

A wildly wonderful world – 10/03/19

Prayer

[SLIDE] Good morning! Our theme today is “A wildly wonderful world”, and this being our Informal service I want you to come on a bit of a journey with me!

Have you ever been somewhere, or perhaps heard something , that has simply taken your breath away? I know for Liz, my wife, the answer is a very special waterfall – [SLIDE] Yosemite in the USA. You approach the falls, which you can clearly hear, along a path through trees, until suddenly you reach a clearing... and as she did so I saw her jaw drop, and tears fill her eyes – she was literally awestruck – the beauty, the power, the majesty...

For me the scene was different [SLIDE] – Iona in the western isles of Scotland. We travelled over to the island on a little ferry and headed off towards the main abbey which is the centre of the Christian community that has existed there for well over 1000 years. About 100 yards short of the main abbey is the little chapel said to have been built by St Columba on his arrival – it’s quite small and dark. I stepped inside and then just stopped – a feeling of such intense peace swept over me – my heart just seemed to sing “I’m home” – I felt like I could just stop and be there for ever – tears of joy ran down my face. I have no idea how long I just stood there – in all probability it was only a matter of seconds – but I do know I had to positively wrench myself away to rejoin Liz outside.

Take a moment and reflect – has there been a special time or place where you have just been so aware of the wonder of creation? Have you stumbled upon one of the so-called “thin places” where the presence of the creator seems to break through?

PAUSE

Or perhaps it wasn’t a place, but a sound, a piece of music, the crash of waves? Or a smell, the scent from a delicate plant, or the delicious fragrance of some rich spice.

PAUSE

I hope there are, and if not, then perhaps the first important take-away from this morning is this – slow down, take a look, savour the world around you, experience it, drink it in! When we do we start to get a deeper impression of this wildly wonderful world.

But now I want you to come with me on a short journey to get a sense of proportion, to put ourselves and what we see and sense in some kind of perspective.

PLAY VIDEO (<https://www.facebook.com/thespaceacademy/videos/1953373731372730/>)

What do you sense and feel having seen the video? I feel humbled, amazed, gobsmacked at the sheer scale of creation!

I also feel amazed at the pace of the journey we are on! Most of the universe we have just seen has only been recognised in the past 100 or so years ; quarks and the smallest building blocks of the universe have only been observed directly in the past ten or so years. The very brightest minds are already postulating mathematical models that suggest there may be may universes existing in parallel, and even smaller particles making up quarks. This journey has only just begun!

And to me the truly amazing thing is that there are patterns and rules we can begin to recognise and follow. The universe, our galaxy, our solar system, our world, all work to a set of patterns and rules – it's not some crazy random jumble of bits – everything is part of a system. The speed of light is not just the speed here, today, but is constant here, on the moon, Alpha Centauri and beyond!

[DEMO]If I just empty this small box of Lego onto the floor it will just be a jumble. The chances of it spontaneously composing itself into a structure are negligible! For me, the very presence of order suggests that there has to be an ordering hand – if there is to be a structure then someone or something has first to imagine it, has to create rules as to how things will stay in place, and then to assemble it.

What's more, the nature of what I create with the Lego will probably tell you something about me! I'm an engineer so I will probably construct something with gears, and bits that turn or do something. Someone else might look at the round parts and see the elements of a flower or a tree – they might model a living organism.

If we look at the world around us, or indeed the universe in which we exist, what can we tell about the creative guiding hand behind it? It is sometimes said that God gave us two paths to understand him – his word revealed through the story of the bible, and creation which reflects the nature of the creator. [SLIDE] As Psalm 19 puts it:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

What can we learn of the creator from his creation?

Well I think the first thing is his abundant generosity! [SLIDE] For a solar system like ours a single galaxy would be more than enough context! That would still be millions of stars, quite enough to fill the night skies! Yet God created something over 350 billion galaxies! – every one different, every one brimming with stars and planets and doubtless more than we can possibly imagine!

God must be so excited creating!! Father, Son and Holy Spirit laughing together as they spur each other on to ever greater heights – full of joy and fun dreaming of ever new ways to configure things!

Of course he didn't just do the big stuff! Why are there over a thousand different species of tree in one square mile of rain forest – wouldn't a dozen or so have sufficed? Why does the average oak tree have several million leaves – every one different? It's because the nature of our God is to give abundantly! He overflows with the joy of creation!

And there are other qualities too! [SLIDE] What about his love of order? Everything in the universe obeys rules. The Laws of gravity, strong and weak electromagnetic forces dictate the nature both of matter and of energy. We have learned that everything in nature tends towards chaos – just ask any mum or dad faced with tidying up after the children have gone to bed – it takes effort and intent to create order – yet here we are observing that order and rules are everywhere!

And in that lies another quality – the unknowable contradictions that seem to be qualities of our God. He created order, yet allows for chaos! We understand light behaves as a wave, yet it comes in packets or particles called photons! He works in the deepest relationships and is engaged in the minutest details of life, yet is Holy, unfathomable, and awesome in nature!

We do indeed live in a wildly wonderful world – full of beauty, possibilities, goodness. And it is set in one corner of a vast universe with possibilities beyond our wildest dreams. But what we need to understand is that we need to see beyond the creation to the creator – we are here not to worship creation, but the creator, and to reflect on, and seek to live in the image of our God.

What will it look like if we do? How can we reflect the qualities of our creator God?

[SLIDE] Well, first we will be creative! We'll apply ourselves to creating order, and beauty – for some that may be in their job or role, for some it may be in the home, the family, the community – valuing the spark that we see in children, protecting it against the pressures that threaten to snuff it out.

[Stop for a moment – how could you think and act creatively – do things have to be the way we first think, or are there other possibilities?]

[SLIDE] Secondly we will be generous, even abundant, to all of creation! We will value diversity in everything! God didn't create just one kind of tree, or bird or animal – his heart was brimming over with love and so he lavished upon the world every kind of living thing! Trees, plants, flowers, insects, reptiles, birds, animals – each and every one special! When you leave church take a moment to look at the crocuses, the daffodils, the green trees and the grass – see the variety of structure and form, the vibrancy of the colours, the beauty – all there at God's command to bless and delight us! As Jesus said in our gospel today, if God cares that much for the plants and flowers, why on earth are you worrying about what dress to wear, what makeup to buy, what body image to strive for!

Listen to the birds singing (or popping in and out of the holes in our spire!) – maybe you will spot a squirrel, or a rabbit hopping about! As Jesus told us – stop getting anxious about

tomorrow, and instead reflect on the generosity of God – trust in his provision. He isn't saying "don't work or plan" – after all the birds will be building their nests and will spend most of the day hunting for the food, but he is saying see these things as pointers to the God who provides and work with him. Live in the confidence that he loves you and stop trying to be in control of everything!

[What would really living generously with all creation look like??]

- More than just being generous with our time and our resources (mention Zac!)
- Caring about the food we eat, where it came from, the animals that we consume
- Thinking about what we throw away – after the land for landfill, or the water in the oceans is someone else's home or habitat ...
- When we travel for our holidays, how can we bless those whose lands we visit?

Generosity is a state of mind and way of living that affects every action we take, and makes it other focussed, not me focussed.

[SLIDE] So that is my message this morning – slow down, take a good look at the world around, see the stars in the sky, observe the fine detail of a flower, and fall in wonder at the awesomeness of creation. But don't fall into the trap of worshipping the creation – it is there as a message, a sign post, from the creator. It points to his order and his holiness, to his creativity and his abundant generosity!

And that should call us to live more like him, rejoicing in, and caring for, all that he has made.