**THE AWESOME LIFE**
Scripture: Psalm 19

FOCUS: God’s word of life and love comes to us in various forms and calls us to respond by living transformed lives.

I recently ran across an interesting article, “*15 words you need to eliminate from your vocabulary to sound smarter.”* When I saw the title I was intrigued. Hey, I can use all the help I can get when it comes to looking intelligent. It is an interesting list. I would have never guessed the first word, but it makes sense once you think about it. The first word I was instructed to banish is *“that”.* Here is what was said concerning its use, ***“It’s superfluous most of the time. Open any document you’ve got drafted on your desktop, and find a sentence with ‘that’ in it. Read it out loud. Now read it again without ‘that’. If the sentence works without it, delete it. Also? Don’t use ‘that’ when you refer to people. ‘I have several friends that live in the neighborhood.’ No. No, you don’t. You have friends ‘who’. Not friends ‘that’.*** I did a rather interesting and somewhat embarrassing exercise. Having read the article I went back to look at my sermon from last week. I found the word “that” 56 time and no more than 3 or 4 times, at the most, was it necessary. Try it some time, you will be surprised as was I.

Some of the other suggestions were also surprising, we are encouraged to put away such commonly used words as: ***absolutely, honestly, always, never, things, stuff,*** I’m really guilty there,and ***always***. I discovered I am rather proficient at breaking most of the rules, but the logic in the article does make sense. A quick google search will lead you to it if you wish to appear a bit more intelligent.

As I thought back to the article I could have sworn there was on the list a word which describes the God’s creation as described in this morning’s scripture from Psalm 91. Though it didn’t make the list, I don’t think there is a more abused word in the American lexicon these days than “awesome” Here again I am guilty as are most of you. We watch awesome football games on our awesome new TVs while having an awesome meal cooked by our awesome spouses after we come to our awesome church to hear an awesome sermon by your awesome pastor!

You get the point. We declare just about anything which is just “good” or perhaps just isn’t “bad”, to be awesome these days. We use the word almost flippantly. As a result it has been cheapened. So what does awesome really mean? The less than helpful definition in most dictionaries is ***“marked by or causing awe”*** Very helpful!The dictionary definition of “awe” however is relevant to our text and to our understanding of this overused word. Awe is defined ***“An overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, or wonder produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful, etc.”*** Yes I know I used the “t” word just now but it is in the dictionary definition or I would have changed it.

Most of what we declare “awesome” just simply is not. Some football games are entertaining, but even the best is not worthy of reverence. I enjoy well prepared good food as much or more than anyone and have, many times, described an awesome meal. But even the most delicious spread is undeserving of genuine deeply felt admiration. I like music, a lot. I think it is awesome we can now stream the Beatles. But is it really? Their music is enjoyable, some would say powerful, but is it really?

Though David doesn’t use the word, the first six verses of the psalm declare loudly, ***“God is awesome!”*** David is clearly moved by the wonder of the natural world, God’s created order. In nature he finds real power as he likens the movement of the sun to a gifted runner. He writes eloquently of the heavens declaring loudly the glory of God without having to use words. David recognized what we often overlook. The glory of God surrounds us daily, but so often we don’t even notice. Having read the lectionary texts earlier this week I was challenged by them to practice what some call “mindfulness” as I took the dogs for a walk one morning. Though there are many different practices associated with the increasingly popular discipline, when I speak of mindfulness I simply mean alertness, intentionally noting surroundings and feelings, practicing what the 17th century Jesuit Jean Pierre de Caussade wrote of in his book, The Sacrament of the Present Moment.

I have long had a love hate relationship with exercise. Once, a long time ago in what now seems to have been a galaxy far, far away, I was an avid runner. Some days I would log as many as seven miles. And I hated every minute of it and the dread only made the drudgery worse. I paid no attention to my surroundings, noticed little other than the pavement below my drooping head, and counted the minutes until I would be back home. Some days I have a similar attitude as Kathy and I walk the dogs. My mind wanders, my gaze drops and I just want to be home with a nice cup of coffee.

But one morning this week I kept my head up, put worry and planning out of mind for a while and was attentive. I noticed the majestic shape of massive leafless trees, wondered who had been in the jets which were long gone but had left vapor trails now painted pink and orange by a rising sun. I actually heard the birds singing and listened to the sound of soldiers doing PT as their voices drifted to my ears. Then as I neared home I was struck by the way the light from the sun was illuminating only the very top of a stately old pine. I stopped to look and discovered a beautiful hawk perched majestically on the tip of a broken limb. It was an awesome site, one I may well have passed many times before, but this day, because I was actually present in the moment I received a gift.

This morning I want David to help us define awesome living. He teaches we begin by recognizing and pondering the awesome nature of God’s immense creation. Like me on many of those morning walks and those long ago runs, we all at times are those who are too distracted to simply be in awe of God’s creation. We are too distracted by anxiety and fear to experience God’s comfort. We are too distracted by our plans to recognize the needs of those around us. We are too distracted by goals and longings to simply enjoy and be grateful for what we have. We are too distracted by constant connectedness to connect with the wonders of nature which lie right outside our door. We are too distracted by things mundane to experience things awesome. We are too worried about things we cannot change to be about becoming the change we are called to be.

