

Universe Sunday (16Oct16)

Proverbs8:22-31;

Colossians1:15-20;

Psalm8;

John6:41-51

I invite you to pause for a moment and really appreciate where you are. Yes in church, in Madison. But also appreciate the wood of the chair you're sitting on and light shining at you, in from windows and down from electricity. Appreciate your surroundings in air you're breathing, how it smells, how it tastes. And your surroundings in the clothes on your skin and how they've come to you. Appreciate those gathered around you, and the trees and sky and soil surrounding you.

Now change your thought. Instead of attention to being here, picture the farthest place away from here you've ever been. You may think of another country, or another geography, or another time and era. Recall how the people were different, and the birds you didn't recognize, the weather that was unusual, or even how the stars didn't give your typical bearings.

And if that place seems far away, then think about this detail: six months ago, at the time we were celebrating Easter and resurrection, you were about 186 million miles away from here. That was when, even if in this same sanctuary, you were located far away on the opposite side of the sun.

But even if as the earth zips along its orbit at 66,000 miles per hour you're passing the time waiting for next year to be back to that same location, still you'll be someplace new, as our solar system goes hurtling within the spiraling arms of our neighborhood in the Milky Way galaxy at 483,000 miles per hour. And we won't complete that trip of rotation around the galactic year for another 225 million of our years.

But even then you wouldn't be back to an original location, because the whole of the universe has continued expanding in the 13.8 or so billion years since the Big Bang, meaning our galaxy is flying away (wherever that outward may be or lead) at maybe 1.3 million miles per hour.

That's a lot of enormous numbers, if you're trying to keep up with the math. These distances end up measured not by MPH but in lightyears, which are unbelievably great, since light moves at 186,000 miles *per second*, so the distance over a year is about 6 trillion miles. Yet the shape of this unfathomable scale could still be summed up in a Monty Python song<sup>1</sup>, so we need to dig deeper. For that, we could say that you've covered a lot of territory in your life, but "territory" is still an earthbound word, for the *terra firma* of land. We don't want to say that you take up a lot of space.

So how about thinking of it this way: for the promise of resurrection to keep up with you since that Easter six months ago, the Holy Spirit has had to fly after and keep trying to alight on you against the stiff breeze of million mile an hour solar winds and cosmic radiation. Or as our group prepares to travel to the Holy Land, we realize we can never go back to the Jerusalem or Bethlehem of Jesus, which would require reversing the spacetime continuum. Yet we must confess Jesus continues forward, not only the Lord of what has gone past but also the fullness of what's to come. More on the expanse of his cosmic domain momentarily.

First a wayside rest on our trajectory from your very specific life on earth to this Lord who is somehow responsible for and committed to the nearly infinite swaths of space. Let's pause for some perspective at our nearest star, the sun. See, there's been a sense for a couple

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<sup>1</sup> Galaxy Song, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23Dm7sQICIE> (viewer discretion, please)

hundred years that nature is “red in tooth and claw,” with survival of the fittest. Either that makes God our Creator a brute or else it plain doesn’t square with a Lord who was willing to die on the cross, emptying himself in love, in which case nature “shrieks against [the] creed” for those “who trusted God was love indeed.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet we need not be distracted by what goes violently wrong and may still trust love as the shape and goal of the universe. With our detour past the sun, as David Keesey-Berg reminded me with an excerpt from cosmologist author Brian Swimme,<sup>3</sup> the sun gives 4 million tons of itself every second for our life, fulfilling its purpose for a time in using up and sacrificing for our warmth and light and photosynthesis creating food. And through death and re-birth, stellar fusion creates the elements that make up our bodies. From the generosity of the self-giving sun, we see the shape of life not merely or even mostly in competition but as a symbiosis, sharing, life together, in relationship.

If we trust this is the Wisdom that has been present since before worlds began, we should be able to identify such fingerprints as godly indicators.

