

**“Have a Wonder Full Life”**  
Colossians 1:15-23  
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The Woodside Church

November 25, 2018

It’s the Sunday after Thanksgiving and Sarah decides to ask her Sunday School class of preschoolers about the meaning of the holiday. It might be fun, she thinks, to have the class playfully correct some wrong ideas about Thanksgiving. “Now let me see. Thanksgiving,” she begins, “That’s the day when we don’t care about anybody but ourselves. The day when we think about all the stuff we want and how we want more things than anybody else has.” “No!” the kids started to yell. “No-o-o!” Then one little guy calls out, “That’s not Thanksgiving, Miss Sarah, that’s Christmas!”<sup>1</sup>

Christmas is not about more stuff and selfishness. Christmas can’t be bought in a store, ordered on Amazon or shipped by Fed Ex. Christmas doesn’t come in a box and can’t be contained in a box. Christmas is all about awe, wow, and wonder – the greatest wonder in the world. For the next four weeks, these worship services will be your time to push the pause button, and take in the wonder of this great truth: that the God who made the Universe visited us as a helpless baby. God came near to be with you. Jesus did this for one purpose:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)  
Jesus came to give you a life full of wonder and a wonderful life. Next week we start a series based on the holiday classic *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Things got so bad for George Bailey he wished he’d never been born. Yet through a messenger from heaven, George discovered that life is God’s greatest gift and that God has a purpose for how we use that gift – a purpose that is wonderful.

But to get us ready for that wonderful life we have to open our minds to the wonder of God. We just completed a series on how followers of Jesus are DIFFERENT than the rest of the world. We don’t conform to the way the world tells us to think. Paul tells us:

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2)  
Today, I invite you to fill your mind with the wonder of God. Let God blow your mind. You often hear about giving your heart to Jesus, but what about your mind? Today we are bombarded by a barrage of theories and ideologies, philosophies and fads. It is essential for believers to understand the faith and to answer the challenges of those who reject or twist the Gospel.

The same was true two thousand years ago. The city of Colossae, which today is in modern Turkey, was a swirling soup of religions and philosophies. The new Christians in that city were tempted to give up the Gospel or mix it with large doses

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<sup>1</sup>Story from Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tennessee

of other doctrines. These other teachers claimed Jesus was only part of the answer. They said, ‘You have to combine His teachings with wisdom and knowledge from other religious leaders to get the full picture on God.’ The Apostle Paul took these challenges head on when he wrote this to the Colossians:

My purpose is that...they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:1-4, 8).

Jesus is not part of the answer, a clue to the mystery or a map to the treasure. He is *the* answer. He is *the* mystery of God. In Him are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But you will never have the full riches of complete understanding if you don’t use your head. Paul tells the Colossians and us three ways to use our heads.

First, Paul says “**Heads Up!**” Look up and see Christ’s hand in His awesome creation. We Presbyterians have a lot of weaknesses. We tend to be rather reserved in our worship. We’ve even been called, “The Frozen Chosen.” But one quality we bring to the Body of Christ is using our minds to love God. John Calvin, our spiritual father and a brilliant theologian, also encouraged us to study the stars. He wrote, “For astronomy is not only pleasant, but also useful to be known; it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God.”<sup>2</sup> Even a secular scientist like Paul Davies sees a purpose and a plan in the cosmos. He writes:

I belong to the group of scientists who do not subscribe to a conventional religion but nevertheless deny that the universe is a purposeless accident. Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level ‘God’ is a matter of taste and definition.<sup>3</sup>

And no less than Albert Einstein gave us this description of the universe:

The human mind is not capable of grasping the Universe. We are like a little child entering a huge library. The walls are covered to the ceilings with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written these books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. But the child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books ... a mysterious order which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hand of God, ed. Michael Reagan, Andrews McMeel Publishing, c. 1999, p.49.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Davies, The Mind of God, quoted in The Hand of God, p. 59.

I want to know how God created this world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are details.<sup>4</sup>

If these two scientists, who are not Christians, use their minds to understand God's design, Christians shouldn't shy away from seeing God's hand in the cosmos. Paul revealed to the Colossians the hidden design behind the universe.

(Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17).

What Davies, Einstein and others could only dimly suspect, Paul makes clear: Jesus is the Author of all those books in the library of the universe, He is the blueprint behind the galaxies, He is the power that holds all things together. Lift your "Heads Up!" Paul declares, and look for Jesus behind the cosmos.

Second, Paul tells the Colossians to "**Head Out**" – Go out and join Jesus where He is working in this world. How did Paul know Jesus is the one who created and holds all things together? Because the Creator came down into His Creation. Not just for a visit, not just to impart wisdom and knowledge, but to lay down His life for us.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 2:19-20).

Jesus made the journey from heaven to earth to save you and me, to reunite us with our Heavenly Father. If He went that far out of His comfort zone to save us, can you go a little outside yours' and invite someone to worship this Advent, invite someone to your Growth Group, invite someone to join you for a mission project, invite someone to join you for Christmas Eve service? Help someone you know who is struggling, hurting, lonely discover God has a wonderful life waiting for him or her.

