

Easter 7, Year A

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St. Stephen's, Belvedere

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I have a new favorite TV show, *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, which is a follow-up to the 1980 classic series *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan's classic. The show presents the foundations of modern science and is hosted by Neil DeGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist, who met and was inspired by Sagan as a college student.

Cosmos has travelled through our Solar System and Milky Way galaxy to the farthest reaches of the observable universe and modern cosmology exploring the Big Bang, black holes, and 14 billion years of cosmic history

Over subsequent episodes COSMOS has gone deep within the human body and the work of molecules and DNA; into our life on the planet including the nature of light and gravity; the discovery of electricity by Michael Faraday; life on the micro and atomic scales and so on.

The beginning of the opening titles has a very compelling image: It starts with a camera moving through stars, and galaxies, and a beautiful nebula, and then pulling back and circling round what looks like the edge of a crater floating in space, showing a view of the stars in the opening, then the image transforming to show the crags and crannies of the crater edge to in fact be a the iris of a human eye and then be a close-up view of a human eye. The visual point being that we have a universe within our body that is a complex, vast and fascinating as that of the cosmos around us.

This is the cosmos "above" that this week we celebrate Jesus ascending into. The feast of the Ascension was this past Thursday, and we heard the Acts version in our first reading. For centuries Christians have professed their belief in the Ascension through creed, confessions, art, and architecture. This morning in the Nicene Creed we will say "he ascended into heaven."

We now know that heaven is not "up there." We know that our knowledge of the cosmos is very different from the flat world, earth-centered, assumptions of Jesus' time.

We have a clash of cosmologies in this biblical story of the Ascension. Oxford theologian and Anglican priest Keith Ward captures this tension. He writes "We now know that if (Jesus) began ascending 2000 years ago, he would not yet have left the Milky Way unless he attained warp speed." They described their experience using how they knew things. Our ideas about space and time are very different. Following what we now know, perhaps Jesus ascended into a parallel universe.

What we still believe is that Jesus is our connection to the divine realm.

But who was this Jesus? He came, he taught, he went and 2000 years later, we are still trying to understand the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection for our own time, as well as working very hard to live out his teachings about forgiveness, love, and the care of those in need.

Today's gospel from John is often called "the High Priestly Prayer:" Jesus is consecrating not bread and wine, but his body which is about to be sacrificed; and he gives his blessing to the church which will emerge from his resurrection through the work of his disciples and followers.

This prayer is thought to sum up the significance of Christ's life: Jesus' work has been to make the Holy One known in all the deeds and words of his life. Jesus is the conduit to and from God.

Jesus speaks to his disciples and to us; and like his disciples, even though we may not fully understand Jesus' teaching, we are faithful to it. We have been given the revelation of God and the divine life, and as a community we move deeper and deeper into living into its fullness. The simple truth of this teaching is love. The Father and the son share life and love. They are one and the church is exhorted to be one; We have a long way to go on that one.

In this passage we are also given a straight forward definition of eternal life, and here it is "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

How many times have we heard this depiction of eternal life? Not very often. On this last Sunday of Easter, in the season of the resurrection, here is an idea about eternal life that stands out and clarifies the empty tomb and the lilies and "Alleluia Christ is Risen." Eternal life is to know God and to know Jesus.

We as Christians have some guideposts for how to live out this knowledge against the backdrop of this vast and amazing cosmos. Week after week, year after year, we come to hear the teachings and to re-visit the life of Christ that guides us. Next week we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, the present reality of God that returns after Jesus has left.

In today's epistle, attributed to a Peter, one of Jesus' primary apostles, we get not only guideposts, but a road-map for living:

+Be Humble

+Don't worry: Cast your anxious cares on God; God cares for you

+Be disciplined; stay alert; stay awake.

+Resist Evil

In this cosmos of wonder, beauty, and complexity.....wherever God is to be found, and wherever Jesus came from and returned to....

We have a precious loving spirit of God which is very, very close. It wraps us round, and especially in the time of fiery ordeals we have a community of the faithful to hold us close in the night.