possible. I need salvation to come from outside of anything human. I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only son, Our Lord. He is God who can save.

But what are humans that God would be mindful of us? Why are we significant? To practice awe is to stand before the mystery that God cares for us. That we are made in God’s image. That we are significant. To practice awe, watching a sunset or climbing a mountain or staring at the stars in silence, infuses dignity into our everyday lives. We begin to recognize the amazing awe of those around us being made in the image of God. What an incredible thing to consider.

Rich Mullins once said that the problem of Mary worship isn’t that Catholics consider the Virgin Mary too highly, but that the rest of us don’t consider one another highly enough. He was a man who sat with awe. Look up his song “The Color Green,” and have a listen this afternoon. Here’s the first verse:

And the moon is a sliver of silver
 Like a shaving that fell on the floor of a Carpenter's shop
 And every house must have its builder
 And I awoke in the house of God
 Where the windows are mornings and evenings
 Stretched from the sun
 Across the sky north to south
 And on my way to early meeting
 I heard the rocks crying out
 I heard the rocks crying out.

I want to encourage you this week to look for moments of awe, to begin training yourself to recognize them. You don’t have to go hiking in Colorado, or watch a sunset at the beach to find awe (although those are good places. For King David, it was the stars and for Rich Mullins it was a crescent moon. How often do we pass those by? For me, recently, it’s been our new born baby. But God’s image is literally in every single person you come into contact with. If you look. If you are aware. If you are open to being changed by awe, you will find Christ reconciling you to that crescent moon, to that person across from you, and to God.

We are now going to do two practices together that have cosmic significance. Both have been done regularly by churches for nearly 2,000 years. In doing them this morning, I invite you to practice awe. First, we are going to join with thousands of churches around the world who proclaim this creed on their websites, in their theological statements, and aloud together as we are going to do. In doing this, we are united beyond our physical locations, beyond our differences of language, beyond our cultural customs. And we are made one in Christ, as part of his body. This is a great mystery.

Let’s read together:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 and born of the virgin Mary.
 He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Now we will do as churches around the world have done for 2,000 years, and take communion together. Here we encounter not only the cosmic Christ who created all things and then entered into that creation as a tiny baby, but the further mystery that he stood before death and chose death for our sakes. “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

God, we remember this morning your son’s death, not meant to help us along, but to save us. Bless these elements that they may be life to us, life that draws us out of the death of our sin and into the resurrection life of your reconciling all things to yourself.

...and may the grandness of their presence slow you down until you recognize the reconciler of all things at work in smallness of our existence.