

## **Under the Stars – What are humans that God should care – Psalm 8**

This January, Jim and I had the opportunity to see a bioluminescent Bay called the Puerto Mosquito or English Mosquito Bay in Puerto Rico. We had been planning on this vacation for over a year hoping that we could celebrate coming out of this pandemic by getting away. It almost didn't happen or at least we were worried it wouldn't, given that Omicron was brand new to the scene. However, we were able to go and one of the highlights was being able to experience this bioluminescence of the water while in a boat. If you don't know what this natural wonder is, it's when the ocean can glow and glitter like the stars in the sky thanks to a natural chemical process known as bioluminescence, which allows living things to produce light in their bodies. Marine creatures like some fish, squid, tiny crustaceans and algae produce bioluminescence to either confuse predators, attract prey or even lure potential mates and the visual is one of neon green or blue through the water. At first, this effect was beyond hard to express or explain as we experienced it and it certainly was impossible to photograph.

But, as I was captured by the amazing neon blue in the water while the boat moved along, I found myself gazing upwards and another completely phenomenal view practically knocked me out of the boat – it was the night sky. There wasn't a cloud, the moon was not bright and the Milky Way was beyond a dazzling brilliance. I could see the spiral leading right down to where we were as if the sky was falling downward as it was so bright and vivid. No one could count the stars if they tried. I remembered tapping Jim on the shoulder as he was looking down in the water saying, "Forget that. Look up." From the smallest of microbes and creatures to the greatest of galaxies, I was transported to a view I have not seen since I was a young adult lying on a South Dakota ground in the Badlands. Nowhere in Eau Claire could you see such a sight. I was suddenly overwhelmed with my place in the world. Why would God be mindful of me and my place in this Cosmos when all that was created by this same One, this Cosmic Christ of the Universe was beyond comprehension. Surely I am nothing compared to this vastness.

Our place under the night sky but also within the smallest of microbes has come into full view of our lives in other ways these last two years. We are all now way too familiar with how a virus may interact, the tiniest of DNA proteins surrounding cells, while at the same time cognizant of how something so small can affect an entire world. In fact, COVID 19 has given us a better image of how one thing can have a great effect upon the whole, the truth of the interconnectedness of all things. We, none of us, are separate from the world God created and in fact, we may be more connected than we ever would imagine. Add to it the global implications of climate change which now has alarming warnings, the devastation of our resources for our own benefit, and now up close, of a war in Europe, a land that seemed far from us but really is closer than we'd like – we really can no longer claim that the large macrocosms do not affect the microcosms of this world. We can only ignore it to our detriment. In this Global reality, where is God in all this? Does God truly participate in the tiniest of microbes and in dark matter? Why would God be mindful of us?

It is a topic of conversation I have had with many the last couple of weeks. At the class I taught on resiliency and with confirmation students, in some of our ministry meetings, clearly these ponderings are on our minds. As people of faith, how can we continue to manage with optimism, to avoid the tendency of overwhelm when such times as these are clearly with us? And, there are no easy answers, certainly not enough of one for a short homily! But, as a reflection for today, I often like to go to the Bible to help me. As people of faith, we look deep into God's word to find what often is lacking elsewhere for us. There in scripture, we can join our voices with ancient peoples who experienced the same questions, the same laments, the same challenges of meaning and place.

These same ancient ones understood how connected we were to creation to the same longing of seeing a new creation out of decay as the Apostle Paul mentions in First Corinthians. We can see the story of Abraham where God brings him to the night sky showing him the promise of a nation when all seemed lost. We can observe the same amazement and joy of the psalmist who wondered how God could be mindful of our place in the

universe as beloved creation. We can witness resurrection and new life in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, flesh and sinews, bone and breath reborn. And, we can walk with the Incarnate One, Jesus Christ, who dwelled with us in flesh, the same flesh as we are; that same star stuff that began the universe and also formed us from the dust of galaxies. On my worst days, I can relate to this creator who longed to be close to us, to be in relationship to us, so much so that this One would care enough to sit at table with us, teach us, heal us and die for us. We do not have far to go – there in God's word, we find the stories of salvation – to see God's intention for goodness and re-creation.

Astrophysicist Karel Schrijver once described the complexity of creation and our interconnectedness in this way: "Our bodies are made of remnants of stars and massive explosions in the galaxies. All the material in our bodies originates with that residual stardust, and it finds its way into plants and from there into the nutrients that we need for everything we do – think, move, grow. And every few years, the bulk of our bodies are newly created. In more than one way, God is always creating, renewing, feeding, and transforming us, if we would but look around to see and experience it."

As the psalmist exclaims: When we consider God's heavens, the work of God's hands, the galaxies that God has created, who are we that God is mindful of us, that God is concerned about us? When the weight of the world seems too much to bear, we can always look to scripture to see that God does indeed care for us, that God loved the world so much to send a Son, Jesus, stardust himself, to be with us. May this knowledge, someday too great for us, connect us to the creative power and saving love of the God whose creation is beautiful so that we may be a new creation for the sake of the world.

Today, we continue our silent reflection time as we did last week. During the reflection time, you can write, draw, or contemplate the following questions: Have you ever had the experience of looking up at a sky full of stars? What was it like for you? When you reflect upon your place in the universe, what words comes up for you – choose your own words, but here are examples: smallness, connectedness, separation, closeness or other words?