

**St. Ninian's Parish Church**  
**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

*Matthew 28: 16 – 20; Psalm 8; 2 Cor 13: 5 - 14*

In 1990 the astronomer Carl Sagan suggested that the Voyager space probe, which had been launched in 1977, should capture an image of Earth as the probe reached the outer reaches of our solar system. It did so, and in the grainy image, which it sent back to us, Earth shows up as a pale blue dot.

Carl Sagan published a book in 1994 called *Pale Blue Dot*. He wrote,

'Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us.... The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.... To my mind, there is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish that pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.'<sup>1</sup>

Carl Sagan wasn't the first to imagine earth as a dot in the universe. In 1919, the philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote of our world,

*On this dot, tiny lumps of impure carbon and water, of complicated structure, with somewhat unusual physical and chemical properties, crawl about for a few years, until they are dissolved again into the elements of which they are compounded... No one is liberated from fear who dares not see his place in the world as it is; no one can achieve the greatness of which he is capable until he has allowed himself to see his own littleness.'*<sup>2</sup>

Neither Carl Sagan, nor Bertrand Russell before him were the first to consider the smallness of our world and the fragility of those who live on it. The author of Psalm 8 wrote,

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?<sup>3</sup>

When we consider this pale blue dot we see how small and insignificant we are, and we appreciate the extent to which the Earth is the only home we have.

When we speak of God how can we not speak - along with Carl Sagan, Bertrand Russell and the Psalmist - of our planet's smallness and of our insignificance, and remember that we, like everything in the universe, are created. We didn't create all of this ourselves; we didn't create even ourselves.

When they worship God, religious people should always worship a Creator God. By doing so we acknowledge our place in the universe as created not creators, and we recognise our intimate relationship with, and our dependence upon, the world around us, this the tiny pale blue dot in the vast expanse of space.

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<sup>1</sup> Sagan, Carl (1997). *Pale Blue Dot*. United States: Random House USA Inc. p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, "Dreams and Facts," *The Athenaeum* nos. 4,642, 4,623 (Apr 18, 25 1919), 198-9,

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 8: 3 - 4

When we forget our created nature, our relationship to the Earth we live on, we become carried away with their own significance, we put ourselves at the centre of the universe, believe that all this is here for us, and can be controlled, manipulated and exploited for our benefit. We start to believe that we are not people, but gods.

Surely, though, in the midst of this pandemic there can't be anyone on the planet who does not recognise our fragility and our smallness. Surely, in the midst of this pandemic there can't be anyone who thinks that 21<sup>st</sup> century human beings know it all and have it all worked out.

If we are going to talk about God, and how can we not talk about God, surely we must talk about a God who is a great, big God, something beyond our imagining, something which is totally different from what we are, we, created as we are, living in a created universe?

If there is one good thing that comes from this pandemic it must be that we take more seriously than we have ever done before in the modern age our fragility and smallness, and rethink our relationship to the planet we live on. Surely, now we must acknowledge our creation, and consequently our relationship to the rest of creation, and tackle more urgently the looming crisis presented by our changing climate.

But, worshipping a creator God, who is bigger than us, utterly different from us, and subsequently doing something about our relationship to God's creation is not enough. One other thing that this pandemic has taught us is that to live in this universe we can't just stand and stare at the heavens praying for a miracle. We are not the centre of the universe, but we are at the centre of our own personal universes. Our lives matter. How could we worship a God who didn't care about each of us individually?

If we are going to talk about God, it is not enough to talk about a creator God, remote and different from us. Our lives are lived from our perspective, so how can we not talk about a God who is not only a great, big God, but also at the same time a very small God, who is the same as us, who knows us, and teaches us, and inspires us, and encourages us; a God who has lived our lives and knows that our lives matter, that all lives matter, that Black Lives Matter.

The psalmist may well have said, 'When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?' But, that same psalmist then said immediately in the next verse,

Yet you have made us a little lower than God,  
and crowned us with glory and honour.

It is meaningless to worship a God who is not the creator of the universe, but it is also meaningless to worship of a God who has not experienced life from the perspective of an individual, and who knows that each individual human life is crowned with glory and honour.

But that too is not enough. It is not enough to worship a God who is the creator of the universe, and a God who knows what it is to be human if we do not also worship a God who is involved with what his creation creates when it comes together; all those things that are a part of our lives that have no material substance: our sense of connectedness by way of our communities, families, churches, countries, languages, cultures. God must also be a God who is involved with all that resonates between us, not just a God who knows what it is to be an individual or who knows what it is to be a creator.

This pandemic has shown us not only that the universe is bigger than we are, and that despite that each individual life matters, but also how important it is for us to exist as a community even when we are restricted to living only with ourselves. And black lives don't just matter because all lives matter, they matter also because if they don't then no other lives matter either and no community, whether country or family or church can continue to exist.

To speak of God and to worship God can only be right when we talk of and worship a God who is bigger than us, a Creator God.

To speak of God and to worship God can only be right when we talk of and worship a God who knows us as individuals, an incarnate God.

To speak of God and to worship God can only be right when we talk of and worship a God who is involved with who we are together, a spiritual God.

And God is only a god when these things, creation, incarnation and spirit are holy; when creation is majestic, humanity dignified, and relationship held together in love: holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we take communion together we worship God: the holy God who created the goodness in the bread and wine we share; the holy God who feeds you as an individual through that bread and wine; and the holy God who brings us together, wherever we are, spiritually, in love.

And when we step out in to the world to make disciples of all nations, we do so by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, telling people that to worship God is to love him as Creator; to worship God is to know that as individuals we are each loved by that Creator; and to worship God is to love the other people that Creator has created.