

Reflection Notes – 11/6/17

- Geoff Stevenson

The Creative Love of God!

I recently picked up a magazine, the whole edition of which is given over to current physics and cosmology. There are beautiful photos of space and the profound elements that make up our galaxy and those beyond. I have read with fascination (those bits I can comprehend!) the complexities and mysteries of the cosmos. Black holes, dark space and dark matter, supernovae, dwarf stars, solar systems and much more hold me in wonder. The authors then speak of the variety of forces and particles that comprise the universe. Some we understand and can measure but several are theorised, used to explain what is observed and measured but remaining hidden, mysterious and unknown.

The universe is a vast, mysterious reality that is fascinating and mind-blowing in its complexity and wonder. The distances described are beyond comprehension, measured as they are in light years (the distance a beam of light travels in one year - ~ 9.461 trillion kilometres. That is a very, very long way!! Alpha Centauri is the closest star to us and is 4.37 light years from us – about 41 trillion kilometres!!).

Equally the world around us, that which we can see, feel, smell, touch and taste, is incredibly complex and beautiful. I sat and watched our dogs this morning as they ran and played with other dogs in the local ‘dog park’. As I sat I looked around at the trees, diverse and beautiful. I noticed the ground with grass and bare earth. I wondered about the soil that existed under the grass, a complex combination of humus, nutrients, decaying matter, other elements and compounds, micro-organisms and little creatures all doing their thing to make this ‘stuff’ the life-giving substance in which we grow food and plants. The local creek has so much life and activity that I fail to notice. Reeds and mangroves filter the water and provide a zone important to the life of the creek/river. Micro-organisms break down organic matter and other organisms ingest much of this as the food chain moves upwards. In the sky above my head there are clouds of beauty and strange shape. The air is filled with all manner of particles and molecules, some good and others unhealthy. Sadly the unhealthy components are growing in number all the time. Certain compounds are warming the earth as we liberate carbon stored in vast reserves of coal, oil and fossil fuels and emit it into the atmosphere once again. The colour of the clouds changes as I sit and watch. They are growing dark in the western sky – perhaps the promised rain is on the way? The sun continues to shine through warming the earth and my back, creating a beautiful morning in which to ponder life and God.

Where is God in all of this? In my science magazine there is little mention of God except that one particle, the mysterious, elusive and unconfirmed Higgs boson, is nicknamed the *God Particle*. This elusive critter remains unidentified and if verified will fill important gaps in our understanding of how the universe works. There are scientists that are agnostic or atheist and others that are people of faith. In the work of science they write with passion and sometimes beauty but their work is careful to avoid any sense of metaphysics or philosophy, not seeking answers to the questions of faith and the like. As I read this material I am fascinated by its beauty but I also realise that something is missing. It can feel dry and a little remote from me and my life and who I am. I am more

than a bunch of atoms and molecules at the whim of forces that are variously described by science. I am more than a series of chemical reactions or biological processes. I am more than a logical series of events, reactions and physical dynamics proceeding according to the laws of the universe. I am, of course, all of this but not this alone.

As I sat on the park bench and pondered I thought about the complex emotions involved in our relationships and the reactions we have to each other. I listened to bird sound and watched dogs romp, play and chase each other, interacting with each other and the humans watching on. These observations touched me and affected me at some non-physical level. As I looked at the grass and the dirt and soil I realised that in some mysterious but very real way I am related to that matter. The atoms and molecules that make up our bodies has been part of the earth and universe for millennia. The water I drank this morning has been in rivers, oceans, clouds, industrial systems, other humans and animals for many, many years. The relationship is deeper, than just sharing molecules and atoms. I am connected and dependent upon other parts of the universe for my life and being, my existence. When I do something here in my miniscule corner of the earth there are implications for other places and people. I don’t exist in isolation from everything else and I can’t separate myself away from everything and everyone.

As I sat and pondered I thought about the words I’d read earlier from Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 (2 of this week’s readings). Both are about creation and both are Hebrew poetry filled with beauty, wonder and relational joy. In the Genesis story, the ‘Seven Days of Creation,’ there is this beautiful infolding of creative expression. Everything flows out from the creative Word expressed by God. This poetic account is often ruined when it is either compared to science or taken literally as an historical, scientific account. Neither does justice to the beauty, wonder and truth that this beautiful poem expresses. In it we hear of God who is the very source and essence of life and being, who holds all things in relational grace and love (‘In God we live and move and have our being,’ says Paul in Acts 17). I imagined a universe exploding into wondrous existence as God dreamed and spoke – the Big Bang of Divine Love at the heart of all things. I imagined an expanding universe bursting with possibility and potential. I imagined the quiet of chaos and the gentle wind of God’s Spirit hovering with creative intent until order and beauty sprang forth. I imagined the waters and land finding their place under the dome of the sky, with stars and planets in their orbits and flight. I imagined the daily rhythms of night and day and the steady flourishing of plants and vegetation. Then sea creatures in the vast depths moving onto land in the forms of ancient beasts and reptiles. Birds grew their wings and took flight and animals of great diversity found their place on the dry earth. I thought of the interactions, the web of life that holds everything in relationship and provides order and diversity. I pondered the beauty and danger of humans entering this complex web and the potential for the great imbalance if greed, power and abuse take too great a hold on these delicate systems of beauty and wonder.

I imagined God gleefully enjoying the beauty and surprises of creation. Puppies licking, kittens meowing, and the joy of people loving each other and sharing life, enjoying the wonder and living peacefully with one another and God. I pondered that God is love and holds everything in love and grace – whether we appreciate that or reject it. What a beautiful story, a wonderful poem and a gracious God at the heart of all things!