# A Sermon Rev. Thomas V. Abbott 6/25/17

**"Astounded at the Greatness of God"**

**Scripture Passages: 1) Psalm 136:1-9**

**2) Luke 9:28-36**

**3) Luke 9:37-50**

**God’s Greatness:** “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” That beautiful refrain from Psalm 136 reminds us of the greatness of God as do the words from those two marvelous hymns we sang at the beginning of the service: “All Creatures of Our God and King” and “All Things Bright and Beautiful”. God truly is great, and it makes sense that we would be astounded at God’s greatness. (Pause)

**Blinded:** Of course, often we are not astounded by the greatness of God. Even on Sunday mornings as we prepare our hearts to gather with others in worship, the greatness of God may not even cross our minds. Often our lives are so busy we simply don’t think about God. Other times the suffering of life, or the suffering we see in the world fills us with doubts and fears as to the greatness of God. Each of us know some of the distractions that deflect our celebration of God’s greatness.

Today we want to consider two important aspects of our faith journey. First, we want to reflect on triggers that remind us of God’s greatness, triggers that turn our hearts and minds back to God. And second, we want to reflect on aspects of our lives that distract us from God’s greatness.

**Triggers of God’s Greatness:** Even though I am a pastor, often thought of as the resident holy person, which Deb would be more than happy to set anyone straight on, my life gets so chaotic that I can completely lose sight of the greatness of God. I get so wrapped up in the routine of each day, of crossing stuff off my list, of trying to do my job well, at being a reasonably good husband, father, son, homeowner, neighbor, citizen of the world that I can easily forget about God, forget about the greatness of God, forget about the faithfulness and provision of God.

When I should be completely astounded at the Greatness of God, it is so easy for life to simply push God off to the side. I am guessing that others of you may know what I am talking about. Our denomination understands this reality, which is why they require every pastor have a certain amount of vacation and continuing education. The fact is every one of us needs time where we can step out of our routines and be reminded of the greatness of God.

While we were away recently, there were a number of triggers that reminded me of the greatness of God. While all of our families have their quirks and peculiarities and absurdities being with Deb’s family and my family was a great reminder of the greatness of God. After that family time, we headed to the monastery where each night I went to the chapel, got down on my knees and spent some wonderful time sitting in the presence of God, where my blindness for God’s greatness began to peel away. While at the monastery we spent two days hiking. One day we hiked to the highest dune at Great Sand Dunes National Monument, which if you haven’t been there is an amazing sight. Nestled up against the Sangre De Christo Mountains is this huge area of sand dunes 900 feet high. Seeing those huge dunes rising out of the valley floor, surrounded by snow covered peaks, with a river surging through vividly reminded me of the incredible diversity of God’s creation, and of God’s greatness. Another day we hiked up to North Crestone Lake, situated about 12,000 ft., in a huge glacial cirque. To get there we walked through glorious glades of aspen, followed and forged raging streams, enjoyed the flitting of butterflies, all while surrounded by snow covered peaks. As we neared the lake we began traversing snow fields. When we reached the lake, it was still completely frozen in a bowl of snow. As we sat enjoying God’s majesty we watched the marmots, chasing around enjoying the sunshine and its warmth. It was impossible for me not to be completely immersed in the astounding greatness of God that day.

For me, as probably for many of us, God’s creation is a significant trigger reminding us of the greatness of God. Family can be another trigger. A quiet moment hugging a loved one can be another trigger. Kneeling in the quiet presence of God can be another trigger. Time in God’s Word can be another trigger. Hearing someone share of God’s faithfulness can be another trigger. Experiencing the power of God at work in someone’s life can be another trigger. What are the triggers for you? What reminds you of the greatness of God?

As people of faith, as people seeking to be Jesus followers we want to make sure that regularly we spend time engaging the triggers that remind us of the astounding greatness of God. How have you been doing that lately?

**The Transfiguration:** A few moments ago, Kristen read Luke’s account of what we typically call “The Transfiguration”. Luke tells us that eight days after informing the disciples that the role of “Messiah of God” equaled being a “suffering-servant” Jesus took Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain to pray.

