On July 7, 2016, our son Hank discovered stars for the very first time. We were driving in the mountains of western North Carolina, baffled at how he could still be awake at 10 o’clock, the night so thick and calming. But foolish is the one who tries to understand a two year-old’s ways! There he was, wide awake, craning his neck back as he looked through the moonroof. We heard him singing a song we never taught him which is a wonder on its own - how they become persons with and without us. “Twinkle, twinkle, little star,” Hank crooned, interspersing his tune with gasps of wonder and delight. “Wow. I like stars!” he declared, a pure prayer of thanksgiving to our Creator if I’ve ever heard one.

I need moments like these, don’t you? These stop you in your tracks kind of moments that make you, demand that you be in awe. Awe of being alive, alive and surrounded by God’s abundant wonder. Alive and aware for a split second that there is so much more than what we know, what we see. In awe that heaven would come and kiss the earth right in front of us, the veil so thin that it pulses with the holy.

Is there a better place to begin than with awe and wonder? For some of us, absolutely. Awe and wonder is like asking some of us to put aside all reason and rationality and live in some sort of ethereal, head-stuck-in-the-clouds kind of place. But, here we are. Being invited to start not with careful planning and a steady pace but with awe and a sacred pause.

To go on this year-long journey, we don’t need to rely on having the best tools or being perfectly prepared. We aren’t to fret about what is to come in the days ahead, where the journey will take us or how we will fare. Lest you think I came up with this on my own, let’s go back to earlier. Did you hear that part from Jesus? I tend to skip over it because it requires a mind and heart twisting quite uncomfortable for me. “Do not worry about tomorrow...strive first for the kingdom of God…” But, Jesus. But - but - I need to know where we are going. I need to know what comes next. How am I supposed to get there if I don’t know where I am going? This goes against everything the world has taught me, every motivational sign I read in classrooms, every conversation I had with my parents as we prepared for college.
And yet...“Consider the lilies...,” Jesus gently offers. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

The writer Annie Dillard is the one who showed me what Jesus’ invitation looked like in practice. How it looks to consider a flower, a field of flowers and take in the particular handiwork of each stem, piston, leaf. The color and fragrance. How the light is captured in the translucent petals. It is a deep dive into the micro that leads us to the magnificent macro, the grand glory of God’s handiwork.

Here she is talking about a sycamore from her 1975 Pulitzer Prize winning memoir Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. “I am sitting under a sycamore by Tinker Creek. I am really here, alive on the intricate earth under trees. But under me, directly under the weight of my body on the grass, are other creatures, just as real, for whom also this moment, this tree, is ‘it.’ Take just the top inch of soil, the world squirming right under my palms. In the top inch of forest soil, biologists found ‘an average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot, including 865 mites, 265 spring tails, 22 millipedes, 19 adult beetles and various numbers of 12 other forms...Had an estimate also been made of the microscopic population, it might have ranged up to two billion bacteria and many millions fungi, protozoa and algae - in a mere teaspoonful of soil.’ The chrysalids of butterflies linger here, too, folded, rigid, and dreamless. I might as well include these creatures in this moment, as best I can. My ignoring them won’t strip them of their reality, and admitting them, one by one, into my consciousness might heighten mine, might add their dim awareness to my human consciousness...”

For almost 300 pages, Dillard revels and wrestles in the wonders of Tinker Creek. From muskrats to mantis eggs, she chronicles her awe of this wild world. In all my readings of this text, I was as mistaken as most to think she had taken to the woods, living in amongst the flora and fauna. How could someone get so detailed and drawn in, how could someone offer up this religious treatment of earth and not be living in seclusion? It turns out, Dillard was living in suburban Roanoke, Virginia in a brick house with her husband. The creek was just behind her house. All she did was get outside and sit. Sit and see. Consider what God’s handiwork had gilded the land before her. Consider and remember: she is alive. What awe and wonder.

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1 Dillard, Annie. Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. 95-96.
Like Jesus does for us, I want to invite you take a moment and consider. Consider where you’ve been in awe and wonder of this life, of this magnificent creation that surrounds us. Perhaps you need to close your eyes to draw near to it. Take a minute and then I’ll ask for some answers.

[meditation]

When have you been in awe of God’s glorious creation?

As a divinity school student, I served as a seminarian at the Harvard Memorial Church and led Morning Prayers, a tradition since 1636 that happened at 8:45 Monday - Saturday. One morning, we stood to sing “Morning Has Broken,” the choir raising their voices with the congregation’s. The light was streaming in from the windows, rays warm and sure. We got to the third verse, “Mine is the sunlight, Mine is the morning, Born of the one light, Eden saw play...” and I lost it. My throat caught and it hit me: this sunlight - this very sunlight has been around since the beginning. Has told the story of God’s love since the beginning. Is the same light that my ancestors saw play. Is the same light that ever more shall be.

Consider the world around us. So full, so brimming, so wondrous.

We begin here, basking in the awe of God’s love being re-created and displayed again and again. This is our beginning - this is the point from which we move. Tomorrow will come. Today, we can only say: “Wow.” Amen.