

“Home: The Universe’s Mystery”
1 Corinthians 13:9-13

What is the human response to mystery? A connected question is this: What is the human response to uncertainty? One good depiction of our instinctive responses comes from Toy Story 3. Toy Story is an animated movie about toys in a little boy’s room who come to life while humans are not there. The little boy’s name is Andy. As Andy gets older, the toys face an uncertain future. Here is the scene: <https://youtu.be/4xRXspsdb38>.

Can we relate to the feelings of grief, anxiety, fear, and uncertainty? One of the hardest lessons in life is living each day to its fullest without being attached to results and driven by fear or worry. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we hear Jesus’ invitation to live each day and to let go of our worry: “³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” Matthew 6:34

Living with a keen awareness of the universe as our home, we can learn to lean into the mystery instead of trying to control life. Our home in the universe is full of mystery and yet it runs without us controlling it. Our work is to be in awe of it and to trust the wisdom of our creator who is the energy and power of all of life. In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we hear his words of advice to a conflicted church. People were trying to control each other and the church. There was fighting and conflict among them. Their community was divided into factions around following different leaders: There were those who had their allegiance to Paul; those who had their allegiance to Apollos; those who followed Peter and those who followed Christ. Each group believed themselves to be better than the other groups and were certain that they alone had the truth. The community was being strangled by arguments about every decision and it seemed that some people were bragging about their spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. They even developed some tests to prove who was right and who was wrong based on the spiritual gifts of each group. That is why Paul felt it was important to write a letter to the Corinthians to help them return to their main focus and mission. All the gifts that they had were not goals in and of themselves. Paul was trying to help the Corinthians remember what was really important for their mission. It was the call of Christ on their lives to be committed to his way of active love that rises above one’s need for certainty and control. What they needed to learn was to trust mystery.

Let’s listen to 1 Corinthians 13:9-13

⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^[b] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Paul knew about this firsthand. His life was so committed to certainty of belief, of identity, and of purpose. Prior to his mystical experience of Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was a religious zealot. He was so certain that his way was the only way. He thought that he knew the faith and that he needed to defend it and God from anyone who didn't fit into his narrow worldview. As a faithful Jew, he saw the followers of Jesus as heretics who needed to be punished and controlled. But when he had a personal encounter with God, everything changed. His certainty was replaced with faith and trust. He did not need power anymore. All he needed was love. He no longer was certain about who is right and who is wrong. Instead, he learned to find his way through life each day through grace and by following the promptings of the Spirit. He then could write a beautiful chapter about love and end it with the affirmation that "we now see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." That is when Paul found his true home in life.

So if we want to feel home in our own skin, our communities, our world, and our universe, we can take a page from the Universe' mystery and Paul's comfort with uncertainty.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was known to say this during his lectures at universities and seminaries, in churches and synagogues: "Ladies and gentlemen, a great miracle has just occurred!" Members of the startled audience would immediately cease talking, lean forward wondering, what miracle could have happened? What miracle did they miss? He would then continue, "Ladies and gentlemen, a great miracle has just taken place...the sun has gone down." Imagine their surprise. What? The sun goes down each day! But then he would say, "Wonder, or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious person's attitude toward nature and history...To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer to his ultimate wonder...Awareness of the divine begins with wonder. It is the result of what one does with one's higher incomprehension. As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such a decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Humankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of happiness lies in understanding that life without wonder is not worth living."

We are invited to lean today into the mystery and wonder of life and of the universe. As you walked in, you were given a blade of grass. This is something we normally take for granted since we know the science of growing things. You are invited to behold it and let it teach you about trust in your life right now.

Jesus called on His disciples to "consider" the lilies of the field and to learn from them about trust. And so today as you hold this delicate flower in your hand consider how flowers do not choose in which field they will stand. When they grow they find themselves in that place. So to we find ourselves where we are today. How trusting are we of our own field?

This flower had no control over what grew around it. When it shot up, it might have had to fight for its life with thorns or clumps of crabgrass. Or it might be outshone by great sunflowers. So have we very little control over what surrounds us.

This flower had absolutely no control over the weather - rain or drought, it just simply learned to stand and endure. So have we no control over much of life.

This flower came up a certain kind of lily of a certain color and shape, and its shapeliness and health depended on many factors. So did we come up as certain kinds of individuals with all of our uniqueness.

For all that, not even Solomon, dressed up in his finest clothes, was any more lovely than this flower. So for all that has shaped and misshaped us, for all that has given us health and inflicted ill health on us – we are precious in the eyes of God, and honored, and God loves us as we are.

Help us O loving spirit to trust in the mystery of your amazing universe and life in each and every one of us. Amen.