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With everything else going on in our world, it was easy to miss a significant anniversary that came and went last month—the 35th ANNIVERSARY of a photograph from SPACE that, at first glance, seems to show nothing at all.

But if 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.[1]

This was Earth—our Earth—as no human eye had ever seen it…
and what's more, an accidental reflection off of the Voyager 1 spacecraft as it took the photo made it look as though the PALE BLUE DOT was being lit up by a glowing beam of light.

Apollo astronauts had taken photos showing Earth as a big blue marble, swirling with clouds and continents.[2] But this picture showed the smallness of Earth in the vastness of space.

Astronomer Carl Sagan expressed how he felt about this photo in his book *Pale Blue Dot*:

> Look again at that dot, writes Sagan. That's here. That's home. That's us.
> On it everyone you love, everyone you know… every human being who ever was, lived out their lives…every hunter and forager…every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. [3]

When—amid all the stars and galaxies and planets that make up this vast universe—God gazes upon Earth, does God see our incredibly fragile vulnerability?
This view of our Earth home is light-years beyond what our ancestors could have imagined. And even we, seeing it with our own eyes, find it hard to grasp, for the very reasons Sagan suggests.

It's a perspective, one might think, that has the potential to change everything by revealing how infinitesimally small our planet truly is—against the backdrop of a DARK VOID that goes on forever.

But that potential has yet to be realized. And until it is, we will continue to divvy up the PALE BLUE DOT, to go to war over little fiefdoms,
over what belongs to whom, and who should be in charge.

By so many measures, in so many ways, our world is out of balance.

- Foundations that once were solid are being shaken.
- Institutions that cultivated trust and hope here at home and around the world are being torn down, their leaders sacked, their life's work thrown on the trash heap.

And the swiftness and scale of it all is beyond imagining.

The RHETORIC is hardening; the GULF between former friends and allies is widening; and FEAR seeks to seize the wheel and steer us away from the "better angels of our nature" toward a self-centered and greedy idolatry.

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[1] The story of the "Pale Blue Dot" photo taken by the Voyager spacecraft 2.14.1990, is excerted 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
[2] Check out some of the Apollo photos, along with outers, at: http://www.spaceimages.com/earth.html
[3] *Pale Blue Dot.* Random House: New York, © 1994 Carl Sagan.

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In their book on leadership, Martin Linsky and Ronald Heifetz speak of the importance of gaining a "BALCONY VIEW." Of getting off the dance floor of work or life to gain a perspective above it, from THE BALCONY, where you can view patterns and relationships that simply aren't apparent when you're down on the floor engaged in the flow of the dance.[4]

THE PHOTO OF EARTH AS A PALE BLUE DOT SUSPENDED IN A BEAM OF LIGHT IS THE ULTIMATE BALCONY VIEW!

When Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain with him to pray that day, I wonder if he wasn't trying to give them a BALCONY VIEW?

On the mountain they became party to a vision of Jesus bathed in a light-beam of his own, and they found themselves speechless.

After that experience—after seeing what they saw and hearing what they heard—Luke tells us, they could find no words to describe what had happened:

AND THEY KEPT SILENT AND IN THOSE DAYS AND TOLD NO ONE
ANY OF THE THINGS THEY HAD SEEN.

How do you talk about things for which there are no words?
How do you talk about experiences when no language exists to describe it?

How do you talk about a Love so immense and so committed, that it declared:

I'LL MAKE MYSELF SMALL ENOUGH TO LIVE ON THAT PALE BLUE DOT.

…a Love so profound that it emptied itself, and became obedient even to the point of death on a cross."

How do you grasp LOVE like that? We can't…but we try anyway…
we tell stories...we bear witness to stories.

Last Tuesday a handful of us from Peace were on site at US District Court to hear arguments on the legality of an executive order halting the country's refugee resettlement program and freezing funds that support refugees— an order that's been nothing short of catastrophic.

At the end of the hearing Judge Jamal Whitehead granted a preliminary injunction blocking the executive order—a hopeful victory amid the flood of bad news.

One of the speakers in the press conference afterward was Rev. Emillie Binja.

Emillie was 8 years old when her family fled political persecution in Congo. After spending more than 16 years in Uganda going through the grueling refugee admissions program, Emillie arrived in the US the day before Trump's first inauguration.

"I don't think people actually understand what people have gone through all those years," Emillie told us on the steps of the Court building. Dreams erased. Education forgone. Emillie is now a US citizen, and an ELCA pastor serving at Creator Lutheran Church in Oregon.

[4] *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading.* [Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.]

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In Luke's telling of the Transfiguration story, there's one symbol that stands out for me—the great CLOUD that envelops the mountain and strikes terror into the hearts of the disciples.

Now a CLOUD is one of the older symbols of God's presence in the Scriptures.
- It was God's presence in the CLOUD that greeted the newly freed slaves from Egypt as they received the covenant at Mt. Sinai.
- And it was God's presence in the CLOUD that guided and accompanied the Hebrew children as journeyed through the wilderness.

By obscuring God, the CLOUD preserves the mystery; but it also protects the people from being overwhelmed by the Divine Presence which is beyond their ken and ability to survive if they saw GOD face to face.

But why this symbol today on Transfiguration Sunday?
Why, at the culmination of the season when we've celebrated Jesus as the Light of the world, do we end up in the clouds?

Perhaps St. Paul said it best, "Now we see dimly, then we will see face to face; now we know in part, then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known."

There are mysteries in our relationship with God that we simply cannot unravel. There are experiences and questions that defy our ability to understand.

When the cloud settles in rather than clears, those mysteries are deepened.

But these mysteries in and of themselves do not and should not keep us from living and acting in the faith that God still accompanies us and wills our good!

God's CALL to each one of us who reside on this PALE BLUE DOT is clear:
DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS, WALK HUMBLY WITH ME.

We all are voyagers together on that tiny speck of blue light suspended in the darkness. And we are not alone.

When God gazes upon Earth, among all the stars and galaxies and worlds that make up this vast universe, God beholds our incredible, fragile vulnerability.

And holding it, and holding us, fully and firmly in his hands, God says:
I LOVE YOU… YOU ARE NOT ALONE…
ABIDE IN MY LOVE… REACH WITH MY LOVE…
AND ALL WILL BE WELL, and ALL MANNER OF THINGS WILL BE WELL.

Amen.