We begin to know an awesome life as we take the time to experience the awesomeness with which we are surrounded every day. I promise it is there, we are just too distracted much of the time to interact with it. Practice a bit of mindfulness each day, then a bit more, then make it a lifestyle and you will be amazed by all the wonder God packs into each and every day. We begin to find awe in our lives as we intentionally seek to experience the awesome way God has created and the awesome way God seeks to create day by day.

I am reminded by the first verses of this 19th Psalm of similar words of David penned in Psalm 8, words of wonder written as he considered the majesty and glory of God. Having been awed by God’s power and might David asks a questions which causes me to pause every time I read it. ***“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them and mortals that you care for them?*** Someone this week passed along a comment which puts it in more contemporary terms, but offers the same message, ***“How cool is it that the same God who created mountains and oceans and galaxies looked at you and thought the world need one of you too.”*** How cool indeed.

In the eight psalm David continues, ***“You have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of you hand.”*** Let those words sink in for a moment. We are created just a little lower than God and we have been given dominion. Dominion. We have done a pretty good job of dominating, just look at how we have abused God’s world. We have conquered the earth, or so we think. We use its resources as if they are unlimited. We destroy ecosystems so we can live and play on beaches and in the mountains. We seek to tame, cage or kill wild animals for our entertainment. We even try to dominate each other, both as individuals and as nations. But we are called to have dominion, not to dominate and there is a subtle but life altering difference.

To have dominion is to have authority and control. Our government has dominion. At least in theory parents have dominion over the home. With dominion comes responsibility. Domination has no regard for what it dominates, takes no responsibility, it is a supremely selfish act. Not so true dominion, it exercises authority for the common good. The dominion we have been given as God’s chosen representatives is to be used for the good of all God’s creation. Godly dominion plays itself out as stewardship. We have been empowered by God to, with God’s help, care for and nurture all of creation.

So we might be equipped for the task of faithful dominioning, we are offered direction. It comes at times through an active prayer life. We find it as we gather together to support, love and encourage each other. We are equipped as we listen to preachers and teachers and as we read inspirational writings. David was familiar with all of those methods but in our Psalm he focuses on the law of the Lord. Notice he doesn’t say the law of Moses as do many other passages of scripture, he writes of the law of the Lord. He does clearly have Mosaic law in mind, but for him, and for us, the law of the Lord is more than a set of rules, it is a pattern by which we are to live our lives. Awesome lives are not those with much fancy stuff, (I’m sorry I just can’t wean myself from that one, it is just so descriptive.) Awesome lives are not those with excessive power and privilege. Awesome lives are those guided by godly standards, which are not particularly flashy, but make for an awesome life. Not a life free of trials, not a life of constant hapiness, but a real life with meaning, purpose and God’s blessing.

Having expressed his awe of God’s power and might, David turns to the benefits of living by God’s law. Beneath them all is the seminal fact that God’s law is perfect. That being said he fleshes out the nature of that perfection. First he declares God’s law revives the soul. Welcome words, for we all need some soul revival from time to time. David teaches soul revival comes as we follow God’s law, living as we are called to live. Our drooping souls, and we all have those some days, are almost always the result of failing to live guided by God’s law. ***“But how can we remember all those laws”***, you ask? Jesus cut to the chase for us there. He declared there to be but two which really matter because all the rest are built on them. Simple enough, right? Simply perhaps, but never easy. All we must do is love God, and love others, all others. Then your soul will be revived.

David declares the law of the Lord sure, making wise the simple. What a wonderful word of assurance. In our age of tolerance we must be careful lest we become unsure of everything. But God’s law of love is certain and is right every time. God’s law makes us simple folk wise, not by giving much head knowledge, rather, God’s law affirms simplicity as wisdom. We need not get all wrapped up with volumes of intricate laws, we need only adhere to the law of love.

David further affirms the awesome nature of God’s law. He declares it to be right, thus rejoicing the heart; to be clear, enlightening the eyes; to be true righteous and eternal. We live awesome lives as we observe and honor God’s awesome nature and respect God’s awesome creations. We further move toward awesomeness as we live our lives guided by the law of unconditional love.

David’s final admonition is really an extension of a life lived following the law of love. David, who was certainly familiar with faults, think Bathsheba, recognizes his inability to be forever faithful. So he prays for God to keep him from what he calls hidden faults. Now he doesn’t mean they are truly hidden, rather that he has become blind to them. Just as we can miss seeing the awesome world around us, we can become so distracted we don’t see our own obvious faults, often they are faults we see clearly in others. There is an unfortunate translation in the NRSV. We read in verse 13, ***“Keep back your servant from the insolent and do not let them have dominion over me.”*** As I read those words earlier this week I thought it didn’t seem to fit with the focus of the Psalm. So I pulled out my trusty cheaters Hebrew Bible, the one which helps out those of us who never mastered language, and discovered the most literal translation reads, ***“Keep your servant from arrogant sins.”***  David was seeking relief, not from arrogant others but from his own arrogance. That is how you live if you want to be awesome.

We are called to live the awesome life as we daily encounter, with genuine awe, God, God’s world and all which is in it. We are then called to follow the loving law of the Lord as we pray for God’s grace as did David. ***“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart”,*** in other words, all that we are, let them ***“be acceptable to you my rock and my redeemer”***

For your sake for the sake of a distracted world in search of awe and for the sake of the kingdom of the only one truly worthy of our awe, let it be so. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN.