

THE MAJESTY AND GLORY OF GOD THE CREATOR

East Plains, Sept. 1, 2019

Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 19; John 1:1-5, 14.

“Summer time, and the livin' is easy.” Well, at least there is at least a little bit of summer left.

It's that wonderful time of year when we feel close to nature - windows wide open, digging in our gardens, barbequing and eating in the back yard, walking in the woods, maybe playing golf, basking on the beach.

People often say they feel closer to God when they are close to nature:

One guy, who never came to church in the summer, said to me, “I feel closer to God on the golf course.” Though I'm not a golfer, I can understand that.

Others say they feel closer to God gazing at a sunset, or a tiny exquisite flower, or the crashing of the sea on a rocky shoreline.

This is what the Psalmist felt, all those centuries ago when he said: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the vault of the sky reveals God's handiwork.”

My wife Pat once wrote in a little booklet: “Watch the sun on a crystal of snow, the glitter of stars in a night sky. Look at the tiny fingernails of a new baby. You might say that God wrote a magnificent poem and called it “creation.”

So it's a common experience that the splendours of nature offer a glimpse into the majesty and glory of God.

In Genesis 1 the Bible opens with grand words: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

And the Apostles' creed from the ancient church, which will be recited this morning by the Anglicans and Catholics down the street: They declare every Sunday their faith in the Creator in these words: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.”

The United Church still acknowledges the Apostles' Creed, but our new creed puts it a little differently, reflecting our modern sensibilities: “We are not alone. We live in God's world. We believe in God, who has created and is creating.”

In other words, God's creation didn't stop billions of years ago. God's creative activity is ongoing. Many years ago someone wrote a book called “Your God is too small.”

In our time, even more than in earlier centuries, we realize the unimaginable greatness of God.

But when we hear what the scientists tell us about the immensity of the universe, well, we may be enthralled, or we may be totally intimidated.

We've learned that the planet Earth is but a tiny speck of dust, a medium sized planet, among several others, rotating around our sun, our star.

We happen to be just exactly the right distance from our star, so that life can thrive here, as it does not on the other planets of our solar system. We are the “goldilocks planet.” Like the porridge of the three bears: Not too hot, not too cold.

According to a little research I did, the Milky Way galaxy, of which our solar system is a tiny part, consists of between 200 and 400 billion stars or suns. No one can count them. It's an estimate.

That's just our little galaxy, - at least 200 billion stars or suns. But our Milky Way galaxy is one of many observable galaxies! And we have no idea what lies beyond the scope of the largest telescopes.

The immensity of it is inconceivable. We cannot begin to grasp it.

Somebody said to me once, that he didn't believe in God because one man couldn't have made all that.

I could only say, “Your God is too small.” We may say that “God is our Father,” but God is not literally a man, and not a woman either. Not a person like us.

We say “God is Spirit.” Though God is not a person like us, God is also not a blind force. Not something less than us. No, God must be personal, - in the sense that God is mindful, purposeful and intelligent, capable of communicating, capable of loving. But in a way beyond our imagining.

Sometimes we suspect God is impersonal. Because God's creation behaves in such an impersonal way. The laws which govern the weather, the chemical and physical laws that govern our bodies, do not behave in ways that are convenient to us.

What we call the laws of nature, you might say the rational order of the world, sometimes seems relentless, and indifferent to us.

But the very order and dependability of nature's laws are a sign of God's majesty. The Creator has not arranged things just to suit me, or you.

We may need to expand and deepen our concept of the Eternal One, the Infinite One. All our language falls short when we try to speak of the Creator. We find we can speak only in poetry and metaphors.

Metaphors that say God is Spirit or Wind, God is our Father or Mother, God is a Mighty Rock, God is a Consuming Fire. All true, but a kind of baby talk, all inadequate human ways to speak of the ineffable, the indescribable.

Our most recent official statement of faith in the United Church says that “God is holy mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description.”

And so we have to speak of the majestic God as One whose greatness and power reduces us to silence. .

Now if we believe in the majesty and glory of God the Creator, we do not worship nature. The realm of nature is magnificent beyond measure, but it is not God.

