

- I. **“When was the last time you felt goosebumps?”** That prick at the back of your neck or along your arms. Hair standing on end. Chills running through your body. Why did you feel them? Was it a breezy day, drafty room? Were you watching a scary movie? Or was it a different response - an emotional response?
- A. **Have you ever wondered why we have goosebumps when we’re emotional?** Cold makes more intuitive sense - body responding by putting hairs out for warmth. Fears makes sense. Connected to other mammals - fight or flight response in the face of threat. But humans have this response when they get emotional; what is that about?
- B. **Dr. Dacher Keltner - prof. of Psychology at UC Berkeley studies humans and awe. Published article in NY Times along with UC Irvine prof Paul Piff.** Argues that humans uniquely experience goosebumps/chills **when we experience awe**. When we’re moved by the beauty of nature, or art, of music. When we have a particularly strong emotional response to another person - someone we’re falling in love with, or perhaps our child.
- C. Define awe as experiencing something vast that transcends our understanding of the world. **Scientists call this being stimulated by a “powerful other”**. Some call this God, some call this nature, but people recognize it’s bigger than themselves.
- D. Kilter and Piff note that in **contemporary culture, experiencing less and less a sense of awe** in everyday life.
1. Adults spend more and **more time working and commuting** and less and less outside in nature or with other people. Less camping trips, outdoor picnics, midnight walks beneath the stars. More time online.
 2. **Attendance at art experiences** has dropped significantly in recent decades - theatre, live music, dance, museum and gallery visits.
 3. **Netflix study validates this** - people aspire to watch things that are lofty, documentaries, award winning films, the save them to their queue, but inevitable most of the time they don’t watch what’s in the queue. They watch *Gilmore Girls* or *Arrested Development*. It’s easier.
- II. Does this matter?
- A. Dostoevsky, in novel *The Idiot*, said **“Beauty will save the world”**. What did he mean? Wasn’t talking about cosmetic industry. Likely more the kind of beauty we’re considering; inspiring awe. Overblown?
1. Professors Keltner and Piff have been asking the question about **what purpose does this emotion have?** Why might it have appeared through evolution? What they have found is that this **emotion of awe is the ultimate “collective” emotion**; it motivates people to do things that enhance the greater good. They’ve found that people who report experiencing more awe in their lives, who feel more regular wonder and beauty in the world around them, are more generous with strangers. They’re more inclined to good for others.
 - a) **study with students on campus.** Took students to the Eucalyptus Grove - Claremont Canyon. **(show slides)** Study participants looked up at the trees or the facade of the science building for one minute. And then an “accident” happened. Person stumble and dropped a handful of pens. The people who looked at the trees were more inclined to pick up the pens.
 - b) **It turns out art and wonder and beauty does have an impact on how people relate to one another. When confronted with the reality of this Powerful Other, people become less self absorbed.** More humble. They recognize they are not the center of the universe. There’s a bigger reality around them and it makes them more open to seeing other people and contributing to others. Kilter and Piff see a correlation between a culture that no longer values and priorities experience of awe with a cultural shift of

people becoming more individualistic, more self-focused, more materialistic and less connected to others.

- c) Ancient Jews have a term for the awe in the face of the Powerful Other, that they came to know as Yahweh. **“Yirat Adonai”. “Fear of the Lord”**. Not a cringing fear before a cruel God. It’s a reverential awe. Recognized that the awe has power. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

- d) Perhaps Dostoevsky was on to something after all.

III. **Beginning a new series, “In Search of Beauty”, that is considering how we can cultivate more awe in our lives, and what role, if any Jesus centered-spirituality might play in that endeavor.**

- A. Appropriate we start on Easter. Easter story is at the center of Jesus follower’s experience of awe in regards to Jesus. If there’s a reason for hair to stand up on its end in regards to Jesus it’s because of what we’re remembering this weekend. The journey from Thursday, where Jesus was arrested, to Friday where he was tried and ultimately executed, to Sunday when the Jesus followers of old claim in an audacious way that he came back. **This is a story that is mind boggling, that is disruptive, that demands awe if it is to be believed. But 2000 years on, its easy to be jaded about it.** We know the story; believe it or not, there’s no surprises. Try to look at this story afresh, from the perspective of those who lived it and were forced to confront the confounding question of what was taking place in their midst, and what impact it might have had on them - toward awe or otherwise.

