



O Sapientia
Malcolm Guite

*I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken.
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,
O Light within the light by which I see,
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,
O Memory of time, reminding me,
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,
My Maker's Bounding Line, defining me,
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,
Come to me now, disguised as everything.*

In the Journal

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Ordinary Time 2024

A seasonal journal produced by Pillar Church in Holland, MI to guide us through the Christian year.

Cover Art: Ruth Stravers

Visual Artists

Ruth Stravers - Textiles

Erin Drews - Poinsetta Paintings

Introduction - Jonathan Gabhart

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Prayers

Captivated By Christ in a Distracted Age

Fall 2024

It is not hard to diagnose the level of distraction we face in our cultural moment. Endless feeds that scroll and scroll by, Advertisements everywhere we turn, Cultural voices saying “buy this and you’ll be happier!” “consume this and you’ll feel better!” And perhaps we’ve gotten so used to the “24 hour news cycle” that we don’t even feel its power of distraction in our lives. This next season at Pillar we want to return again to the promises of Jesus. We want to pause, rest, be still, create space to BEHOLD.

What if by beholding Christ we become captivated by Christ, either once again or for the first time? Captivated by his grace and beauty and goodness, so that it might find its way into our whole lives as a captivating witness to the world. Let’s behold together.

In this issue of the Pillar Journal, you will find 4 essay reflections from the pastoral team. Each one exploring an angle of our life captivated by Christ. Throughout the journal there is original art from Erin Drews and Ruth Stravers that was displayed at Pillar in summer 2024.

And in the last section, you will find 4 prayers from a variety of sources within the Christian tradition to guide as you reflect and pray this season.

Peace to you! - Jonathan Gabhart



CAPTIVATED (I)

Jon Brown

St. John, in his Gospel, records John the Baptist saying of Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” St. John was inviting the crowds then, and us still, to slow down, look up, pay attention, “the lamb of who takes away the sin of the world.”

There is so much vying for our attention, like sirens in Homer’s Odyssey, calling for our affections. It’s not all bad either, that’s where it gets sort of tricky. A quick inventory of many of our lives includes an alarm sounding well before the sun’s rising, hustling kids out of bed, into clothes, off to school (“Is your lunch packed? Is your homework done? No, you can’t wear that. Don’t forget your violin.”). And then we race off to work hoping to get there before we’re too embarrassingly late. We do the best we can to get the job done while we’re there but have to leave a little early to get to the volleyball match or the soccer game, and then home for a late dinner before packing the lunches and hounding the homework-ers.

If we’re lucky, somewhere in there, will be a few moments of quiet which most of use diligently to scroll the social media feeds out of some fear we’ll otherwise miss out on something so very important, like the latest on Taylor Swift’s relationship with Travis Kelce (Are they still together anyway?). And then we’re back at it again the next day, one day closer to the glorious weekend we often waste away with chores and events and more things that keep us everything but quiet, awake, attentive. We live life at a torrid pace.



And that's just how we try to manage time. Add to it advertisements, podcasts, websites, news feeds, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and the seemingly endless notifications that alert our hearts to things that we could probably do without knowing (like the average amount of time I spent on my phone this past week as compared to previous weeks. Thank you, Apple, now I feel bad about that too.) and of course we're going to find ourselves distracted, wired until exhaustion.

Even if your calendar isn't full of appointments and to-dos, most of us still fill our days with worry and anxiety, gossip and distraction. And St. John pierces through the distractions, , "Behold, the lamb." He cried out, "slow down. Look up. Pay attention. The living God is on the move. Jesus Christ is among us. The one who takes away the sin of the whole world."

Reflecting on this moment in John's Gospel, Lanta Davis offers in a book titled *Becoming by Beholding*, these words, "Behold often introduces the unexpected and captivating. It asks us quite literally to hold on to what we see, to contemplate and be transformed by it. When John tells us to "behold" the Lamb of God, he's not just telling us, "Look over here for a second." He's telling us to look so carefully, with such utterly captivated attention, that we are changed by what we see."

