



ORBITING JESUS TOGETHER

Living by Faith..Awe & Response

November 12, 2023

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

Prelude – You’re Beautiful – Phil Wickham
Welcome/Announcements (Advent Kickoff)

CTW| Isaiah 55:1-5

“Come, **everyone who thirsts, come to the waters**; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and **come to me; hear, that your soul may live**; and **I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David**. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, *because of the Lord your God*, and of the Holy One of Israel, *for he has glorified you*.”

Song #1 – My Worth is Not in What I Own by Gray Havens

Song #2 – You Hold It All by Porter’s Gate

Dismiss Kids

Pre-Sermon | John 7:37-42

On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, “**If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink**. Rivers of living water will brim and **spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way**, just as the Scripture says.” (He said this in regard to the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.) Those in the crowd who heard these words were saying, “This has to be the *Prophet*.” Others said, “He is the *Messiah!*” ...saying...the Scriptures tell us that the Messiah comes from David’s line and from Bethlehem, David’s village...”

SERMON | Living By Faith...In Awe & Response

So here we are, a few weeks from Advent, having spent what the Church calendar calls “Ordinary Time” (those days between Easter (or Pentecost, depending on the tradition) and Christmas) getting into all the ordinary, everyday, foundational, and granular contexts in which life is made whole and holy, free and flourishing, or something less. Asking questions that we believe our faith and scriptures actually answer. Namely, “What does God require of humanity to live, full and forever?”

That is the question of our faith and scriptures. The treasured answer to which we’ve been digging up by asking...

QUESTIONS WE’VE ASKED:

- What is required to live resurrected (true)?
 - What is required to live free?
 - What is required to flourish (whole)?
- What does a resurrected (true) life require of us? A life in rhythm with the Creator in work and rest and work again.
 - What is required to live free? Build a life on the simple basics of the Ten Words.
 - What is required to flourish (whole) in our basic freedom, to live life whole and holy, different and deeply amid the anxious unrest of our cultural moment? Enter the day, interactions, your own heart, aware.



As we have discovered, our faith and our scriptures presume that life true, whole, and free is a life caught up in grand existence, a majesty pulsating in every granular corner of existence, life bound not by circumstances of time nor by oppositions to freedom, nor by our sin (our brokenness/failures of relation), nor by even the apt structures we construct to keep us faithful (i.e., religion, church, etc.) as we began to see last week.

Life in the Life Light is the image Van Gogh’s prophetic portrait paints: a world alive, like the prophet Isaiah described,

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)

The mountains and the hills, the trees and the fields, and our lives of joyous wholeness, completeness, and blessedness (i.e., peace) join with creation together to declare the wonder and amazement of God for us, God with us.



A world reverberating with the Life of the heavens in all, well almost all, the places where the Kingdom is within our grasp.

The one still and darkened space is the **Church**—the community and structure meant to help us live out and mature into the fullness of our faith, which is often the centering structure in our lives of faith. Yet, this place is not the life, not where we see the Light Life and where our attention and ambitions should orbit. Van Gogh's painting portrays a world glowing with the glory of the graciousness and majesty of our God, full of the Life Light of Jesus. A world alive in which the structure of the place of faith can be but is not necessarily vibrating with life. The granulars of existence reverberate, pulsating with the LIFE of the heavens. This is the image Van Gogh gives us.

At the root of our faith is the "awe" and "reverence," an awareness and appreciation of the grandeur and mystery and beauty of the world surrounding us, the Life in which our lives are lived. "Awe," says Rabbi Abraham Heschel, "is the beginning and gateway of faith, the first precept of all, and upon it the whole world is established."¹

It's this awe, reverence, and openness to transcendence to a world more than our own, that keeps us hungering, thirsting for a life more, different, deeper.

