

October 6, 2019 Creation – Sacred Universe

In the year 1609 a man looked through a telescope and unleashed a revolution that would change the world forever. His name was Galileo Galilei. But how did this simple act of looking through a telescope unleash a revolution?

Because Galileo Galilee was looking at the surface of the moon, and saw that it was full of craters and mountains. To you and I this is old news, but to Galileo and the people of his day it was a terrifying revolution. Galileo had grown up learning what everyone in his day “knew” to be “fact”. The earth was the changeable, imperfect, impure centre of an unchangeable, perfect and pure universe. And this universe spoke powerfully of God and humanity’s place in it. The earth was placed at the centre of the universe because humankind was at the centre of God’s concern. The various elements of the universe – the sun, moon and stars, existed for our benefit and ours alone. We were the focus of God’s unfathomable love. The heavens, being the creation of a pure, perfect and unchangeable God, were likewise pure, perfect and unchangeable.

But with one glance through his telescope Galileo’s view of the world was changed forever. The heavens were not perfect, pure and unchangeable and the earth was not the centre of the universe. Rather, the earth was a ball of mud floating through the vast, dark expanse of space. And so it raised the question: If

we were not the physical centre of the universe, were we the centre of God's love and purposes?

This week in our Season of Creation we think of "cosmos". However, "Creation" as a word, seems so flat for what we come to today. Instead, the Season of Creation springs up toward the infinite reaches of the cosmos, in the figure of Lady Wisdom from Proverbs with whom all creation was made. 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.

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 “*k*”*osmos* 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.

If Genesis 1 – 4 contains two creation narratives, today’s passage from Proverbs contains a pre-creation narrative. The earlier verses of this chapter of Proverbs, speaks of Wisdom, as she calls out in the streets, with discretion, compassion, yearning for justice, and offering love to everyone. Today’s verses in

Proverbs 8 sing the praises of Wisdom by answering two questions: What is Wisdom's origin, that is, where did Wisdom come from? And what is Wisdom's role in creation, that is, what does Wisdom do? The answers come in the form of poetry, not philosophy or theology, with Wisdom speaking for herself.

Herself? Yes, Wisdom is depicted as a woman, specifically "Sophia".

Wisdom is, then, personified. Personification is a literary device which represents abstract ideas, inanimate objects, and even animals as if they were human beings. This is done to enliven an otherwise dull presentation, to create an atmosphere, to get the reader's attention, or to bring an otherwise distant topic close to home. Thus, Wisdom is pictured as a woman, a teacher, a prophetess, a hostess, a bride, and a faithful lover.

Wisdom, as firstborn, looks like God the most and acts more like God than the rest of God's creation put together. Wisdom would be, in our terms, the "spitting image" of God. Thus, through her, God's act of creation also becomes an act of communication, a revelation of God in terms that creatures can relate to. God is not so transcendent and aloof that God cannot communicate or does not communicate with creation in understandable terms.

So, humans can knock on the door of her house and ask, "Can Wisdom come out and play?" She is best learned through play, through leisure,

contemplation and reflection. She is best expressed through a well-rounded schema of activities, both labour and leisure, doing and being. She will play or work with not only the Sons of Israel but also “the sons of men,” all humans. She is at home with God in God’s grand design of the world, God’s master plan, and she is at home with humans who live in that world, at home on the streets. She is both book-smart and street-smart. The cosmos is complete with acceptance of Wisdom, and her role and contribution in the vast web of relations.

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. Wisdom is present is beauty, in awe, in and before creation, and in our cosmic actions, interactions, and celebrations.

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, into the relationship of Wisdom.

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 with Wisdom, around the fire, the hearth, the altar, and today around our communion table. 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, and yesterday planting trees. We must sow the seeds of beauty and justice. Only by doing both will we truly know the peace that passes understanding, only then will we dance with Wisdom and embody the peace of being at one with the sacred universe.

Amen.