Yes, as the biblical tradition sees it, God is in all things, but creation itself is not God.

The realm of nature, of which we are part, is mortal and finite. It had a beginning, and will have an end. It is subject to violence, decay and death.

Natural events, like hurricanes, for example, are not “acts of God.” In our Hebraic/Christian tradition. God transcends nature.

But how can we connect our biblical faith in God as Creator to our modern scientific knowledge of creation?.

Doesn't science tell us that everything got started about 14 billion years ago, give or take a few hundred million, with the so-called Big Bang? Astronomers have discovered that the universe is still expanding from that original gargantuan explosion.

This is the prevailing scientific theory about the origin of the material universe. It seems to be the consensus agreement of the scientists who specialize in astronomy, physics and cosmology.

They say that time and space, and matter and energy, had a beginning in that initial explosion.

At the level of science this is fascinating; it describes, in a fashion, what happened at the beginning.

The scientific theory describes, but really explains nothing. It tells us nothing about why it happened, nothing about why anything exists at all, or why we exist at all.

If the realm of matter as we know it, had a beginning, we still have to ask: What brought about that beginning, and why.

According to our faith, it is the eternal God who undergirds all the things that come to be and that pass away. God creates out of love, and for the sake of love.

Creation, in all its glory and beauty, has burst forth out of the rich fertility of God's eternal Being.

Matter as such is finite. When matter, as we know it, no longer exists, when the last star burns itself out, the eternity of God remains.

The point about God as Creator is that God has no beginning and no end. God IS the beginning and the end. The Alpha and the Omega, as the Bible tells us, the A and the Z. Remember: The visible symbol of eternity is the circle. No beginning, no end.

This is basic to our faith: The eternal God is the Source of all power and energy. The Ground of all Being.

Now I know that sometimes God seems irrelevant. We sometimes feel we can get along fine without God. God can seem to have no practical, pragmatic relevance to our everyday problems. I can feel that way myself sometimes.

But if God is God, then God is absolutely relevant. Nothing could ever be as important as God. If God becomes peripheral, or optional in our lives, that means that God is NOT our God. That something else has become our God.

For believers, God the Creator is the rock on which we stand, the foundation on which we build our lives. It's God who gives life meaning. God is our Source, and our ultimate destiny.

There is a certain comfort and security to be found in the eternity of God. As the hymn says, "Death and decay in all around I see. O thou who changest not, abide with me."

Consider what it would mean if there were no God. It would mean that the whole universe, and our little lives within it, would be finally meaningless, just an accident. The whole world has come from nowhere, and is going nowhere.

But God the Creator is real. Therefore, our lives do mean something. They've come from somewhere, and are going somewhere.

Now, it's not only the immensity of space but the vastness of time that can enthrall us, or intimidate us.

It's about 14 billion years since that so-called 'Big Bang', and about 4.5 billions of years since the formation of this planet Earth. Millions of years since the dinosaurs and before that, the first fish, birds and mammals.

What about us human beings? About 200,000 years is the most recent estimate of the age of humanity. That is, humans like us, so-called homo sapiens.

Human beings, like us, have been walking around this planet - eating, drinking, working, playing, loving, worshiping, praying - for about 200,000 years. To us, finite little creatures, it seems like a long time, but....

Compared to 4.5 billion for the planet Earth, we humans are 'johnnie come latelies.' We are a recent phenomenon on this old planet. When I was in Sunday School, I asked my teacher: What took God so long to get around to creating us?

Good question. My Sunday School teacher seemed annoyed that I would ask such a disrespectful question. I've never got a fully adequate answer.

But keep in mind that, if God is eternal, God's time must be very different than time is for us. One of our hymns says: "A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone."

Presumably, for the Eternal One, time is not a succession of hours and days, years and centuries, as it is for us. From God's perspective, a few thousand years is but a blink of the eye.

These are humbling thoughts. It can make you feel very small and insignificant. It can also fill us with awe at the majesty of the Creator.