Yet our faith and our scriptures presume that life good, true, and beautiful, true, whole, and free, is neither an entitled destiny of humanity nor the inevitable outcome of struggle, success, or desire. Instead, it is entered experienced in relating rightly to God and others. That is to say, that life, true, whole, and free, requires something of us; something more than grit or longing or even need. **That indeed, life good, true, and beautiful, first and foremost, requires a response to The Good, The True, The Beautiful; The Whole, The Holy—The One who offers Himself, Life Himself with and within us. Faith is a response that is relationship—**to dine without pay on the abundance of life in His commitment, listening in the Presence so that our soul might live as Isaiah says, that our soul might overflow as it is where with life—the Life of God in us, as Jesus

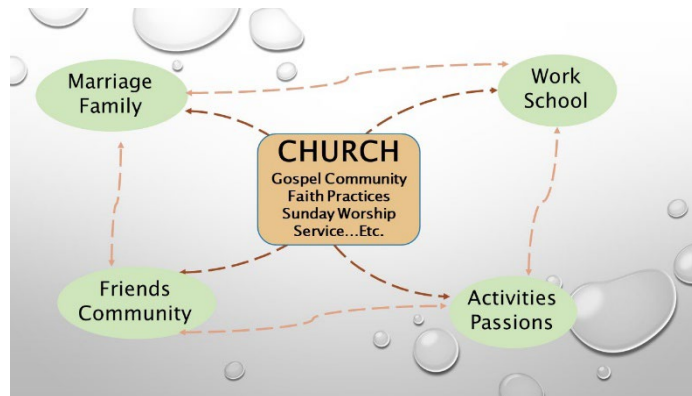
¹ Heschel, ,21.

said. Like seeds that die to live, sprout and grow, mature and bear fruit that abides forever—that “flourishes”—so is our life in God’s life.

Awe and responsiveness keep us living by faith: true, whole, and free.

“freedom,” contends Rabbi Heschel, “presupposes an *openness to transcendence*, and [a person] has to be *responsive before* [they] can be *responsible*.”²

Responsible, I think that’s where our orientation to God, to one another, and the world tends to skew. Responsibility is why we build churches and create structures to help us live faithfully—physical representations of *what we are responsible for in our faith*.



But, as the Rabbi has said, and our scriptures and faith attest, responsibility flows from awe and response, not vice versa. Here’s how another prophet, a contemporary of Isaiah, Micah,

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has told, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8)

We’ve interpreted the prophetic words of Micah mathematically rather than relationally. We’ve reduced our life of faith to:

REDUCING MAT

(A) Justice + (B) Kindness + (C) Humility = A "Good" (i.e. godly) Life

² Heschel, 15.



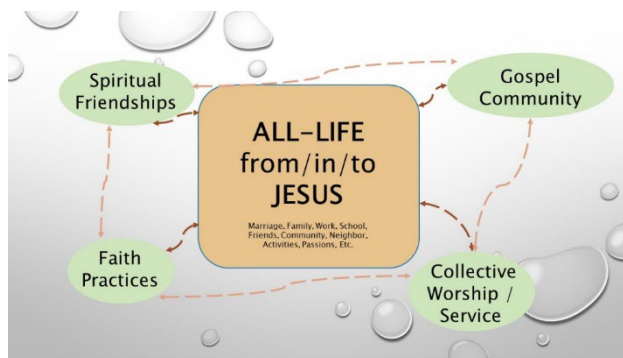
Justice and kindness, our responsibilities, become the requirements for making life, good—which, in proper turn, become the church's activities. But we let the finishing phrase, which is presumed to have come before as the source of justice and kindness, be just that, a mere presumption

Instead, we, as Isaiah and Van Gogh have painted for us, and Micah concurs, expand the equation:

EXPANDED EQUATION

Walking with God is the "good," for when we are humble (in awe & responsive) to Him as we go, we'll do and love what God does (justice) and what God loves (steadfast kindness, especially towards the lowly and needy).

