

October 4, 2020 Sermon: Cosmos, Creation

“The one thing that connects modern man with his prescientific ancestors, is a sense of awe at the wonders of the celestial heaven” writes Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist. Streams give water to beasts of the field where wild donkeys quench their thirst and birds nest in the trees. Cattle are sustained by the grass and crops. Wine, oil and bread provide human beings with the sustenance they need. All of this comes wonderfully in due season.

This week our theme in Creation is not just Rivers, and Humanity. In addition, the Season of Creation also springs up toward the infinite reaches of the cosmos. We are of the stars, the dust of explosions cast across space. We no longer look up at the stars and see in them Orion or Cassiopeia, bears or dippers, except as useful words to describe what we know are masses of exploded material dead long ago, whose light is only now reaching us. For some non-theists – people who do not believe in God – scientific knowledge robs the heavens of their mystery and makes life, the stars, the universe, and religion pointless. Non-theists also reject God as the Creator. For Christians though, we look up at the stars with wonder and with questions and with acceptance of the stars as our oldest ancestors. We, as Christians, value religion as a way to nurture the human

need for spirituality, community and morality. We need to look to the cosmos, the entity bigger than our universe, and also to scripture, for a story that inspires us to act in the world.

Everything to do with the heavens is seen as a royal raiment giving God splendour, rank and majesty. God's omnipotence is seen in the stability of the earth on its foundations and the boundaries between water and earth set in place by God's authority. God as sustainer is evident in the springs and the water that provide for plant and animal life both domestic and wild and for humankind as well.

As we widen our horizon in this Creation Season to glimpse the vastness of God's reach, a question may arise: Why have we chosen to use the term *cosmos* to refer to "all things," and not just the word universe? One reason is that the term *universe* may be too small. The word *cosmos* comes directly from the Greek *kosmos* and has the primary meaning of "order". We see order all around us – we glimpse order on a macroscale as we gaze through a telescope at the heavens, and we glimpse ordered reality on a microscale through a microscope. In our scriptures, *kosmos* has a range of additional meanings. It often refers to adornment or ornament, from which we get our term *cosmetics*.

How we understand cosmos reflects something about ourselves, too, and about what we hold to be the underlying attitude of God toward the creation. Though many of us have learned to see the world dualistically, the Season of Creation has been challenging us to see the cosmos holistically, to be open to the transcendent, invisible hand of God at work – not in an interventionist sense, but woven into the very fabric of reality and interconnectedness. The order of the cosmos reveals an impulse to life. We might use another term for this reality, namely “grace”. The fact that we exist at all, in a cosmos imbued with life, is itself a demonstration of grace.

How essential is this awe and wonder to our own wellbeing and to a commitment to the well-being of the planet? Certainly, some of the most fervent activists of our history and day are those who have found deep commitment and inspiration in the beauty and creation around them.

Thomas Berry is probably one of the most influential eco philosophers and an activist for the creation of a new attitude in which human beings and nature exist in a mutually enhancing roles. He writes of his own simple but telling experience in his book ‘The Great Work’. As a young boy he experienced a meadow in a spring afternoon in all its beauty, this left such an impression on him that it became the yardstick by which he measured all his ecological thinking: “*Whatever preserves and enhances*

this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformations is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple.” Can we reflect on an incident or experience in our own lives that provide us with such a testimony and is transformative of our own attitude toward the planet and its creatures?

Another personality, Brother Lawrence in the 17th century, found his own faith and spiritual discipline after contemplating a tree in the middle of winter. Realizing that in the spring and summer the tree would regain its leaves, and that flowers and fruit would emerge, he realized that God would provide for him too in due season. This realization was for him the basis of his spirituality, namely, to continually practice the presence of God. Despite being well read and educated Brother Lawrence worked his whole life in a kitchen.

The mystery of creation provides many a parable for our understanding of God. The fact that God is the Provider is deeply ingrained in the integrity of creation and we make a huge mistake when we no longer allow providence to determine the pace of existence and allow our consumer lifestyles to determine the human and planetary trajectory. When we take God out of the picture, the fact that we are consuming planetary

resources at rate far in excess of the planets ability to replenish itself should not surprise us.

Francis of Assisi, to whom the church has given the status of patron saint of animals, lived a faith deeply instilled with a similar sense of the gift of creation. In the Canticle of the Sun, Francis speaks respectfully and with deep humility of the celestial and natural world as brothers and sisters. Sun, moon, water, fire, earth are all fellow creatures who reflect the wonder of the creator.

Larry Rasmussen writes: “we do not live with “nature,” then. We live with trees, animals, birds, and insects of nearly infinite variety; with winds, clouds, and the spirited gases of the atmosphere, with mountains, lakes, streams, oceans, beaches, forests grasslands, and deserts; with bacteria and amoebae and viruses; with the sun, moon, and fifty million galaxies.

The cosmos provides us with endless opportunities to appreciate beauty, even in processes that are actually destructive. Some of the nebulae which glow so entrancingly in photographs mark the deaths of stars, which blew up in cataclysms we can barely imagine. Others are the opposite. They are the birthplaces of stars, providing them with the star-stuff from their hazy clouds, and incidentally frustrating Earth-based

astronomers who'd love to get a closer look at a proto-star through the gas clouds.

Life is a miracle. We need to remind ourselves of that every day. The mystery, the wonder, the reverence, the sacredness, the miracle of it all: Christians each day celebrate the world, proclaiming What a Miracle! We are a part of the great circle of humanity gathered together around the fire, the hearth, the altar. As Christians we must drink in the beauty of the stars and march in the streets for social justice; we must preserve the planet by planting gardens and by planting schools. We must sow the seeds of beauty and justice. Only by doing both will we truly know the peace that passes understanding, embody the peace of being at one with the cosmos and all humanity.

Cosmic celebrations need not be cosmic in scale. They just need to be enough. Enough to pick up the work before you. Enough to embrace the friend who's with you. Enough to resolve that the stranger might have justice. Enough to offer forgiveness to the one who's hurt you. Enough to acknowledge the wisdom of God in Creation. Enough to give thanks for the gift of Christ's salvation. Enough to rejoice in existence. Enough to rejoice

in life. A cosmic celebration need not be cosmic in scale. It just needs to be enough to relax into the cosmic love of God. Amen.