IV. **Narrative everyone expected, verses what went down with Jesus**

- A. **Jesus arrived in Jerusalem the week of the Passover festival to a huge rally;** not that different from the rallies being held across the country today. It was in celebration of a leader, someone who would deliver them. Someone who would kick out the people in power who controlled them: the Romans. **People were saying this as the Messiah, Anointed One, the King who would come to make Israel Great Again.** They shout “Hosanna”.
- B. People thought **they knew how this would go. Jesus would rally the crowds and mount some sort of political insurrection.** They’d overthrow the power structures, both the Jewish political and religious seats of power and the Roman secular government.
- C. **Those power structures are aware that this must be the plan.** This is how revolution happens, isn’t it? And those who are watching, those Jewish leaders who have been paying attention see that this Jesus guy seems to have some crazy power at his disposal. Power to heal. Power to feed thousands with a few paltry loaves and fishes. Power to preach with a kind of authority that is spell binding and leaves their own teaching sounding trite and cliché. **And so now that Bernie Sanders style rallies are happening in the street, they’ve got to do something and fast. Stamp out the threat quickly. Build alliances with the Romans to conspire against this insurrection.**
- D. **So they arrest him.** The religious leaders **accuse him of blasphemy**, saying that this Jesus claims to be on the level of God. They use whatever power they have to accuse and convict him. They start their own propaganda campaign to turn the crowds against them. **They shift the rallying cry of the people from “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him”**. And then they hand him over to the political authorities, the Romans, and make the case that he’s a political threat. That Jesus is a revolt waiting to happen. That Jesus needs to be killed in a brutal way to show these weirdos once and for all who is control. That this Jesus thing is not happening.
- E. And **Jesus doesn’t fight them.** He doesn’t try to rally a coup. When one of his closest friends picks up a sword at his arrest, he tells him to put it down. He doesn’t try to defend himself as he tossed from hearing to hearing, he just says these weird cryptic things like “My kingdom is not of this world.” It’s like he’s letting it happen. And then it does. They kill him in

brutal fashion, nailing him naked to a couple of pieces of wood and making him hang there until he dies.

F. And **everyone thinks that's the end**. That's disappointing. The conspiring people of power are quietly celebrating; feeling pretty satisfied. His followers are crushed and demoralized. They were duped. Or God is not really on their side. Or he's abandoned them. **Then Sunday Happens.**

V. John 20:11-29 - setup - Mary found the empty tomb and told a couple of his followers who came and saw it, and ran off; then this happens.

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. 12 She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. 13 "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. 15 "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

16 "Mary!" Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").

17 "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message.

19 That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. 20 As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! 21 Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." 22 Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

24 One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

A. **What moved these men and women and changed their lives was wondrous, awe-inspiring, beautiful experience.** So much so that it changed all of their lives forever. Forty to fifty years later, John, one of those who was a part of Jesus' inner circle is still so re-oriented by the disruptive experience of this day that he writes the book so others like us can know this happened. But what made it so moving? **What is really so beautiful about resurrection?**

1. **Beauty of suffering redeemed**

- a) When **Jesus meets his followers they have been grieving.** Mary thinks she has lost everything. The cross stole it all: all their hopes and dreams that Jesus would redeem them.
- b) **But on Easter Jesus returns.** He's been raised from the dead. He's ascended to his Father and returned. But he's not the same. **He has some sort of mystical body.** It's a real body, it's not a ghost phantasm thing. It can eat and drink and touch and feel. But it can go through walls. It can appear out of nowhere into a locked room. Jesus can apparate. And the crazy thing as he appears into the room is that **this new body is also the old body.** The body has his scars. He invites his followers to touch them. Such an intimate act. Touch my side. Touch the scar, see for yourself. It's me. It's happened. And I haven't erased it. I haven't made them go away. My scars have been transformed into something beautiful.