While at the top of that mountain the disciples had an experience that can only be explained to the astounding greatness of God. Our human language simply cannot capture or explain God’s greatness as experienced by the disciples. In his own attempt to capture the moment Peter suggested building three dwellings or literally tabernacles (like the tabernacle that held the “Ark of the Covenant”), but no human structure can begin to capture or sustain the greatness of God. We read that after being enveloped in the presence of God, and hearing God’s voice charging them to listen to Jesus, the disciples came down from the mountain and stayed silent. God’s greatness left the disciples in awe. There was nothing they could say to express the astounding greatness of God that they had experienced. Do you and I allow the astounding greatness of God to lead us to awe?

“O Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

**Distractions:** Of course, as we read Luke’s account of the transfiguration Luke also informed us that Peter, James, and John almost missed the astounding greatness of God because they were weighed down with sleep. This description of the disciples, challenges all of us to ponder the ways we are weighed down with sleep when it comes to our relationship with God, when it comes to missing the astounding greatness of God. Luke’s description of the disciples being weighed down with sleep foreshadows the stories that follow. If you don’t have your Bibles open I would encourage you to turn to Luke chapter 9 beginning with verse 37. **Read Luke 9:37-43a.**

**Lacking in Power:** Luke followed the “Transfiguration” story with four vignettes that illustrate different blinders that turn us away from the astounding greatness of God. In the first story where Jesus healed the boy with a demon, we see that the disciples were lacking in power.

Most of us struggle to believe that God has the power we hope God has, and we struggle to believe that God will direct God’s power through us, to bring healing and reconciliation to this broken world. The Message translates verse 41: “Jesus said, ‘What a generation! No sense of God! No focus to your lives!’” Like the disciples we too lose trust in the power of God, which then blinds us to the greatness of our God.

**Lacking in Understanding:** Listen as our passage continues. **Read Luke 9:43b-45.**

In this vignette, the disciples express their lack of understanding in the ways of God, which of course blinds us to the greatness of God. Like the disciples we too struggle understanding that God’s power comes through powerlessness. Our sense of confusion often blinds us to God’s greatness.

**Lack of Humility:** Listen to the next vignette: **Read Luke 9:46-48.**

In perhaps the most comical moment of the Gospel the disciples begin arguing about who is the greatest and who is going to be the most famous. As humans, we so quickly fall into this trap believing that success is about what we accomplish, rather than success is about building relationships. So we regularly hear parents brag about their kids, pastors get together and talk about the size of their churches, golfers talk about their longest drive, and it goes on and on ever day completely missing the point of the gospel, which calls us to a life of service and humility in the building of relationships and community.

Jesus shaking his head at the ludicrous discussion said, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.”

In other Gospels we hear Jesus say that we must become like children, but in Luke’s Gospel we are called to welcome children into our lives. At the time of Jesus children were the lowest on the pecking order, they were truly the least of these and the most neglected. To understand the greatness of God is to receive and welcome the outcasts, the aliens, the strangers, the neglected, the least of these among us. God’s greatness is evident in God’s love for absolutely all of God’s creation and we are called to follow suite. Our lack of humility easily blinds us to the greatness of God’s love for all.

**Lacking in Sympathy:** Listen to one more passage: **Read Luke 9:49-50.**

In this final vignette, the disciples prevent a person from healing people because he was not a part of their group. The disciples show a tremendous lack of sympathy for those who were being healed by the other man, and they also reveal their jealousy and competitive spirit which was in opposition to the inclusive nature of our God’s greatness. How easily a lack of sympathy or love as well as a jealous and competitive spirit blinds us to the greatness of God.

**Conclusion:** How aware are we to the different ways that we become blinded to the greatness of God? Do we have an awareness of the distractions, like busyness, sleepiness, as well as lack of power, understanding, humility, and sympathy?

What are we doing to change our behaviors so that we become more attuned to the greatness of God? What steps are we taking so that our lives have space and practices that trigger awareness of God’s astounding greatness?

As we arrive here each Sunday morning do we have a heart and mind filled with awe for the greatness of God? Can you imagine the difference an awe filled heart and mind will make in our worship and our love and grace for one another and the world? Let us be a people growing in our awareness of the astounding greatness of God! Amen.