

Creation 4C - Universe
Peace, Seattle
June 27, 2010 epk
Proverbs 8, Colossians 1

UNIVERSE

FRAME ~ ELDON

- On this final Sunday of this Season of Creation, we pull out our telescopes to behold a universe unimaginably more vast and complex than our wildest imaginations, where single galaxies exist composed of a trillion stars, and where peering at them through the night sky means peering back into the expanding universe's distant past in deep time.

TELESCOPIC LENS 1 ~ ERIK

- On a clear night, away from the glare of city lights, if you turn your gaze upward (as some of us will be doing at Holden Village this summer) you'll see, running roughly from north to south, that great river of stars we call the Milky Way, home to perhaps two hundred billion stars, and our Sun is just one of them.
- The nearest star to our Sun is Proxima Centauri. Traveling at 186,000 miles per second, it takes light from our Sun over 4 years¹ to reach that nearest neighbor.

TELESCOPIC LENS 2 ~ ELDON

- On the same scale, it takes 26,000 years for the light of our Sun to reach the central core of our home galaxy – the Milky Way.
- The next nearest spiral galaxy to our own, the Andromeda Galaxy, is 2 ½ million light years away and hosts an estimated 1 trillion – count them—TRILLION STARS.
- **Tools like the Hubble Telescope** have enabled us to look deep into the universe, and still, we've observed only the tiniest sliver of a fraction of the estimated 100 billion galaxies that exist beyond our own in this ever expanding, ever changing universe in which we find ourselves.²

THE "PALE BLUE DOT"³ ~ ERIK

- **This year marks the 20th anniversary of a famous space photograph that, at first glance, seems to show nothing at all.**
- But when you look closely at the dark canvass, you can just make out a tiny speck of light. That speck is the Earth, seen from nearly 4 billion miles away by the Voyager 1 spacecraft.
- **This was a picture of our Earth—as no human eye had ever seen it before**, and the reflection off the Voyager 1 as it took the photo makes it look as though the pale blue dot is suspended in a beam of light.
- **The Apollo astronauts** took photos that showed the Earth as a big blue marble, swirling with clouds and continents.⁴ But this picture shows the smallness of Earth in the vastness of space.

THE "PALE BLUE DOT" ~ ELDON

Astronomer Carl Sagan tried to express how he felt about this photo in his book *Pale Blue Dot*:⁵

"Look again at that dot," he writes. "That's here. That's home. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their

¹ 4.2 years.

² Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*. Based on his William Belden Nobel Lectures at Harvard. (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 2006).

³ The story of the "Pale Blue Dot" photo taken by the Voyager spacecraft is taken from an NPR story by [Nell Greenfieldboyce](#) entitled *An Alien View Of Earth*.

Go to: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123614938&ps=cprs>

⁴ Check out some of the Apollo photos, along with others, at: <http://www.spaceimages.com/earth.html>

⁵ *Pale Blue Dot*. Random House: New York, © 1994 Carl Sagan.

lives...every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, every hopeful child...every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

MICROSCOPIC LENS ~ ERIK

Let's shift for a moment, and exchange our telescope for a microscope...

- The human brain is by far the most complex physical object known to us in the entire cosmos.
- Of the roughly thirty-five thousand genes coded by DNA in the human genome, half are expressed in the brain.
- There are about 100 billion neurons in the brain, nerve cells intricately interconnected with each other.
- Each neuron connects with about 10,000 other neurons, so that the number of synaptic interconnections in a single human brain vastly exceeds the number of star in our Milky Way Galaxy.⁶

A NEW STORY OF COSMOS ~ ELDON

In his book, THE DREAM OF THE EARTH, Thomas Berry writes:

“We have lost our sense of courtesy toward the earth and its inhabitants.”

“We have no functional cosmology to guide and discipline our...knowledge and skill... We really do not understand the new story of the universe or its meaning.”⁷

- When measured against the deep time of a 13.7 billion year old universe, the human story on this planet we call home is very late to the stage.
- We are, (like) that PALE BLUE DOT suspended in the beam of light, a tiny speck in time.

OUR FAITH 1 ~ ERIK

Our faith affirms that within the vast spaces of the universe and the human story of countless generations, at a particular moment in time, God entered in Jesus.

- We don't look at humanity from the outside, from an abstract point of view, but from inside, from that single moment of Jesus' coming to our earth.
- Imagine Christ as the **Blue Dot** of human history, a light that informs not only all of human history but our personal history.
- This single event of Jesus defines our lives from birth to death, from baptism to a new creation.

OUR FAITH 2 ~ ELDON

- We look at our whole history and universe from the perspective of the event of Jesus' dying and rising—all our lives, our humanity, our creation, and our universe are wrapped around this single event human history.
- **Jesus is for our faith the Blue Dot lens to see the infinite mystery of the universe itself.**
- **The text from Colossians** calls us to focus, not as we usually do on the historical Jesus, his sayings, his deeds, the miracles and messages of his life, but rather on the event of his incarnation—his coming into human flesh, into our neighborhoods, into our world, into our universe.
- For by this same Jesus, Colossians claims, all things in the universe have come to birth, all things are ordered, and all things on earth and in heaven are reconciled to God.