That line captured my attention, "look so carefully, with such utterly captivated attention, that we are changed by what we see."

That's a hope and prayer I have for Pillar this season. That we'll be so utterly captivated by the person of Jesus Christ that we'll be changed by what we see.

And, just to be forthright, there will be a lot seeking to attract your attention. Pundits and politicians have made their case for your vote, and they might just grab your heart too. Beyond that, there will be some global, national or local crisis that leaves you spinning and your heartaching. There's likely to be some kind of drama that draws you in and manipulates you into behaving in ways that aren't true to who you are. There is probably going to be some family dynamic that occupies your soul and consumes your mind. That's just how it usually goes.

In the midst of it all, we want to be a place and a space, a community that serves as an invitation, an invitation to slow down long enough and open our hearts wide enough to hear John's invitation, "Behold, the lamb of God." He's among us. He's on the move. We want to be the kind of community, amidst all the noise and hurry, amidst all the sirens wooing for your affections, that is so utterly captivated by the person of Jesus Christ, that we'll be changed by what we see.

Slow down with us, to be captivated by Christ in an age of distraction. "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."



CAPTIVATED (II)

Anna Anderson

When I was in college, I would occasionally take the train from Wheaton into Chicago to visit the Art Institute. I didn't wander through the galleries in any intentional order or direction, but each time without fail, I found myself in the same grand room in the 'Painting and Sculpture of Europe' section, sitting on a small bench, staring up at a massive oil painting of Christ on the cross. Amidst my melancholy, deconstruction, and angst during my college years, this painting pulled me back, again and again, to the person of Jesus—specifically the humiliated, suffering Jesus. You could call it a mystical experience, or the Spirit's guidance, or perhaps my own dramatic attempt to find meaning and peace with God outside of my frantic mind... but every time I sat to stare at the dying face of Jesus Christ in Gallery 211, I was captivated. I was captivated, and am captivated, by the person of Jesus: my friend, my savior, my God, the only one who truly understands me and gave his very life for me.

This painting is called *The Crucifixion*. It was completed in 1627 by a Spanish artist, Francisco de Zubarán, and it spans 5 ½ feet wide and 9 ½ feet tall, depicting our Lord slightly smaller than life-size. I'm no art historian, but upon reading a bit about the artist's context, I've learned that Francisco de Zubarán was aligned with Roman Catholic efforts (called the Counter Reformation) to combat some of the aesthetic impacts of the Protestant Reformation by celebrating the "inspirational value" of visual images for Church life.



Some Protestants had strayed from this appreciation for visual pathways of worship, due to a valid concern about idolatry and a righteous hesitancy about depicting God. I'll leave the nuanced complexities of that conversation to our congregation's own historians and professors, but I can speak to the intimacy and power of my own encounters with God "depicted" in Jesus Christ via this artwork.

I've been reading Advent sermons from the Church's long history with a group of other pastors this fall in preparation for preaching during Advent. We recently read a sermon from John Chrysostom, a 4th century preacher and theologian. He emphasized the humility that God has woven into the names in Matthew's genealogy leading to Christ: ordinary, sinful people—Gentiles even—who, despite their lowliness, prepared the way for the Savior's coming. This line on the intrinsic humility of Christ himself that subsequently flows into his followers struck my heart: "For nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one's self with the last."

This painting, *The Crucifixion*, displays to me the humility of God, the one who numbered himself with the last, fully and finally, in his body, to the point of death.

I think that's part of what was swirling in my heart each time I'd sit with this painting in college. I came to that gallery in my neediness, and I received the solidarity and power of God to transform me and save me through Jesus Christ's humility on the cross. A God who is humble, a God who in Jesus Christ dies for us, a God who numbers himself with the last— that's what is utterly captivating to me about our Jesus. This is the God who says "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). May we be continually, repeatedly captivated and transformed by the humility of God in Jesus Christ— not for the sake of our own virtuous improvement— but so that our neighbors might taste, through Christ in us, the love of God.