A life lived humbly (in awe and responsiveness) WITH our God that is a good life ("Blessed"). A walking with that takes us into the places outside the sanctuary where we can do justice and love kindness—where, in awe and responsiveness, we might not only engage in life as God engages us but participate (follow) in Life already at work. **To orbit Jesus is to live by faith, in awe and responsiveness, in our bound relationships and responsibilities.**



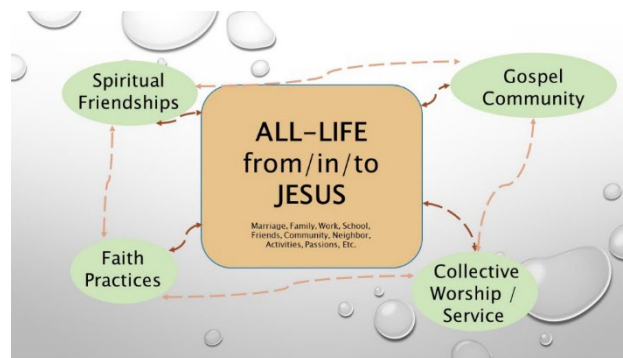
The activities of our community of faith, the body of Christ **to whom we connect, contribute, and move through life following Jesus together**, are meant to, like the cypress in Van Gogh's portrait, the monuments in Isaiah's prophecy, draw our attention (our awe and response) to the Life and Light of God all around us, within us, through and for whom we exist. **Cultivating a life of faith from, in, and through Jesus:**

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For **by (in)** him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or

authorities—all things were created **through** him and **for** him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For **in** him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and **through** him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

The activities of our community of faith, the body of Christ **to whom we connect, contribute, and move through life following Jesus together**, help cultivate our awe and response to the Life and Light of God all around us, within us, through and for whom we exist. So let's briefly mention those:

PUT UP SLIDE ON THE ON-STAGE TV



GATHERED | Being led into awe and response in worship and over food, through study and reflection, in communion and prayer.

SERVICE | Being led (*by you*) into awe and response to God in and for our neighbors, the voiceless, the needy, the longing.

SPIRITUAL FRIENDS / COMPANIONS | Chosen and trusted sisters and/or brothers in Jesus committed to *mutually* helping one another listen and respond to God with us. This is what makes a friendship “spiritual.” Persons who help *discover* and *nurture* one another’s *desire for God* and Christlikeness by supporting one another in discerning a way of life consistent with that desire.

These people know to ask... “...*me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.*” (Thomas Merton)

GOSPEL COMMUNITY | A community of people explicitly and consciously submitting themselves to the direction and training of Jesus (awe and response) through the Holy Spirit and scripture so as to pursue excellence in becoming who they are in Jesus together. A company of spiritual companions and those on their way to becoming such, sharing the ups and downs of life as apprentices of Jesus, being with, becoming like, and doing what Jesus did.

Let's discuss.

REFLECTION | To Consider and Discuss

- How is cultivating awe and responsiveness within life from/in/to Jesus different than building out life around “church”?
- Why does it matter?

COMMUNION |

The activities of our community of faith, the body of Christ **to whom we connect, contribute, and move through life following Jesus together**, help cultivate our awe and response to the Life Light of God through, in, and for whom we live now and forever. Or, as the apostle Paul said,

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven... (Colossians 1:21-23)

We conclude our resting to enter our living...
 Through the strength of Christ’s birth with His baptism,
 Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
 Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
 Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.

Christ with me,
 Christ before me,
 Christ behind me,
 Christ in me,
 Christ beneath me,
 Christ above me,
 Christ on my right,
 Christ on my left,
 Christ when I lie down,
 Christ when I sit down,
 Christ when I arise,
 Christ in the heart of every person who thinks of me,
 Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
 Christ in every eye that sees me,
 Christ in every ear that hears me.

In Through and For Jesus, we live. Amen.

SONG #3 – Man of Sorrows, Hallelujah What a Name by Providence

SONG #4 – Altogether Good by Citizens, McCracken

BENEDICTION | 1 Peter 1:5-9

As we conclude the day made for us, we enter into the work for which we are made [LIGHT THE CANDLE], remembering:

God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole.

I know how great this makes you feel, even though you have to put up with every kind of aggravation in the meantime.

Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it *proved* pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out *proved* genuine. When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory.

You never saw him, yet you love him. You still don't see him, yet you trust him—with laughter and singing. Because you kept on believing, you'll get what you're looking forward to: total salvation, salvation of your soul.