

**Eastern Region Sermon  
Easter 5A – 10 May 2020**

**'Wow!'**

**Setting the scene**

***[Slide 1 – the creature from the Black Lagoon]***

In 1957, some Buddhist monks in Thailand had to relocate a large clay statue. When a crane began to lift the huge statue, a loud crack was heard and then it began to rain. The head monk, afraid that the statue would be permanently damaged, decided to lower it to the ground and cover it with a huge tarp.

Now later that evening, the monk went to check to see if the statue was dry, so he lifted the flap and pointed his flashlight towards it. Then his eye caught a slight gleam. He was curious, so he fetched a chisel and hammer and began to tap away at the clay. After hours of chiseling and hammering, he discovered a solid gold statue, ten and a half feet tall, weighing two-and-a-half tons!

Apparently, some ancient monks had coated the gold statue in clay centuries before so that the statue would not be destroyed or plundered.

I have been thinking about this statue, and how each of us is like that golden statue. For within us is a gleaming image of God, a golden essence that is eternal and indestructible. Yes, we are made in the image of God, but I think there is something more than that going on, and today I would like to spend some time talking about that extra something. Our problem is that over the years, the clay and dust and muck of life has layered us with disguises—hiding our light, and the light of God within us.

I was thinking that it might be helpful if each of us took some time to examine ourselves, and try and see what that golden self within each of us actually looks like. What is it about each of us that mirrors the God within us?

One little exercise, that I have seen done, is to try and work out one word, just one word, for *ourselves* that best describes our own ideal self, or best self.

***[Slide 2 - question + image of boy + 'Wow']***

I have tried this second exercise for myself, and realized that it was surprisingly hard to do, there was just too much muck covering this 'ideal self' for me to clearly see it. In the end I was forced to think back to when I was a child. *[that's meant to be me up there ... ]*

I remembered how my parents told me that when I was a very young child, I sometimes stood staring at the naked flames of our stove, fascinated by the flames, and amazed at how it all worked. My parents apparently use to call me the 'mad professor' and suspected that I might end up being a scientist.

And so I came up with the word, 'Wow!' to describe the God within me. Now I don't mean that I was 'wow', but rather that this 'ideal self' was someone who was stunned and amazed by the glory of God's creation, and who needed to know the answers to life's mysteries. Of course, I could have come up with other words, but this is the best one that I

have been able to come up with so far.

**If you had to come up with one word, just one word, to describe your ideal self, what would that word be?** You might like to share it with a person seated near you.

*[Pause for thinking]*

How did you go? Did you find it difficult?

Now I don't think we should put too much importance on the word we come up with. But I found this a helpful exercise, and it was relevant to today's readings from scripture.

And to be honest, as an adult I am much slower to feel and say, 'Wow!' I am much slower to be excited by the wonders of life and the things that God has given to us. I am far too eager to complain and see the negative side of things, and in this, I suspect that I am far from alone. So many of us struggle to get truly passionate and excited about the things of God.

### ***Telling the story***

#### ***[Slide 3 - the map]***

If we look at today's reading from 1 Peter, it is clear that the writer of the letter thought the people he was writing to had something very special going on in their lives. They were from the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithniya, and what was then called 'Asia'. All of these places are in what we now know as modern day Turkey.

These were very important places in the spread of early Christianity, and even in the development of Christian theology.

#### ***[Slide 4 – photos of Capadoccia & SNAIL]***

I prepared a slide which shows some picture of these areas. The one on the top right is of Capadoccia, and it shows some of hills and caves that became the homes of many early Christians. Capadoccia has been estimated to have about 200 underground towns and villages, and one of them is eleven levels deep. Christians sometimes sought refuge in them during times of persecution.

#### ***[Slide 5 – quote from 1 Peter]***

The Christians from these places had good reason to be excited and passionate about their faith. They had good reason to say, 'Wow!'

Listen to what Peter says to the church,

*'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, ..... once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'*

There is no whinging here. Peter looks at the people of God, and what God has given to them, and says, 'Wow! You are chosen, you are special, you are necessary and you are precious in God's sight. And he even goes so far as to call them 'Living stones'. They were called stones, because they were part of a temple, with Christ as the cornerstone, holding

everything together.

### ***Grace in life***

I believe that God can take our interior stones, those places in our own souls, our own lives, where we feel stone dead, and make us come alive again. This is what can happen when we allow ourselves to feel the energy of God's loving and healing spirit.

And this can be seen in some of the things that are happening throughout the world today. I have heard some amazing stories about what is happening in China, and I would like to share one of these with you today.

About 10 years ago I read the book 'The heavenly man', which tells the story of a Chinese Christian, Brother Yun. It is an astounding book and reads like the book of Acts in the way it describes numerous conversions, miracles, healings, persecutions, God speaking through dreams, and miraculous escapes from authorities. One story describes how brother Yun had his legs broken so he could not escape from prison. After receiving a vision, the crippled Yun gets up and walks straight out of the high security prison. He found that his legs now worked, all the doors were open, and the guards failed to stop him!

### ***[Slide 6]***

May we never forget that the God of the early Christians is also the God of us today. May we, with God's help, cast off all the clay and muck that surrounds us, for we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Let us be excited about the things of God's, and truly say, 'Wow', as we worship and proclaim the mighty acts of God in Christ.

*Let us pray,*

*Merciful God, architect of the Universe,  
you have called us to be your home,  
with your promises in our hearts.  
You live in us, and through you, we are a people,  
forgiven and part of a glorious inheritance,  
that has been passed down through the ages.*

*May we be thankful for what you have accomplished,  
in the Church and in us, through Christ.  
May we live lives worthy of this high calling  
that you have given to us.  
In Jesus' name. Amen.*