⁶ 10¹⁵ synapses versus about 10¹¹ stars, in *God's Universe*, p. 29

⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) p. 2, pp. 111-112.

How do you talk about a divine Love so profound that, “THOUGH HE WAS IN THE FORM OF GOD, HE DID NOT EXPLOIT IT, BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF, TAKING THE FORM OF A SLAVE AND BECAME OBEDIENT TO DEATH ON A CROSS.” ? [Phil. 2:6-8]

How do you grasp Love like that?

THE GREAT EMERGENCE ~ ERIK

In her book The Great Emergence – church historian Phyllis Tickle suggests that...

- Every 500 years the Christian faith holds a rummage sale. It sorts through ideas that have accumulated over recent centuries.
- What seems to be extra baggage gets sent to the recycling center
- And what seems essential it preserves, poising itself for a new chapter.⁸
- We are now in the middle of one of those episodic rummage sales.

THE GREAT EMERGENCE ~ ELDON

- These rummage sales and church transitions seem to coincide with major historic cataclysms.
- In each era, the so-called Jesus question became different: what was his nature? How does Jesus reign in nations and empires? How does the church become the agent of the salvation Jesus brings? Or since the Reformation: How can I be saved?⁹

SALVATION ~ ERIK

- **Today, some are asking whether the question of individual human salvation is too narrow in scope for our age.**
- Perhaps over the past 500 years our theological microscope has been focused too narrowly on the human species while neglecting the fate of the Earth and its other inhabitants.
- Do “salvation” and “redemption” have a broader application in this emerging age?
- Is it possible to imagine Jesus as the redeemer of the whole cosmic order – a cosmos which, in the words of St. Paul, “waits with eager longing,” “groaning in labor pains” in anticipation of the complete healing and consummation of all God has promised in Jesus? [Romans 8:18-25]

SALVATION ~ ELDON

- **We are moving into an understanding of the universe we haven’t taken time to understand.**
- It is informed by sciences, yes, but primarily informed by the incarnation of Jesus.
- People are grappling with this in all sorts of theological and Biblical studies. And among us, there’s a sense that we’re at threshold of new ways of understanding faith, particularly the Jesus questions.
- We can’t resolve those questions this morning, it’s far too complex and there are no clear pathways, but we invite you to that threshold with us. A threshold to a new emergence.

IMPLICATIONS ~ ERIK

What are some of the implications of what we’ve been talking about over the past four weeks? What does this new emergence mean for you, for our community life? For our spiritual practices as a community? HERE ARE A FEW STARTING POINTS.

1. Vulnerability of God in Christ.

- The God we meet in Jesus is one who suffers in, with, and under creation—not above and beyond it.

⁸ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.) She builds on an image proffered by Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer. Brian McLaren in turn picks up this image in his book, *A New Kind of Christianity*. (New York: Harper One, 2010) p. 11.

⁹ Eldon Olson suggests that at these 500-year intervals paradigmatic shifts also hinge on questions regarding the nature and work of Jesus.

- God choose to enter the limits of human existence, and through Christ is fully present in created cosmos in a way that God could not have been present before becoming flesh.
- This self-emptying God intends for his reconciling work on the cross to reach every corner of the created realm. He beckons us to follow him into a future where he fills “all in all.” [Eph. 1:23]

IMPLICATIONS ~ ELDON

2. A world being birthed anew.

- As people of faith, we don't just talk about the universe as “evolving,” although there's nothing wrong with that image. The Biblical image is that the universe is “birthing.”
- Just as the human being is being birthed into a new creation, so is all of creation, the entire universe.
- What is happening in universe has to do with enfleshment of Jesus.

3. Ongoing wonder.

- We also speak of universe as being born anew in wonder; that there's a sense of daily wonder of ongoing process of creation/rebirth.
- This is how Luther talked about baptism: as a daily process of dying and rising.
- We, too, are called to this sense of wonder. When we see a sunset, and call to each other to come and look, even though we've experienced it a 1000 times, still it holds for us a sense of wonder. We could give a scientific description of it, analyze it, take it apart, but that's not where we go. Instead, we recognize that as we behold those oranges, reds, magenta, and yellow, something somehow is being birthed, and we say “LOOK AT THAT SUNSET!”
- What if we, with the same sense of wonder, were to say, “LOOK AT JESUS!”

IMPLICATIONS ~ Erik

We who have been re-birthed in Christ through the waters of baptism, believe there is something constant in the universe that reinterprets every single dimension of the cosmic realm.

This community, which gathers around bread and wine, water and Word, names that presence—that “blue dot.” We call it Jesus Christ.

How will we enter this new story to which Christ is summoning us?