

## A New Community: “A Sense of Awe”

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West Side Church of Christ  
Searcy, Arkansas  
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### Scripture Reading

*“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe...” (Acts 2:43 NASB).*

### **GOD IS HERE**

Centuries ago, God’s people gathered together for the very same reason you have gathered together today. It’s recorded in Malachi 3:16. Those who feared the Lord got together and talked with each other—like we are doing right now. And the Lord listened and heard. The gathering might have seemed like a ho-hum event, but oh my—what is really happening is beyond our wildest comprehension.

They say the distance between the sun and the earth could be turned into a model I can get my head around. Make the sun the size of an orange and place a grain of sand 35 feet away. That’s the earth. We can do that in this room. In fact, we can do that on this stage. It’s helpful.

But if you want to measure the next closest star like our sun, you are going to need another orange. Only this time, you’ll have to put it somewhere between 1200-1800 miles away (think like Memphis to Los Angeles). And if you want to model our galaxy—you are going to need a lot of oranges. I mean a lot! Try 1 billion—that’s how many stars and planets we’re dealing with. And each of them are going to have to be placed 1200-1800 miles away from each other. And that’s just one galaxy.

The good folks at NASA and Hubble have been up all night counting. And they tell us there are billions and billions of galaxies. And Isaiah says God holds all of that—every bit of that—and all the space in-between; he holds it all in one hand (Isa 40:12)

And the God big enough to do that also took time to put hair on every blade of grass, and to paint the pattern on every butterfly wing.

That God—THAT God—is the one the prophets talked about when they said “the word of the Lord came to a fish boat captain named Jonah. [I’ll give you a moment for that one to...you know...*sink* in].

That God—THAT God—is the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

That God—THAT God—is the one Paul writes about when he says “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you...[And] if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Rom 8:9-11 NASB).

That God who created us, who lives in us...is with us today. He’s here in this place.

When Elisha’s servant boy got up early one morning to wash his eyes, he looked up and saw only a wall of horses and chariots holding the enemies of Israel, surrounding the city, and cried out “Oh no, my lord, what shall we do?” “What shall we do?” answered back the prophet of Jehovah God’s holy, special, chosen people. “Are you kidding me? The King of Aram sends out a crew, and that’s all you see? Who is the king of Aram and his minions? You can count ‘em if you want. But don’t you see? Lift up your eyes. Those who are with us are far more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:15-16). It’s hard to believe, but even God’s people sometimes need a little reminding of just who we are and who’s we are. So Elisha prayed, “Oh Lord, open his eyes, so that your servant may see” (2 Kings 6:17). And do you know what that servant boy saw when he looked around? He saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding them all (2 Kings 6:17). Did God suddenly show up to help them in trouble? Not on your life. He was there before the enemy even advanced. He who fills heaven and earth, he who is in all times and all space, is in this time and in this space. If only We have eyes to see it.

[Glorify Thy Name]

### **ALL TOGETHER**

Churches of Christ are known for our singing. Every church I grew up was like that. Even the little ones. My first preaching job was in 5 points, Tennessee—a church of about 30 people. We had one Bass, and, let me just say, she wasn’t that good.

But they sang with all their heart. Many Christians from other traditions will visit churches like this one and they will comment, “oh, I love your singing! Do you rehearse? I mean, everyone sings! You all take part in this service—and I just love it.” I do too. Just a few weeks ago, I was visiting with a friend of mine who happens to be the sound booth coordinator at a large church from a different background in another city. One that doesn’t have congregational singing like we do here. During our conversation, I was taken back when I heard these words: “We try to keep the noise level throughout the entire service at around 95 or 96 decibels...so no one ever has to hear themselves sing.”

May I share a good argument for the way we sing here? At West Side, we don’t try to discourage your participation in singing; we want to magnify it. We follow a practice that was so standard for most churches in most centuries that the name “*a cappella*” actually means “like the church does it.” When we gather together, we offer together the fruit of our lips in praise to God. You see, you are not the audience in worship. God is. We are the performers—all of us. This is concert day in the presence of our Holy God. And there are two cardinal rules every performance should keep in mind. The first one is “the show must go on;” and we remind ourselves of this one every time a child wants to have a breakdown just before the Lord’s Supper. “I’m sorry.... but the show must go on.” And the second cardinal rule is this: “give the audience what they came for.” I have no doubt that I can and do worship God well in a variety of ways. But if you ever wonder if your voice, weak as it is, shrill as it might sound to you, is good enough to please the Father, can I just tell you...he came to hear you sing. He came to hear you sing! And he made that voice box of yours in his image. Did you know that God sings? Oh yes he does. Zephaniah 3 tells us he does. And do you know what he sings about? Get ready for this one. Wouldn’t you know it—he sings about you. He sings for you. “The Lord your God is with you; He takes great delight in you. In his love he will no longer rebuke you. No! He will rejoice over you...with singing!” That’s Zephaniah 3:17. My God sings, and He made you to sing. He made your voice, and when he calls for all of creation to lift up one voice in praise and honor and glory, the King of all the earth delights in the sound of your voice. And if He delights in it, then shouldn’t we?

[Sing on Ye Joyful Pilgrims]

### **IN THE THRONE ROOM OF GOD**

Is there anyone who doesn’t love the throne room scene of heaven’s worship in Revelation 4&5? All the lightning and thunder, the thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful chorus, all things in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth joining in praise as the 24 elders cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus who shares the throne with

the Father almighty. We read that and long for that day when our worship will feel like that, and our eyes will see that, and our voices will meld with that. Bart Millard, lead singer of Mercy Me, wrote:

I can only imagine  
 When that day comes  
 And I find myself  
 Standing in the Son  
 I can only imagine  
 When all I will do  
 Is forever, forever worship You

Surrounded by Your glory  
 What will my heart feel?  
 Will I dance for you Jesus  
 Or in awe of You be still?  
 Will I stand in your presence  
 Or to my knees will I fall?  
 Will I sing hallelujah?  
 Will I be able to speak at all?  
 I can only imagine

But I think I can do you one better!

All that imagery of Revelation 4 & 5 can't just be about the *future*, because over in chapter 8 there is silence in heaven for half an hour. And what is that for? Because the prayers of God's holy, treasured gathered saints are coming up before God.

When in history was there ever a time when God's holy gathered people offered up prayers to God, and the elders of God's people represented the worshipping people of God before the throne? Dare I suggest... the answer is... *right now*?

Revelation 4 & 5 give us a picture of not only what *shall* be in the great by and by, but also what is happening *right now* from God's perspective. What the world sees when they look at you this morning—what we sometimes are tempted to see in gatherings like this—is only the best that Aram can offer. But I see chariots of fire. And that voice of yours that you feel self-conscious about, trying to hold that high note in the chorus, is being joined by thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of angels—melded together with the songs of the saints all over the world, through all time.

This is who you are, church—and this is why you gather today. And as Malachi says, the people gathered to talk with one another and the Lord listened and heard. And someone began taking notes for a little book he was going to have written. Malachi calls it a book of remembrance, and says He was taking names of those gathered who feared the Lord. And by the time we get to Revelation, it's called the Lambs book of life, and its open in the throne room of God. My God is among us—or better put, we are transported in this moment to be among the heavenly throng—and He is taking names!

And he is calling your name. He's calling your name. "Won't you join the chorus?" says the grand conductor. I want you to sing for me. Because don't you know that I sing for you. And the song on my lips for the saved ones is "Oh how I love my people." But the song on my lips for my little lost lambs is simply this: "This was all for you. See—look at my wounded feet. This was all for you. I want you. Come home."

[There's A Stirring]

Our God He Is Alive closer