

“Home: The Universe’s Human Race”

Luke 17:20-21

In all the chaos of our world with things like the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, I have often found myself drawn to a universal connection that we have as human beings. The last couple of years, we have been gifted with amazing images from the James Webb space telescope. They are just breathtaking. Let’s watch a video compilation of some of them: <https://youtu.be/pinoqCfpjik>.

They take us back in time to the origins of our universe. I have found them to be powerfully spiritual as they reminded me of our connection to God's eternal time and to one another. Even though the pictures were taken recently, they captured events that took place billions of years ago. These images transported me to a larger time and a larger connection to God's universe. I have used these images in my prayer and daily life. Whenever I find myself losing my sense of connection to God, my sense of love for other human beings, or my sense of purpose in life, I am breathing deeply and pondering these images and praying the words of Psalm 19:1a "The heavens are telling the glory of God." Not only do these images remind us of our cosmic story, they also transport us to God's eternal time where we can see our current struggles from a perspective of love, compassion, and care. They help us to see that we are part of an incredible cosmic dance. We are partnered with God to do the work of love.

Sometimes it is easy to get cynical and to wonder why humans even exist when we seem to be destructive to the life of the planet. But in faith and from the universe’s perspective, we play a part in this mysterious and evolving universe.

I often think of the butterfly effect in Chaos Theory. This is the idea that we cannot predict the future or how things will turn out because the world is so complex and that a small decision or action can cause a huge change. Mathematician and meteorologist Edward Norton Lorenz originally explained this theory metaphorically, with the flap of a butterfly’s wing in one corner of the world causing a tornado elsewhere weeks later.



We may feel so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the universe that we may end up believing that our lives or actions don't matter in the grand scheme of things. But the invitation of seeing the universe as our home is to remember that we belong and that each of us has a place and a part in this story. We are a part of God's unfolding story in the universe. We are not the only or most important part, but we have a place and a role here on this earth in God's universe.

So how do we become at home in our human race as part of God's unfinished story of the universe? James Conlon asks similar questions, "What then does it mean to be a cosmological being, a citizen of the cosmos? How do we begin to grasp the holiness and wholeness in this story? What difference does that make in your life? How does this vision make you more fully human?"

I believe that the essential key is to look deep within ourselves. The patterns of God's love and of the universe are already imprinted on our souls and hearts. What we need is to let them guide us. One of the often-neglected teachings of Jesus is found in the Gospel of Luke. Let's listen to Luke 17:20-21:

²⁰ Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that

can be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, “Look, here it is!” or “There it is!” For, in fact, the kingdom of God is within¹ you.’

The kingdom of God is in the midst of you, or within your grasp. People around Jesus were looking for big world changing events. They were hoping for an intervention that would change the course of history once and for all because things were really bleak for them. The powerful were ruling over them. Exploitation, unrest, war, and fear were the daily realities of their homeland. Home didn't feel like home anymore. The people were looking for a savior who would deliver them their suffering. Jesus came telling them about the kingdom or reign of God and they imagined a cosmic event that would put an end to all the evils of the world and would bring a reign of love and justice. But Jesus's answer turned their expectations upside down. The reign of God is already within you and within your grasp. God has already given us what we need to navigate life here on earth while still being aware of the universe. By focusing on each thought, breath, or action as part of God's realm through the love of our hearts and the strength of our souls, we can have a butterfly effect on the unfolding of God's unfinished universe.

Writer Barbara Brown Talyor says this, “Every morning when you wake up, decide to live the life God has given you to live right now. Refuse to live yesterday over and over again. Resist the temptation to save your best self for tomorrow. Live a caught-up life, not a put-off life, so that wherever you are, you are ready for God. Ours may be the generation that finally sees him ride in on the clouds, or we may meet him the same way generations before us have—one by one, as each of us closes our eyes for the last time. Either way, our lives are in God's hands.”

Being home in this human life is about refusing to believe in the cynical and evil forces in the world and instead focusing our energy on love in each moment is how we follow on the path of Jesus and his love. When we do that, we find ourselves at home in this life, in this human race, on this planet, and as part of the universe. Every thought, word, feeling, or act of love becomes part of the greater whole of God's work in the world!

Please turn to your neighbors and talk to them about how the words of Jesus about the kingdom of God being within you changes your perspective of humans and life.

Former Methodist Bishop in Alabama, Will Willimon, tells the story of two women whom God empowered to share in Jesus' work in Cullman, a small town in northern Alabama. The two older women came to visit him in his office in

Birmingham at the end of one very long, discouraging day for him. He just wanted to go home, but he listened patiently as they told him about their ministry. “Gladys’s grandson was busted, DUI. We went over to the youth prison camp to visit him. Sad to say, we had never been there before. We were appalled by the conditions those young men were packed in there like animals. We got to know them. Are you aware that only ten percent of them can read? An illiterate 19-year-old and we wonder why he’s in prison!” “Well, we began reading classes,” the other one said, “Sarah taught school before she retired. Then that led to a Bible study group in the evening. We’re up to three Bible study groups a week. Two friends of ours who can’t get out bake cookies for the boys. We’ve also enlisted two wonderful nurses who help... Some of them said those cookies are the first gift they’ve ever received.” Willimon figured they were there because they wanted the Conference to now take over this ministry, or to help with funding it. But no, they said, they didn’t need anything. He was puzzled why they were there sharing their story with him. They said: “Well, we know that being a bishop must be one of the most depressing jobs in the church – too many things that we are not doing that Jesus expects us to do. So Gladys thought it would be nice if we came down here to tell you to take heart. Something’s going right, that is, up in Cullman.” Amen.