

Wonder of Wonder

Years ago my mother gave us children some refrigerator magnets from the comic strip Peanuts. There were several and we got to choose which ones we wanted. As they were passed around the table I picked the one with Charlie Brown hanging upside down from a tree attached to his kite string. I have always identified with Charlie Brown and his struggles with the ups and downs of life.

When the magnets got to my brother he took one out and did not keep it but gave it to me. He thought I should have it. The image is of Charlie Brown, Linus and Lucy lying on their backs looking up at the sky in wonder. My brother, who seems to be the least religious person in my family, has an innate understanding and appreciation of my calling. One of the main aspects of which is wonder.

Wonder is a good thing. We need to spend more time wondering. Not thinking so much as just gazing off into the clouds and being mesmerized. Have you ever spent time just staring off into space and allowing your mind to wonder? Have you done it recently? I hope so. I encourage you to. Our culture teaches us that we must always be on the go and always be doing something or we have wasted our time, but time or societal expectations ought not to control us. It is so important to stop doing in order to just be. We need to make time to wonder for that is where God is to be found.

Jesus' parables are made for wonder. Look at the farmer in today's parable. He sows seed and then takes to his bed. He does not just rest for the night but for the season. He does not pull weeds, water the crop, worry about critters eating up the crop, or anything else that a normal farmer might do. Instead he lets it go. Jesus says that the farmer "would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." The farmer is not a diligent worker. He lets the crop do what it will. He does not understand how it grows, but he allows it to do so. He also trusts that the seed will sprout and produce "first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head." Rather than getting caught up in the tasks of farming he lets it be until it is time to harvest the grain.

It is an odd scenario. No real world farmer would be so passive. Yet, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like this scenario. The abnormality of the situation is what Jesus wants us to wonder about. Indeed, Jesus' parables are almost always like that. He tells us a story that does not make sense by worldly standards. He is trying to get us to start wondering about the story. For his first century listeners whose society was agricultural this parable would have stopped them in their tracks, because it is so absurd. Every time you hear a parable I want you to stop yourself and ask, "What is wrong with this story?" If we are not asking that question we are in grave danger of missing the

opportunity that the parable provides us. The greatest of those opportunities is to wonder.

Wondering does not mean thinking really hard and trying to suss out the answer or the moral. Answers are for math problems and morals are for fables. Parables are supposed to bring us up short, startle us, and make us think in different ways. In relation to this parable tell me what might you wonder about? A few I thought of are:

- How can the Kingdom of God be like a lazy farmer?
- Is the farmer lazy or trusting?
- Is his trust misplaced?
- Is the Kingdom of God a place of ease?
- Is the Kingdom of God a place where things always work out?
- Does the Kingdom of God always have a plentiful harvest? If so what is the harvest?
- Why is a situation that seems so abnormal to me the root of understanding God's Kingdom?
- Is the Kingdom beyond my understanding?
- Is the Kingdom something that does not require effort on my part except planting and harvesting?
- Why does this make my brain hurt?
- Is wondering without answering enough?
- And so much more.

Free floating wonder allows the questions to abound. It also allows that awe does not have to have an answer. Wonder is enough. We live into the questions and that is enough, as we talked about a few weeks ago. We just have to be comfortable with that. If the question becomes an obsession, then blurt it out to God. God will see you get some clarity when the time is right.

Being comfortable with unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions is one of the basic tenants of Episcopal theology. We are to love the Creator, respect the creation, give thanks for the redeemer in Jesus, open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, and rest with the questions in our hearts. This is not a recipe for certainty so much as it is a way of finding peace, the peace of God that passes all understanding, and that keeps our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. That is all we need for a life rich in the love of the Lord. That is all we need to find peace, love and hope.