



Sermons

from Northwood United Church

“Getting Lost”

Exodus 3:1-6, Psalm 19, Mark 1:9-13

Will Sparks September 14, 2014

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I was driving up to Kelowna this past week with my son, for a dental specialist appointment. And as we drove through the incredible slabs of rock that tower over the Coquihala highway and noticed the scrape marks that glaciers left behind on the surface of the stone, we got to talking about how amazing everything is. The car was struggling to stay in cruise control so in one fluid motion, I touched the breaks, put the clutch in, geared down, and then reached behind the steering wheel and turned off the cruise. It took me about 3 seconds. And then it occurred to me what had just happened within me. Think about it. My eyes had noticed that the speedometer was saying I was slowing down, and my ears told me that the engine was laboring. My frontal cortex registered that from past experience that means the engine needs me to change some things, but of course, I wasn't aware that my frontal cortex was doing anything at all. That was automatic. What was also automatic was the way my brain told my foot to reach out and depress the clutch, my hand to reach down and rest on the gear shift and my right foot to reach out and be prepared to push on the gas pedal so that when the clutch released I could rev the engine and not slow the car down too much, which my frontal cortex told me would not be good.

Then my brain-body did a funny thing it has learned to do all at once without much thinking. Push in the clutch, rev, shift, and let go of the clutch while keeping the revs in sync with the speed of the car. Anybody who has ever tried to teach a teenager how to drive a standard knows just how complicated a little maneuver that actually is.

And then, not to show off or anything but because my brain told me that I was going to have trouble down the road with the cruise control, my left hand reached down past the steering wheel to a little arm with buttons on it, my fingers felt the little button on the end and pushed it to turn off the cruise, all while watching the road and steering the wheel with the other hand and maintaining speed with my foot. This all took 3 seconds, much less time than it has taken for me to tell you all of what was happening.

The brain is amazing! The body is amazing! The way the body stores smart little movements in the body so that it will just do them automatically so the brain can be thinking about other things is amazing. The eyes, the ears, it is all amazing! The fact that I can tell you about it later with even a clue how the brain-body did it all is amazing.

Today I am beginning a sermon series on Creation and the ways in which God speaks to us in the creation. And I plan to string some words together over the next few weeks in celebration of that great and continuous revelation, but I have to tell you that from my perspective, words fall short. The sunset speaks what words cannot. The smile of a child is without adequate description. And the simple reality of life, when you actually think about it, means awe is the only rational response. So awe is where I begin.

Let's do a little experiment I am borrowing from a genius of the cosmos, Brian Swimme. I want to invite you to become for a moment a part of the Milky Way

“... see if you can imaginatively free yourself from seventy million years of conditioning regarding our place in the universe – Imagine the Earth floating in space, and instead of picturing your own place on the ‘top’ part of Earth, arrange the picture in your mind so that you are on the ‘bottom’...”

Now. . . imagine yourself peering down into the great chasm of the night sky. . . it might take some time, but the moment will come, in a rapid reorganization of phenomena, when all those stars will be experienced as down below, far, far below, and the amazing feeling accompanying this experience is a sense of surprise that you are not falling down there to join them.

Earth's gravitational power holds you, and you feel the strength of this bond in the pressure felt in your shoulders and along your back and buttocks and legs. . . It's the Earth's hold that keeps us suspended above the stars.

As you [feel] yourself hovering within this gravitational bond while peering down at the billions of stars drifting in the infinite chasm of space, you will have entered an experience of the universe that is not just human and not just biological. You will have entered a relationship from a galactic perspective, becoming for a moment a part of the Milky Way Galaxy. . .”

You see, it is about perspective- God's perspective. God did not just create you and me. God did not just create the earth and all its creatures. God created and the universe is, with its amazing forces working together to make life, wild and beautiful, awesome, powerful, and dangerous. And we are specks in that universe, but not just any specks. We are specks that can see and understand the universe. We have the ability, like Moses, to stop and behold a bush and know that the ground we walk on is sacred. We have the capacity, like Jesus, when he comes to awareness of God's blessing, to make his way into the wilds, and be immersed in the creation- communing with the wild things and cared for by the spiritual powers within the creation and come to understand his place in the universe. I believe that if we are to follow in the way of Jesus, we too need to know our place in the universe, be in touch with the Creation, have perspective on our own lives in relation to the life of the universe. We need to cultivate awe and reverence in our life.

I have a friend, Phil, who takes people on experiences of the Creation on foot or in canoes, and one of the exercises he does with people is to take a belly walk. That's right, a belly walk. He gives them all a toilet paper roll, and says, "I want you to go outside and lie down some place. Lie on your stomach on the ground and take your toilet paper roll and look through it at the ground. Spend some time, like five minutes, looking at one spot on the ground. Notice what is there. Inevitably people come back amazed at everything contained on a 1.5 square inch piece of the creation. Living things, minerals, creatures, the different textures of material, and colour. Did you know that contained within a cubic inch of healthy fertile soil there are an average of 3 super-antibiotics, compounds that create powerful balance in the soil. Pay attention to the creation and you will see into the genius of the creator. Blithely walk past unaware and we miss so very much. Attention is the beginning of awe and reverence.

Over the next five weeks, I want to challenge you to awareness of the creation, attend to the world around you. Stop and look and behold what you see. We are in a gorgeous part of the world at a stunning time of year, so this is no hardship. But let your imagination and your senses lead you to an awareness of your surroundings. Get lost for a moment in the place you are standing. Press pause and notice. For once again, in the words of Brian Swimme, "We work to ignite life... you must see this as basic to the universe, Consider the star. In the core of a star helium, carbon, oxygen, silicon, all the elements up to iron are created in blazing heat. If a star is of sufficient size, after billions of years it explodes, creating all the rest of the elements, sending them off into the universe. Our own solar system emerged from an exploded supernova, creating the planets and their many elements. Minerals and life forms are created out of supernova explosions.

Think about it! When you breathe, you breathe the creations of a star. All the life you will live (and see) is possible because of the gifts of that star. Your life has been evoked through the work of the heavens, do you see?" Get lost in that, and give thanks. Amen.