

Don't Hesitate
Psalm 147:1-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
August 16, 2026
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

In her book *Help, Thanks, Wow*, Anne Lamott talks about prayer as happening through three simple yet essential practices. And one of those - encapsulated in the word "Wow" - is the prayer of awe, of praise, of wonder.

And this is so natural to us. Ever since people have existed, we have experienced the need to express praise.

The psalmist celebrates the things God is doing, in today's psalm saying that the Lord...

- Builds up Jerusalem
- Gathers the outcast
- Heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds
- Determines the number and names of the stars
- Lifts the downtrodden
- Makes the grass grow and feeds the animals

This psalm names both the ways God's power is great and the ways God's involvement is intimate and personal - two things that both elicit praise.

As Professor Fred Gaiser of Luther Seminary writes, "The same God who names and numbers the stars cares for the downtrodden and the outcasts, heals the brokenhearted, and feeds the young birds (Psalm 147:2-9). Who'd have thought it?" (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-christmas-2/commentary-on-psalm-14712-20-5>).

In the face of this reality, the psalmist responds with praise.

So, I wonder...if you were to write a psalm celebrating God's activity in the world and in your life, what would you include? What things in this world, what experiences, cause you to praise God? What things cause you to be overcome with awe? What things simply force you to pause and to say, "Wow!"

Is it the feeling of security that washes over you in the presence of true love? Is it the awe that fills you when a piece of artwork or the sounds of beautifully crafted music are experienced? Is it the sense of God's presence with you when you feel anxious? Is it the sky at sunrise or sunset? Is it a moment of peace, of community, of oneness in the midst of an otherwise warring world? Is it the first cry of a newborn child or the last breath of an elderly loved one? Is it the stars on a clear night or the fresh fallen snow?

What things make you stop and realize that you are part of something bigger? What things cause you to say, "Wow!"?

And what do you do when that happens? Because in our life and times today, there are many barriers that challenge our ability to offer praise. After all, we are so often in a hurry...rushing from one appointment to another, squeezing just one more activity into an already overfull calendar. And if that wasn't enough, we are not only living in a hurry, but we are also often doing it with our faces in our phones, our earbuds in our ears.

What a challenge it then becomes to even notice things and people around us, to even experience the places where love or peace or God are showing up.

Does our rushing leave flowers in full bloom or young deer nibbling at the foliage unnoticed?

Does our obsession with our devices mean we rarely pause to look another person in the eye, to see their beauty, to be overcome with awe at their presence in our life?

Does living lives of overstimulation mean we have forgotten the value of a starry night or a bursting sunrise or the sound of water lapping on the beach?

And even if we notice, do we actually pause with that which causes awe? Do we actually allow the "Wow" to escape our heart and find its way to our lips? Do we actually open ourselves to our bodies being moved - literally or figuratively - in response?

Does anyone remember the story of David dancing before the ark of the covenant? It's a story from 2 Samuel.

David has become king of all the tribes of Israel and establishes Jerusalem as the new capital, a place more centrally located than Hebron where he first reigned. Part of establishing Jerusalem as the political and spiritual center means moving the ark of the covenant - that tangible symbol reminding the people of God's presence and of the covenant they shared with God.

While the story of moving the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem has some drama of its own with a death and a delayed trip, some criticism and a deeply broken relationship, one of the things we don't want to miss in this story is David's joy. In fact, in more than one place in the story we hear that David was dancing before the Lord with all his might.

Sit with that for a moment. Dancing before the Lord with all his might.

What would that look like if it was said of you?

What experience would move you so deeply that you would dance before God?

And if for you, as it does for me, the thought of actually dancing in any public way makes you nervous, perhaps we can release that expectation and simply wonder...what experience would cause you to be so overcome with joy that you just couldn't keep it in?

Because I think that's something else we need to pay attention to. Not only do we live busy and distracted lives, but we also live lives full of expectations that often keep us from expression. We clap gently and politely when our heart wants to shout, "Woo Hoo!" We feel something significant when we sing praises to God, but we don't dare lift our hands or move our bodies for fear of how we will be perceived. Even our smiles and laughter are often controlled and limited. We live life bound by expectations that our emotions will be monitored and too often we miss the chance for a hearty "Amen", laughter that leaves tears running down our cheeks, or a dance with the holy.

Mary Oliver's poem "Don't Hesitate" says this:

*If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,
don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about
to be. We are not wise, and not very often
kind. And much can never be redeemed.
Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this
is its way of fighting back, that sometimes
something happens better than all the riches
or power in the world. It could be anything,
but very likely you notice it in the instant
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the
case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.*

"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it....Joy is not made to be a crumb" (from Mary Oliver's poem "Don't Hesitate").

There are many things in our world that trouble us, much that is worth worrying over, and too much that causes fear.

AND there is so much that is worthy of praise...so much that gives us joy if we are just paying attention.

So, don't hesitate...don't hesitate to offer praise...don't hesitate to feel joy...don't hesitate to allow you "Wow!" to leave your heart and find its way into dancing. Amen.