Now, as we all know, it's now common knowledge that human beings derived, genetically, from the evolutionary process that operates in the whole world.

Some people think that the whole fact of evolution refutes the existence of a Creator.

They say it's the process of evolution that created us, that we descended from ancestors of our cousins, the apes. Therefore, no need for the hypothesis of God.

But again, I have to say: If there's no room in your concept of God for evolution, then "Your God is too small." As our creed says, "God has created and is creating."

The creative power and energy of God continues to breathe and pulse through all things, including the process of evolution.

In the Bible God is thought of metaphorically as Spirit, - Wind or Breath, blowing within creation. God is not only beyond creation, as Creator, but lives within the created order, and even within us.

If God is infinite and eternal, then God is not confined to "Heaven," not locked up somewhere up above, but universally present. And universally at work, preserving and sustaining the whole creation.

True enough, God is beyond us, as when Jesus says, "Our Father who art in heaven." God dwells beyond us – we might say, for lack of better words, "in another dimension."

But we can think of God as not far away – not millions of miles up in the sky somewhere, but very close to us, all around us, even inside us.

We may think of the Spirit of God as the inner intelligence of the universe. It's no accident that beautiful, complex creatures, including ourselves, have evolved, out of that original great explosion.

That original Big Bang that came forth from God's eternal Being, was enormously fertile for the development of life, and intelligence, and order, and beauty. From the very beginning, creation was pregnant with us, our amazing humanity, our intelligence, our spirituality, our music, our technology and science. The source of all this is majestic indeed.

So never think that science refutes God. We don't need to choose between God and science.

Now I'm afraid this concept of God I've been spelling out may seem rather abstract and theoretical.

This immense power, this ultimate Mystery, beyond our comprehension – it seems to have very little to do with our little lives, very far away from our personal joys and struggles.

But this is really the amazing thing about our gospel. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is telling us that this majestic Creator has sought to communicate with us little creatures.

This Ground of all Being, this infinite Eternal One, actually loves us as God's own, dear children. We are, perhaps, God's most wonderful creations, made in God's own image. The gospel is telling us that God loves each and every one of us. Everyone of us is precious.

This is not so hard to believe. We love our own children, don't we, passionately and without condition. So also God our Creator loves us. And God seeks to communicate with us and to show this love.

And this is what is revealed in Jesus.

John's gospel, from which we read this morning, tells us that Jesus Christ is God's Word to us.

He means not just Jesus' words or teaching. He means the whole Christ Event – his life, his teaching and deeds; his death on the Cross, his resurrection. The whole event of Jesus Christ is God's message to us. God's message of love.

In Jesus, the majestic, incomprehensible Lord of the universe reaches down and becomes small for us.

It may be difficult to relate to the majestic Creator, but we can relate to Jesus, a human being like us, who laughed and wept, enjoyed life, but also suffered and died, like us.

The gospel tells us that Jesus is God's Word to us. Or, to put it differently, Jesus is our window into God.

Looking through the window that is Jesus, we discover God's purpose and will for us, God's promise to us. John says: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory."

Glory! The glory of God! It's there to be seen in Jesus.

The Old Testament already spoke of the glory of God long before Jesus. As the Psalmist said, "The heavens declare the glory of God...."

But here John declares that the true glory of God is most perfectly revealed in Jesus.

You see, it's not sheer power that we worship. We don't worship God because God is the most powerful, the most forceful of all Beings. We don't just bow and scrape before some almighty tyrant.

We don't just worship Bigness and Power. The God we worship is the God who is Love. We'll never know this love of God by looking out at the Milky Way. Or from the sunset, or the forests or the flowers. No, we know this through Jesus.

Do you think that God is unable to be among us personally in and through a human being like us? Do you think that the Creator Spirit cannot live around us and within us?

Why not? Do you think God cannot communicate with us, cannot know us personally? Consider carefully. Perhaps your concept of God is too small.

The Creator, whose majesty and glory is beyond all comprehension, is the holy One whom we can love and worship from the heart. God is the Eternal One, who, through all the troubles and struggles of life, is the God we can trust.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. Thanks be to God!"