CAPTIVATED (III)

Joel Boersma

One of the perks (gifts!) of serving as a pastor at a college church like Pillar is the vicarious nature of life with students. There is an exquisite privilege in watching them grow up in all things into Christ our Lord: forming friendships, building Christian character, discovering the adventure of “faith seeking understanding,” and even becoming captivated by Christ along the way.

In a recent meeting, I enjoyed hearing about a Hope student’s diverse range of classes: Introduction to Old Testament, Human Physiology, Beginning Tennis, and Physics. It illustrates, in part, the college’s stated commitment to the liberal arts, which I’ve heard called the last, best hope for Christian higher education.

A theme that surfaced as we were discussing his coursework is that of origins (i.e., where do we come from?) and end (i.e., where are we heading?), and the respective responses given by different disciplines. My friend was working through the place of his Christian convictions alongside plans to attend PA school. In his wondering, I sensed a conflict between (personal) faith and (public) facts.

Such a division of knowledge—like that we see between the humanities and the sciences, for example—has long been the cultural air we breathe. There is a need, then, for a kind of training or conditioning to rediscover the way that integrates, rather than divides into endless specializations.

That is, as C.S. Lewis said, the “clean, sea breeze of the centuries” found in the Christian tradition. It is the way in which we honor Christ’s command, “to love the Lord your God with all your mind.”

In light of this, we see that science alone cannot answer the question of origins and end. Once the natural scientist ventures into that territory, argues Duke theologian Kavin Rowe, “they have stepped out of the role of scientist and into the role of mythmaker or priest or prophet or adherents of a religion. They speak not as proponents of a scientific theory but as simple individuals offering their personal preferences about things that in principle lie beyond scientific knowledge. [Christian theology], by stark contrast, does answer the questions of origins and end, and thus, as it turns out, of purpose in the present and hope for the future.” (Rowe, 12)

Theology in Christian liberal arts is the “queen of the sciences.” It is where we must turn to learn to think and live Christianly. It is uniquely suited to locate the remarkable discoveries of modern science, and point them to a proper telos: that is, a goal or purpose. Crucial to theology, of course, is its narrative shape. Which is to say, in order to think theologically and live Christianly—no matter the discipline—we must go back to our Bibles.

The Bible is the story of God, and thus, theologically speaking, is the story of everything. In the beginning, there is God, and then there is all that God made: light and darkness; land and sea; the sun, the moon, and the stars set in place; waters swarming, birds soaring, creatures appearing in all kinds, shapes and sizes. Creation, said Calvin, is the “theater of God’s glory.”

And God made us—you and me—creatures to image the Creator. This reflects our origins, to have dominion and exercise stewardship in the world charged with the grandeur of God. It also reveals our end/goal/purpose, to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” The consequences of sin and disobedience, of course, disrupt and distort God’s design for our origins and end—“sin’s stealing pace and theft” (George Herbert). And yet, it is the apostle Paul’s theme time and again, that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus Christ therefore is the key: he restores in us God’s image, gives us purpose in the present, and offers hope for the future.

Which brings us back to my friend hoping to attend PA school, pursuing his calling in view of an intellectual climate that stacks the deck. The next time we meet again, I think I will bring these lines from the priest-poet Malcolm Guite, as a way to urge him onward:

*‘With all your mind’, with every gift I gave you,
For every drop of truth is drawn from me.
Not that your mind itself will ever save you,
But that it lives within my mystery.
Ask and be answered, seek and you will find
I am the life of every loving mind.*



CAPTIVATED (IV)

Jenna Barber

There's a beautiful practice that I've been led through - and in turn have led others through, both in larger groups and individually. It's a type of prayer and meditation that draws on visualization, and has resulted in powerful moments of the participant being captivated by Christ. I'd encourage you to try it out - or even better, to ask someone to lead you verbally through these steps, for minimal distraction.

Here's how it goes; the exact wording isn't as important as leaving generous space & silence while walking through this process.

