

Pentecost 20B Creation Sunday: Hosea 4:1-4, Job 38:1-7, Psalm 104:1-25, Colossians 1:15-20, Mark 10:35-45

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Be in awe and wonder as we love and serve creation.

You remember Muhammad Ali—the boxer, the greatest. He said, "I float like a butterfly, I sting like a bee." The story is told of Muhammad Ali on an airplane one day. As they were about to take off, the flight attendant said, "Sir, would you fasten your seat belt?" Muhammad Ali replied, "Superman doesn't need any seat belt." The flight attendant looked at him and said, "Superman doesn't need any airplane. Would you please fasten your seat belt?" The story of humanity and the universe is a bit like Muhammad Ali and the flight attendant. As a whole, human beings generally think they are a lot more important and god like than they really are.

Here are some facts about this amazing thing called creation. Now I love this stuff. Let's see what you make of it!

Our galaxy has approximately 250 billion stars and it is estimated by astronomers that there are 100 billion other galaxies in the universe. There are actually more stars in the universe than all of the grains of sand on earth. Here is another one - the Earth is rotating on its axis at a rate of 460 metres per second at the equator, and is orbiting the sun at a rate of about 30 kilometres per second (that's 108,000 Kilometres an hour). The sun is orbiting the centre of the Milky Way at a rate of about 220 kilometres per second. The Milky Way is moving at a speed of about 1000 kilometres per second towards a region of space 150 million light years away called the Great Attractor. We are literally flying through space at a break neck speed.

Also, the matter in the universe is so thinly dispersed that the universe can be compared with a building twenty miles long, twenty miles wide, and twenty miles high, containing only a single grain of sand. All of the matter in this immense universe is minuscule compared with the amount of space. Not only that about 25% of the universe consists of "dark matter", and about 70% consists of "dark energy", leaving only about 5% of the universe visible to us. That's only 5% that we can see.

And finally many cosmologists suspect that this universe we are in is only one of countless other universes. They think there might be parallel or multi-universes.

At this point we can end up feeling completely overwhelmed by these numbers. They become both meaningless and they can make us feel absolutely insignificant. Who are we in this vast immense universe? As the psalmist says, "Who are we Lord, that you are mindful of us?"

The universe so immense, so amazing and there is so much we will never know. That's why we chose a black background for the altar piece – the universe is ultimately a mystery. Even our best calculations are built on theories and guesses. As Stephen Hawking wrote in 1988, "What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?" That "there is something instead of nothing" is the fundamental question.

I now want to move from facts about the universe to just some facts about this planet we call home. Taking all the known scientific facts about the universe into account it has been said that the chances of there arising life at all is almost impossible. The conditions for life to arise on earth had to be exact. Surface gravity, the bonding of water molecules, the age of the sun and its colour, the thickness of the earth's crust, the magnetic field, the axial tilt, the ratio of carbon dioxide to water vapour in the atmosphere are just some things that have to be just right for life to emerge and continue to exist.

Now I am not trying to build an argument for the existence of a creator God. I am trying to build a case for awe, wonder and humility. It is the wonder and splendour of creation that God uses as his clinch all answer in the debate with Job. Job and his friends have been discussing and arguing, tying themselves in existential knots, and God's voice comes out of the whirlwind "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God then goes on to list the mysteries of all the cosmic delights and wonders he alone can comprehend. Even if God's answer is still unsatisfying on some level at the very least it should make us stop and think.

I wonder who are we really? Who are we to manipulate and control nature? Who are we to use this planet for our selfish drives to possess and control more and more? Do we really think we know enough to split atoms and splice genes? Do we really know what we are doing when we fill space with metal objects, bleed the depths of the earth of all minerals, rocks, and ground water, pollute the skies and waters with toxic waste and plant a flag on the moon as if human beings owned creation to do with what they wished?

It has become fashionable to blame the way we dominate nature in our age on our Greek and Judaeo-Christian roots. Yet no one in these earlier traditions would have predicted that we would interpret the texts of these traditions the way we do. For instance, none of the Hebrews would have guessed that the “message” of the creation story in Genesis 1 would have been heard by the movers and stompers of our age as: “In the beginning God formed a big ball of raw material. On the sixth day He put humans on the Earth and said, ‘I didn't quite finish the job. Have at it! I hate to see it go to waste. Build! Reshape it. Develop it into something.’ We are developing it into something and the possibilities before us look dire.

I'd like to read you a quote from the theologian Mark Wallace:

We face today a crisis of unimaginable proportions. Whether through slow and steady environmental degradation or the sudden exchange of nuclear weapons, the specter of ecocide haunts all human and nonhuman life that shares the resources of our planet home. Many of us have become numb to profiles of the crisis - acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, food chain pesticides, soil erosion, consumption of nonrenewable fossil fuels, oil spills, agricultural runoff, radioactive wastes, overpopulation, deforestation and desertification, carbon emissions, and loss of habitat.³ In our time, nature has been commodified and domesticated-like a piece of real estate or a consumer item that is bought and sold in order to maximize profits. Nature no longer functions as wild and sacred space for the eruption of the sublime or the manifestation of transcendence. We have exchanged the power and mystery of the earth for the invisible hand of the marketplace, and we are all the poorer for it. We are indeed the poorer for it. Perhaps more importantly it is the future generations who will be most effected –in ways we cannot yet imagine.

Perhaps it is our lack of imagination that gets us into the most trouble. A lack of imagination was something Jesus confronted in his followers all the time. In today's Gospel John and James present him with a request. “Could they sit at his left and right hand when he is seated on the throne of the Kingdom”. His answer to his listeners does two things. It asks them to really imagine what that would look like and he presents them what leadership is really about. It is about service.

Human beings have been given great power yet the only God given way to use that power is in the service of others. If we take the covenants of Genesis into account then that means the service of creation as well. How can we here in Canberra best serve creation? As we look at the universe, if we really look at it, then the only way to care would seem to be in a constant state of awe, wonder and humility. What is it that we can do that will help heal and rejuvenate our earth? Well the good news is a hell of a lot. That is the thing with the God

given power we have – we can actually make a difference. Yet the power we exercise belongs to God. When we say yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory we are stating that God is God, not us, and that we recognize this relationship with him.

In closing I'd like to encourage us to do three things:

The first is to spend some time soaking up the wonder and beauty of creation. When was the last time you looked at the stars or hugged a tree? Do it at night so no one notices!

The second is to praise and thank God for the gift of creation in all its diversity and richness.

And finally, the last one is to find just one thing you can do this week that will help make a difference to the wellbeing of our planet. The list is endless. In the bulletin is a sheet with just a few suggestions for what we can do about the current climate crisis.

As we come to the Lord's table let us lift up our hearts and minds in thanksgiving, let us share in the bread and wine, let us share in the goodness of creation and let us remember the example of Jesus Christ who showed us that service and sacrifice was the path to salvation for all. Amen