(1) **Terrorism isn't new. Crucifixion as a form of terror.** Perhaps anachronistic which is why it shocks us so.

(2) **Dictionary definition of terrorism: the use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims**

(3) **Romans terrorized the people they occupied through this brutal form of execution for the crimes they wanted most to deter. Most executions were easier more efficient affairs like beheadings.** Crucifixions were reserved for 2 manners of criminals: particular low-lives, like escaped slaves, and enemies of the state. Suspected insurrectionists who might rebel against the state. Intended to be a gruesome form of death as a deterrent, that **strips the would be powerful from all power and asserts the power of the state.**

(a) **You think you have power? We can make you powerless.** Naked. Unable to swat away the birds who pick at you or the dogs who bite at your feet. And Jesus submits to their stripping him of power. He could call down angel armies to fight them off, but he doesn't. He lets them strip him of power. He lets them commit violence against him. And **he says "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."**

(b) Jesus chooses solidarity with humanity in suffering, he chooses to experiencing suffering as all of us experiencing, he chooses to take on our state of powerlessness, he chooses to stand in the "Why God?, why have you forsaken me?" the ultimate existential question. **He chooses to meet humanity in it's isolation, to go there with humanity, and at the same time to relieve humanity of the burden of judgement it pronounces on itself every time it chooses fear and violence and isolation instead of human companionship, connection, and love.** He succumbs to the violence and he pronounces forgiveness for all of it.

(c) And then he comes back. On the third day, he rises, still bearing the scars of the violence that he has forgiven. **But now these scars are no longer a source of terror and grief. They are a sign of victory.** They testify that violence has not had the last word. **Love and mercy** have had the last word. And these scars,

what were intended for pain and shame have become a source of joy. Suffering has been redeemed.

- (d) Resurrection body is not new, it's **recycled**. God was green long before we were. He is not in the process of chucking it all and starting over. He's renewing creation. He's recycling it. Repurposing it. Turning even that which was a source of terror and pain into something different.

c) If Jesus' scars can be redeemed in his resurrection body, what about our own?

- 2. **Beauty of intimacy.** Jesus knows his followers personally. Cares about what they need to experience.

- a) For **Mary, she needed to hear him say her name**. To know he cared for her tenderly. He gave her the honor of being the first to connect with him. Peter and John had been there moments before. Jesus appeared to Mary. She was someone who had experienced Jesus' power to transform suffering. He had cast 7 demons out of her. Girl was tortured, and now she was a close follower of Jesus. But then he was gone. Now what? And there he is. The gardner who speaks her name and she understands its his voice. Something about the way he says her name sparks recognition. The hair on the back of her neck stands up. "Rabboni." She knows him. This was what she needed; this intimate moment with Jesus. This assertion that it wasn't all a dream. She still is that woman who was delivered of 7 demons. And now she's the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus.
- b) **Thomas needed something different**. Perhaps he felt left out, because he missed the initial encounter with Jesus, and his **disappointment turned to skepticism. How many of us have been there?** We trust the sincerity of the person next to us who has had a powerful encounter with the Powerful Other, but we haven't for ourselves. Or **maybe this is part of Thomas' personality**; some of us need more empirical data. We don't intuit our way to understanding. Jesus doesn't condemn Thomas. History has given him a bad wrap, calling him "Doubting Thomas" but that doesn't come from Jesus. Jesus knows what he needs and is willing to come again to them just for him. He doesn't dismiss Thomas for needing proof; he meets him where he is, even as he points the way to something more.
- c) If Jesus is willing to come in unique ways to encounter and inspire awe in Mary and Thomas, how might he do that for each of us?

- 3. **Beauty of new life.** Jesus says to his followers "Receive the Holy Spirit" and he breathes on them.