Find somewhere comfortable and ground yourself. Mindfully, make your way slowly through your body starting with your toes and finishing at the crown of your head. Notice what you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally. Simply take note. Is your left knee stiff? Is your mind distracted? Is your spirit anxious? Hold it non-judgmentally and offer it to God to do with what he pleases. Your role is to quiet yourself to an open-handed, clear-minded space.

After some time of settling into yourself, visualize yourself somewhere. It could be a place of peace for you (the beach at sunrise, or a glen in the woods), but it could also be a place that comes to you out of present pain or emptiness (just curled up laying on your bed). Rest there a moment.

(Note: this is the part where it may be helpful for someone to narrate for you.) Jesus appears, Jesus joins you. Knocks and opens the bedroom door, or approaches through the path in the forest. Wherever you are, you see him walking toward you to join you. [Pause.] Does he stand next to you? Sit down? Meet your gaze? Touch you in any gentle way? Whatever it is, be present to his presence and his peace.

After several moments settling in his company, let your mind open in prayer to what Jesus has to say to you. Perhaps you start the conversation by sharing with him a longing or a question...or maybe you are silent and just listening, waiting. In these moments, just be still in the comfort of his company as your deepest self is met in love.

Stay there as long as you need. Let yourself be captivated by Christ's presence and overwhelming love for you. Be seen, be known, be changed.

If you try this practice, I would love to hear your experience. I hope it can help you encounter Jesus in new or fresh ways in this season.



The Time of Your Favor

PRAYERS

*Lord God, heavenly Father,
we thank you
that you have granted us to live
in the time of your favor
when we may hear your holy gospel,
know your fatherly love
and behold your Son, Jesus Christ!
Most merciful Father,
let the light of your holy Word remain with us,
and govern and guide our hearts by your Holy Spirit
that we may never forsake your Word,
but remain steadfast in it
and finally obtain eternal salvation;
through your beloved Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.*

(Veit Dietrich, d. 1549)

Short Prayer to the God Who is With Us

*Father,
You have placed my feet on stable land,
And made my hands to work this ground.

May my heart learn to trust You in the process—
That I never rush beyond the pace You set before me,
That I never quench the Spirit's still small voice within me,
That I never wish the journey's end before I've seen You:*

*With me,
Near me,
In me,
Before me,
Around me,
And always ever only for my good.*

Amen

(Peter Assad, worshipforworkers.com)

Keep Us Faithful

*Oh Lord God, our creator, redeemer, sustainer,
Father, Son, Holy Spirit,
Hear us when we feebly call upon you
out of our manifold sins and weaknesses,
ignorances, failures, cowardice, bewilderment.
Lord we turn to you and call upon you because we know
that is what you want from us. You love nothing more
than to hear the confession of confused, troubled, insecure,
worn-down people who desire to be your servants.
Because you have called us to be your servants, dear Lord,
we know that you will give us the strength
to do what you have purposed for us to do.
Just, please, Lord, please keep us faithful to that calling.*

(Fleming Rutledge)

A Cistercian Prayer

I have found him whom my soul loves: I grasp him and will not let him go. I embrace you,

my Jesus and experience the joy of my love. I encompass you, the treasure of my heart,

from whom I have all that is mine. May my mind feel, I beg you, the power of your presence.

May it taste how sweet you are, O Lord, so that, captivated by your love, it might seek nothing outside of you, and love nothing except because of you.

You are my King: do not forget my indigence and tribulation. You are my Judge: forgive my sins and have mercy on me. You are my Physician: heal all my infirmities. You are the Bridegroom of my soul: wed yourself to me for all eternity. You are my Guide and my Defender: keep me at your side and then any hand can fight against me. You became a Victim for my sake, and I will sacrifice to you an oblation of praise. You are my Redeemer: redeem my soul from the power of hell and save me. You are my God and my All.

What is there for me to seek in the heavens, and, apart from you, what do I desire on earth? The God of my heart and my lot are you, O God, for all eternity!

The image features a vertical arrangement of three stylized oak leaves, embroidered in a golden-yellow thread. The leaves are set against a background of dark blue fabric with vertical white stitching lines. To the left of the leaves is a grey fabric with horizontal white stitching lines. The text is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image.

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