

Pentecost 10B  
Peace, Seattle  
July 12, 2015  
Ephesians 1:3-14

## **A FIXED ORBIT AROUND GRACE**

**This Tuesday the New Horizons spacecraft, after traveling for 9 ½ years at a speed of nearly one million miles a day, will fly within 8,000 miles of Pluto and its largest moon Charon, a journey, all told, of over 3 billion miles.<sup>1</sup>**

Astronomers looking toward the outer reaches of our solar system have plenty of theories about what they'll find in this close encounter, but they fully expect to be surprised. With new data from New Horizons in hand, says lead investigator Alan Stern, "The Pluto we imagined will just go away like smoke."<sup>2</sup>

His team is placing bets on everything from Pluto's diameter, to the number of new moons, to the extent of its atmosphere, to whether there will be craters, canyons, or cryo-volcanoes there.

**"It's an amazingly rich system for such a small place," says astronomer John Spencer, "and probably a lot of what we think we know is wrong."<sup>3</sup>**

It's hoped that this expedition through the Kuiper Belt, to Pluto, and beyond will help answer critical questions about the role Jupiter and Saturn had in sculpting the early solar system.

Over the last two centuries physicists have been on a quest for the ultimate unifying theory—a single, all-encompassing, coherent framework that could fully explain all physical aspects of the universe.

From Albert Einstein in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to Stephen Hawking in the early 21<sup>st</sup>, they've tried in vain to come up with a single, overarching theory that would explain the existence of everything.

Some scientists are convinced the quest is impossible. Others believe an explanation that unravels the complexities of the material Universe, as we know it, is only a matter of time.

**There's something within the human species that keeps us striving for language to explain how things work, where we come from, and what the ultimate fate of our Universe is.**

**Today in our reading from Ephesians we hear a theological response to these questions:  
With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will,  
according to God's good pleasure set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time,  
to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.**

**The universe, says Paul, is not impersonal but personal; not accidental but purposeful.**

**The Author of life—who chose us "before the foundation of the world" to be whole and holy emblems of love<sup>4</sup>—has revealed the mystery of his will in Jesus: to pull the whole universe into an unceasing orbit around the gravitational center of God's lavish grace.**

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<sup>1</sup> To read more about the expedition, go to: <http://a.msn.com/01/en-us/AAcWAAR?ocid=se=>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in an article by Nadia Drake in the July 15, 2015 edition of *National Geographic Magazine*.

<sup>3</sup> Op cit. Quote from John Spencer of the Southwest Research Institute, in an article by Nadia Drake in the July 15, 2015 edition of *National Geographic Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the language here comes from Eugene Peterson's translation of this passage in *The Message*.

## **Through Jesus, our adoption, our identity, our destiny are assured.**

At times, the New Testament letters address very specific situations in very specific communities. That's what happens in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, for example, and in Thessalonians, Philipians, and James.

On those occasions Paul and other writers address specific contexts—and sometimes even specific individuals—with words meant to encourage, exhort, warn, or call them back to faithful living.

But at other times, the authors portray with the broadest strokes imaginable, the great sweep of God's salvation trajectory. That's what's going on in these opening verses from Ephesians.

### **God has a plan that's as big as the universe and yet as specific as each individual person.**

That plan, born of grace, is that we would be adopted as God's very own, brought into a faithful orbit through Christ Jesus.

**This destiny, our passage says, isn't just about us; it's not just about the human experience. God intends to gather up ALL THINGS—THINGS SEEN AND UNSEEN, THINGS IN HEAVEN AND THINGS ON EARTH—into this cosmic embrace. Yes this, the writer of Ephesians says, this is where we're headed.**

**But God's timeline isn't our timeline. And that's what can make it so hard, at times.**

**Sometimes, progress toward a goal is measured in seconds and sometimes it's measured in days. Sometimes, progress is measured in months and sometimes in decades.**

**But sometimes, progress toward a goal is not measured on any human scale at all.**

- The time it took the Colorado River to carve the Grand Canyon.
- The time it took the Cascade Range to reach its present height.
- The time it took the scattered debris from exploding stars to coalesce into the planets that form our solar system.

**Oh how we wish that God would abandon this infernally slow timeline and adopt ours instead!**

**Enter Pierre Teilhard De Chardin** (1881-1955), Jesuit theologian, philosopher, geologist and paleontologist, who combined his knowledge of the earth's origins, and his studies of early humans with his faith in a divine Creator, and along the way produced some of the most imaginative and forward thinking theology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**De Chardin once wrote:**

“Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new...

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”

**Above all, trust in the slow work of God. If Chardin is right, God is not the least in a hurry.**

**Sometimes, we become so focused on our own stuff**; what's working and what's not working in life: health, job, parenting, marriage, you name it...sometimes we get so caught up with our own stuff that we can't see beyond our needs, our concerns, our navels.

It's not that these are legitimate areas of attention—they certainly are!

But at times like these, we need to be reminded that there's a deeper and higher purpose unfolding in our lives and in our world, and even though we don't know precisely how its all going to work out, we are called to TRUST that God is present and at work in and with and under and through it all.

**How do you get to that place where your eyes focus less on here (down) and more on here? (up)  
Where do you go for the balcony view?**

For some a trip to the ocean does it, for others climbing a mountain, or going on pilgrimage of sorts. For me, going to a place where I can behold the constellations of the Milky Way in all their glory always helps.

Whatever your method of lifting your head up, of getting up to the balcony, this is the view—the place—Ephesians is trying to take us this morning—this is what God wants us never to forget it.

**God knows that we need something solid, something we can taste and feel and touch, to confirm the hope within us.**

**And when we come to the Lord's Supper we receive it**—tangible gifts of creation which, when we consume them, have the power to bring us back to center again around the God who gathers us and all things into his wide and compassionate embrace.

**This orbit is where we all belong. This is home.**

**God is most decidedly patient with the unfolding of this vast universe. And God is also patient with you and with me.**

**We have no idea how many eons lay ahead of us, but the witness of Scripture is that the Universe is moving toward a goal, a "telos", and that this end, finally, is seeded with hope.**

Amen.

HYMN: Eternal Rule of the Ceaseless Round