

“Of Grasshoppers and Eagles”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
February 4, 2024 - Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

[Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39](#)

Please join me in prayer. “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen” (William Sloan Coffin).

“Have you not known? Have you not heard of God’s incomparable greatness? Has it not been told to you from the beginning?” asks the writer of second Isaiah.

Like many of the children of Israel for whom the prophet was writing so long ago, I was fortunate enough to have grown up participating in the life of a faith community that emphasized the incomparable greatness of God, and so I could answer Isaiah’s question in the affirmative: Yes, from the very beginning of my life, I have been taught about the awesomeness of God. I do believe that my best teacher of this lesson, however, was not found within the walls of our church, or my family’s home, but outside of all walls, as I have always been moved to be in awe of our creator when paying attention to the amazing universe that surrounds us.

This is a lesson that goes on as I am still amazed and inspired by the beauty of creation to praise God and give God thanks. This is especially true when I look up at the night sky and see the heavens, stretched out by God like a tent over us. I have always been amazed by the vast array of stars in the sky, and the more I learn about this infinite, heavenly realm and our place in it, the more I am in awe of the Creator. Perhaps you also are moved to awe by a starry night.

We are so blessed to live in a time when we have tools, created by people using knowledge of the created realm accumulated and passed on since our beginning, that enable us to peer into the sky and see -- and be inspired by -- what no other generations since our beginning have been able to see. The Hubble telescope, sent into orbit around our planet in 1990, has provided us stunning images of stars being birthed in distant clouds of gas and dust, and when peering deeply into what appear to be empty spaces between stars has revealed that these spaces are not at all empty, but are filled with an infinite array of swirling galaxies.

And the James Webb telescope, which joined the Hubble in orbit only two years ago, provides us with even more stunning images. It can look into the sky and see we cannot, light waves that have been traveling for so long, in our ever-expanding universe, that they have stretched out in length beyond what we are capable of witnessing, but as the James Webb telescope sees these infrared light beams, and computers translate the infrared images to a palette of colors we can perceive, revealing what would appear to us if we were much closer in time and distance to the sources of this starry light, we can now see with stunning clarity churning galaxies, sprawling nebulae, and black-hole-fueled quasars that people before us were never able to witness. This is truly amazing.

Even more amazing is that the incredibly vast sky, filled with stuff beyond our comprehension, is nothing in comparison to the Source of all light and matter. The Creator of all is greater than all we could or ever will know. And yet, the One who holds infinity cares deeply for all that has been and is being made. The God of the galaxies is concerned about every neutrino and quark in every atom of every element and in every molecule in everything in existence, including each cell of your body.

God cares especially about the cells of your body and the person made by them. The Creator and Holder of the universe loves you, and desires for you to experience goodness throughout the days of your life. When you don't, God the Creator is at work to lift you up. When you feel insignificant, lowly as a grasshopper or the grass it munches on, God desires for you to rise and soar like an eagle. When you are faint and powerless, God desires your strength to be renewed. When you are brought low with illness or by some oppressive force, God seeks to lift up your spirit.

I pray that God would heal us all in this good world we've badly broken and continue to break, that God would perform some miracle and give the children of Gaza peace. I pray that God would raise up the women of Afghanistan to be respected and dignified. I pray for the Uigurs and so many other people in the world who are forced to work for the gain of others that they would be liberated from oppression. And I pray for all in this land and everywhere who are harmed by the abuse of the more powerful or by indifference to injustice.

Today, let us keep our senses tuned on the great needs of our fellow creatures near and far and the miraculous work of building lives that God the Creator seeks for us to do. When we sense that we have been lifted by God, let us do what we can to respond gratefully by serving others in need. As we do, may God's love and peace expand in our hearts and may beauty and goodness grow throughout the cosmos. Amen.