- a) Later in the story, in the book of Acts we hear the account of Pentecost, of **God sending the Holy Spirit to Jesus followers through the gift of languages, given his followers the capacity to do what Jesus has done**, to connect with people intimately from wherever they're at by speaking their unique language. Holy Spirit will empower them to do the kind of Jesus did, to speak word inspired by God, to sense God moving and connect with that, to bring healing, physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- b) But here, before that happens, we have a picture of **Jesus breathing the Spirit into them**. We have a portrait of the giving of the Holy Spirit being like the giving of breath from the risen Jesus. Couple interesting resonances for Jewish people, particularly.
 - (1) **God breathing life in to Adam/mankind**; now God in Jesus is breathing another kind of life into mankind
 - (2) **God giving a word to prophet Ezekiel in a dark, hopeless period of Jewish peoples history**. Ezekiel saw a picture of a valley filled with dried bones, and felt God saying this:

“Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

1. And in his vision, as he prophesied, the bones came to life and God breathed on them again and tendons and flesh and movement came out of what was dry and desolate. It was a powerful word given to a hopeless and cynical people at the time. Thought God had given up on them.
2. **How different are many of us? What would it mean for us to receive the breath of God through Jesus breathing life into us?** Where we feel hardened; where we’ve been let down? Where we’ve become apathetic, where our hearts have turned to cynicism, Jesus breathes new life and an invitation to participate in his work of breathing life and redemption and renewal into the whole world.

VI. This isn’t just theoretical for me. As a young child I experienced regular sexual abuse by an extended family member. Tormented by it for many years. Suppressed it or told myself they were nightmares. But **the nightmares were real.**

- A. Had experienced a lot of healing, but still hooked in this area. Afraid of dating, intimacy, sex. Shame and fear. And also a sense of betrayal. Where was God? Why did he let this happen? Then: a powerful prayer time, a mystical experience. **Experienced Jesus with me in the nightmare. Saw it from his point of view; seeing it all and weeping.** God’s heart was rent for me. He felt the pain as deeply as it could be felt. He was in it with me. He cried out at the injustice of it; with passion, with righteous anger. This was wrong and the most Powerful of Others knew it. And He would never forget. And I sensed through that experience that even while it happened, that Jesus was intending for a day when this suffering would be redeemed. He was crying out with me, but he was committing that this would not go undealt with. Tremendously healing experience.
- B. **Dating, nervous about this part of my history.** Too overwhelming, too much baggage for Jason. His response was the opposite. While he was grieved for my past, the way God had met me in my pain and moved me forward, the way he had redeemed my sorrow was now a crown of beauty, that attracted him to me. And **through that experience of understanding Jason’s response, I began to understand more clearly my own version of new life.** The breath of God, the Holy Spirit has been breathed into me, and my bones have begun to stand, and walk, and dance again, My story is no longer something I’m ashamed of. It’s no longer a veil of shame. My scars have become part of my beauty. I have connected with Jesus in an intimate way. I have had my pain transformed. I have received the breath of new life and my bones have had a new journey. I have moved. **My sexuality has been reclaimed and redeemed and is now one of the areas I most readily experience passion, and beauty and awe in my life And yes, goosebumps. And it’s really, really beautiful.**
- C. This is why those early Jesus followers were moved by what they saw not the first Easter. **They saw suffering redeemed. They encountered a God who connected with them intimately wherever they were. And they received his breath of new life.** And these things together moved them with awe, and changed the trajectories of their lives. It started with wonder and beauty.

VII. This is what we’re gonna be considering over the weeks to come. How might Jesus be wanting to move in our own lives to bring a deeper awareness of beauty, of wonder, of awe, and how might that new awareness and connection impact not only our own satisfaction but

the way we connect with others around us. Today: a few suggestions for how we engage during responsive worship. Music as an expression that helps us connect with wonder and awe. Prayer has that capacity too. Consider these questions, consider praying from wherever you're at.

- A. What would personal connection to a Powerful Other look like for you? If Jesus was going to come to you, how would you need him to connect with you?**
- B. Where have you experienced wounding that could use redemption? What would it look like to invite Jesus into your area of pain?**
- C. What hope might you have for new life? If you could imagine something on the other side of pain, what would it be?**