John Muir, the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club, wrote in his book, Travels in Alaska, about two tribes: the Stickeen and Sitka Indians. A few years before the American Civil War there was a bitter conflict between them. The war was so long and bloody that no one dared gather winter provisions. Without these vital resources, few would survive the winter. Muir writes,

At this crisis one of the Stickeen chiefs came out of his block-house fort into an open space midway between their fortified camps, and shouted that he wished to speak to the leader of the Sitkas.

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<sup>4</sup> The Hand of God, pp. 124, 47.

When the Sitka chief appeared, he said: "My people are hungry. They dare not go to the salmon-streams or berry-fields for winter supplies, and if this war goes on much longer most of my people will die of hunger. We have fought long enough; let us make peace. You brave Sitka warriors go home, and we will go home, and we will all set out to dry salmon and berries before it is too late."

The Sitka chief replied: "You may well say let us stop fighting. You have killed ten more of my tribe than we have killed of yours. Give us ten Stickeen men to balance our blood-account; then, and not till then, will we make peace and go home."

"Very well," replied the Stickeen chief, "you know my rank. You know that I am worth 10 common men and more. Take me, and make peace."

This noble offer was promptly accepted; the Stickeen chief stepped forward and was shot down in sight of the fighting bands. Peace was thus established, and all made haste to their homes and ordinary work. That chief literally gave himself a sacrifice for his people. He died that they might live. Therefore, when missionaries preached the doctrine of atonement, explaining that when all mankind had gone astray, had broken God's laws and deserved to die, God's son came forward, and, like the Stickeen chief, offered himself as a sacrifice to heal the cause of God's wrath and set all the people of the world free, the doctrine was readily accepted.

"Yes, your words are good," they said. "The Son of God, the Chief of chiefs, the Maker of all the world, must be worth more than all mankind put together; therefore, when His blood was shed, the salvation of the world was made sure."<sup>5</sup>

God, the Creator, came down and made peace with this world in Jesus Christ. He is out there now, working in the hearts and minds of people. He wants everyone in His family.

And that's why Paul also says: "**Head In!**" Get your head into Church, the Body of Christ and invite others to join you.

And (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18).

We are a small part of a great universal church the stretches through time and space and even crosses the boundary between life and death. Jesus is the Head of the Church. He is the Lord of the living and the dead. The late Mike Yaconelli described the Church as a huge mosaic.

Moorhead, Minnesota, the home of Concordia College, is a very bleak place in winter. All year, the community anticipates Concordia's annual Christmas concert. Each December, a huge choir and a full orchestra give a musical performance in the concert hall at the college.

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<sup>5</sup> John Muir, *Travels in Alaska* (Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1915) p. 197. The entire text of Muir's book can be found at [www.sierra](http://www.sierra)

Every year, the people in the community create a unique background for the concert—a one-hundred-by-thirty-foot mosaic. Beginning in the summer, the community designs a new mosaic, rents an empty building, and the painting begins. Thousands of people, from junior high schoolers to senior citizens, paint the mosaic. They paint by number on a large-scale design that has thousands of tiny pieces. Day after day, month after month, one little painted piece at a time, the picture on the mosaic gradually takes shape.

When everyone has finished painting, an artist goes over the entire creation, perfecting the final work of art. When the mosaic is completed, they place it behind the choir. It has the appearance of an enormous, beautiful stained-glass window. Every year in the middle of the summer in Morehead, Minnesota, thousands of unknown, ordinary people paint a tiny insignificant tile. Six months later, the result is a spectacularly beautiful masterpiece.<sup>6</sup>

Each of us adds our little contribution to the Church and Jesus, the Master Artist, works it together into a glorious masterpiece.

There is a lot of criticism about churches these days and even more apathy. Many people say, “Who needs it?” I wish they could see the glorious masterpiece I see. Do you know you Woodside were recently honored by the Bucks County Opportunity Council at its Annual Breakfast. For all you do for the Community – from Code Blue and Family Promise to the Dinner Ministry, Prison and Recovery Ministries, Angel Trees, Habitat and supporting Food Pantries – the Opportunity Council honored you with its Community Connector Award. When they gave this award to Hilary Walp, who oversees our Code Blue team, the presenter summarized all the ways we bless the community by saying, “This church is a gem!”

You are not only a gem of sharing, you are also a gem of caring. Two Sundays back Carolyn Fegley passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Her death deeply wounded her husband Scott, their daughters Courtney, Diana and Gabrielle and all their family and it sent shock waves throughout our community. Yet in this valley of the shadow of death I witnessed the miracle of God’s loving care through you. Youth group leaders and students, deacons, elders and staff members, worship leaders and choir members, countless Woodsiders came out to offer their prayers, their presence and God’s peace. Who needs the Church? We all do because tragedies come, storms rage, and life is fragile. Not one of us can do it alone. Each one of us is needed. Each one of us is necessary. And together, with each of us doing our small part, Jesus, the Master Artist, creates a glorious masterpiece. Make it a priority on the Sundays of Advent to Head In to worship and join up with God’s gem.

This Christmas, let Jesus fill your mind with wonder, let Him use your mind to speak the Truth to others and help them discover God has a wonderful life waiting for them.

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Yaconelli, [Messy Spirituality](#) (Zondervan, 2002), pp. 118-119.