But the harder trust, the more incredible sense, is to forecast that into the future, not only of origins but also of destinations, of goals. That requires the language of redemption, which the writer of Colossians understood must be true on a cosmic scale to be true at all.

Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran professor, gave a famous speech at a World Council of Churches gathering in New Delhi 55 years ago in which he proclaimed with Colossians that some views are too small, with the error (he said) of “assum[ing] that there were ‘thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities’ which have a life and power apart from Christ, [assuming] that

the real world was a dualism, one part of which (and that part ensconcing the power of evil) was not subject to the Lordship of the Creator in Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Sittler highlights how Colossians won’t back down, though, emphasizing “all things” six times in these few verses. Sittler even says, in the aftershock of hydrogen bombs, that “When atoms are disposable to the ultimate hurt then the very atoms must be reclaimed for God and [God’s] will.”<sup>5</sup> From the microscopic to the vastest unimaginable scale, this proclamation can leave nothing out.

So to be your redeemer and Lord, Jesus must be able to redeem you from your wrongs and sins, be able to redeem and restore fractured relationships, must offer salvation from illnesses and death. His message of resurrection much chase you through the stars and across the galaxy, and it must include not just small personal moments of human trust and doubt, of justice versus evil, of worries and endings, but must also include the eventual fate of the whole cosmos, or else it can’t be true.

So the instances of interactions with our life simply must be everywhere. Trusting this fullness and Wisdom of Christ as Lord of all, for example, we note that he is Lord of our finances and schedules, as we attend to especially in this time of stewardship. But it’s not just the microeconomics of families, but the macroeconomics of this household of earth. So his lordship must also include banks that steal from customers and fail in their role even as they’re too big to fail and he must redeem them and us from their failure. And the lordship of Jesus must redeem us from commercial capitalism that tries to convince us comfort and convenience are our kings and queens. And his lordship may not leave out poverty that

<sup>2</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “In Memoriam A.H.H.” canto LVI

<sup>3</sup> *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* p39

<sup>4</sup> “Called to Unity” speech, see p178 reprinted here

<http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> p184

neglects wages and welfare and sustenance and even the very existence of vast percentages of people. He must be Lord for the whole economic system that pretends it can persist in depleting a finite earth.

With Professor Sittler, we must once again proclaim that he is Lord of the sad, disgusting politics we face right now, not just in claiming votes of those who believe a candidate is chosen by or represents God, but Jesus is somehow redeeming even those who are deemed irredeemable, since no rulers or powers are outside his reach.

In another separate aspect of his same realm, Jesus is Lord of zoology and climatology, as we've noticed better in recent weeks of this Season of Creation, delighting in beastly monsters and abundant non-human fauna, and commanding even the weather. So, again, Jesus must be Lord not only of sunsets over serene mountain lakes but also in redeeming toxic waste and bringing good, raising new life from landfills.

Jesus is Lord not just of morality and ethics, as is most often the presumption of the religious, not just for the innermost contemplation that guides future motives, but also Lord of the nebulae and galactic clusters farther away than our best telescopes can peer into the past. And as Lord, he must be expected to bring newness not only out of supernovas but also somehow to pull life out of black holes and the cold, lonely distance of expanding entropy.

This Lord Jesus came because God so loved the world, God so loved the cosmos (with that original Greek word), and—should we discover realities beyond ours—God so loves the multiverse.

He came down from heaven, as he says in John. We needn't hold that as someplace up above the sky, beyond space. We might simply

say from whatever is separated from us, Jesus came here, to what we know of life, came to it all, even if we only know it in part, only dimly. He is yet a Lord whose ways are higher than our ways, but simultaneously a Lord who is near and not far off, whose reign encompasses the immensity of this universe we claim, a Lord before anything else existed (as Proverbs reminds) and is Lord of "all things" as Colossians reiterates, and this Lord Jesus is for you, abiding with you and reconciling you and dying for you and giving you himself so that on the last day—whatever that means and whatever we expect—on that day he will give you life.