

# Making sense of it

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 31 July 2022

A Reflection by Kevin Dallas

Pentecost 8C

Hosea 11: 1-11; Luke 12:13-21

The video of this reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/> The version below is not a transcript, but the scripts from which the reflectors spoke, so there may be some changes of wording.

---

I have entitled my reflection “Making sense of it” and thought I would start by mentioning those images we all were privileged to see just a few weeks ago when the James Webb space telescope released their series of pictures of the Cosmos!! Wow! The ABC web site had a riveting collection with brief stunning commentary, I am sure you would agree that we need other voices and experts to assist and help us get to even a very basic understanding of what we are looking at, simply mind blowing and almost beyond comprehension.

Is it at all possible to comprehend or begin to make sense of viewing such a staggering array of images?

We live in an age where we have the opportunity to grasp a greater than ever understanding and knowledge of both the world around, the Cosmos/ galaxies and beyond as well as the world within (the human mind).

Speaking of the world within I would like to briefly share some of the interesting and ground-breaking research I recently came across, done on the human brain by one Dr Iain McGilchrist, Philosopher, Psychiatrist Scientist and Author, best known for his thesis on the way humans understand the world when the role of the two hemispheres of the brain (left and right) are properly understood. I understand this has challenged much of the conventional thinking developed over many years. (The Master & His Emissary/The Matter With Things.) (The Divided Brain/Making of the Western World.)

In his latest book he devotes one extensive chapter to what he calls “*The Divine*”. In one interview I saw, he spoke freely about the apprehension and concern he had in delving into the whole subject of the sacred and divine. Interestingly, rather than the notion of a *creator* God he chooses to use the term *evolving*, thus bringing a more dynamic sense to the possibility of a Creator.

If we look at the images from the telescope the sense of creating would be total, as planets interact with stars and galaxies, easy to agree/accept that the creator is continually creating.

Iain lives on the Isle of Skye, off the coast of North West Scotland, where he continues to write, and lectures worldwide.

He is committed to the idea that the mind and brain can be understood only by seeing them in the broadest possible context, that of the whole of our physical and spiritual existence, and of the wider human culture in which they arise: the culture which helps to mould, and in turn is moulded by, our minds and brains.

His ground-breaking research over a number of decades uncovers such things as Intuition and Imagination (right side of the brain traits) often lost to the apprehending/controlling (left side of the brain).

Just to be clear with these definitions and interpretations using these terms:

1. Apprehension is a mode of consciousness wherein one is aware of something but cannot pass any judgment on it, while comprehension is a psychological state of mind wherein a person is aware of something, is able to think about it, and knows how to deal with it.
2. Comprehension requires knowledge, while apprehension does not.
3. Comprehension is deeper than apprehension.
4. Apprehension is a state of mind wherein a person does not fully grasp the meaning of an idea or object presented to him, while comprehension is a state of mind wherein he is able to fully understand the meaning of the idea or object presented to him.

I mention his work because he makes much of the sacred and divine and its importance; and sadly, how much of this has lost out to a controlling and bureaucratic culture which has achieved so much towards the advance of technology at the expense of our understanding of who we are and our place in the cosmos. In other words are we thinking more like machines and perhaps losing what makes us human.

Although he devotes a substantial thesis within the book to the divine, he also makes clear that such an understanding is, in his view, probably beyond words. He gives himself a fail mark when summarising his effort to write about the Sacred and Divine.

I am increasingly aware and in sympathy with the concept of *beyond words* and rather than the question being "*making sense of it*", is not the entire concept and experiential outcome much more "*a sense of the sacred and divine*"? Living the experience.

The gospel reading this morning from Luke contains the so-called parable of *the rich fool*. Working hard to produce a good crop he wanted endorsement of his idea/strategy to pull down his small barns and build larger ones! Sit back relax and enjoy life! Made sense to him.

His proposal saw short shrift in the parable. The abrupt and clear conclusion, "*your life will be demanded of you tonight. Then who will get what you have prepared*" Now how did that make sense?

Was our rich young fool more inclined to the apprehending traits of the left side of the brain? Rather than the *comprehending* right side. And, if so, did the abrupt response received open his eyes to comprehend the full magnitude of his folly in sacrificing the accumulation of worldly possessions for the free gift of God's Love? As we will hear, as we turn to consider our next scripture reading from Hosea, it is all a matter of relative value. God's love to mankind should be a towering reality in our human existence, influencing every aspect of our being!

And yet ....

It's not often I dive into Old Testament themes and stories with any enthusiasm, but today's reading from Hosea and the recent reflection Jo gave us on Elijah and Elisha sparked my interest. So, when I came to consider the theme for today's reflection I decided to take a closer look at Hosea.

The only other occasion (back in my Salvation Army days) I came across this minor prophet was when two talented Salvation Army Officers who both went on to become Generals of the Salvation Army, wrote and composed a number of musicals. One, in the late 60's was entitled Hosea. The setting was a youth group preparing to perform a musical of the story. It was structured as a play within a play, as the lives of the young people in the youth group played out the themes in the book of Hosea, with original songs and music, much still used in Salvation Army liturgy today.

The genius was in making contemporary sense of this ancient story and having lyrics that with great simplicity emphasised the main theme. With a modern setting the story was simply told. One of the songs has the words:

You can't stop God from loving you!

*You can't stop rain from falling down,  
Prevent the sun from shining,  
You can't stop spring from coming in,  
Or winter from resigning,  
Or still the waves or stay the winds,  
Or keep the day from dawning,  
You can't stop God from loving you,  
His love is new each morning.*

*You can't stop ice from being cold;  
you can't stop fire from burning.  
Or hold the tide that's going out,  
Delay its sure returning,  
Or halt the progress of the years,  
The flight of fame or fashion,  
You can't stop God from loving you,  
His nature is compassion.*

You get the idea, despite the male pronoun!

The theme verse for Hosea is found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter verse 1: *'Then the lord said to me "Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other Gods and love raisin cakes"*.

The verses that were read earlier from Chapter 11 come under the heading of God's Love for Israel. How do we make sense of this story? What are we to make of the characterisation of God's anger? What is the metaphor and theme within the book of Hosea?

Recapping then:

Hosea, having found that his prostitute wife had become a slave, bought her back. In the same way God will buy back his adulterous people from slavery (3:1-2). But Gomer had first to undergo a period of discipline and live with Hosea as a slave, not as a wife. Israel likewise must have a period of discipline.

She must live in captivity in a foreign land, where she will be without her own civil government and will be separated from all objects connected with former religious practices, good and bad. Only when she willingly responds to God's love and seeks him will she be truly his (3-5).

The love that God showed to Israel (and Hosea to Gomer) is a special kind of love that in Hebrew is called *chesed*. It is translated in the RSV as 'steadfast love', in the GNB as 'constant love' and in other versions as 'mercy', 'kindness' and 'loving kindness'.

*Chesed* love is covenant loyalty and faithfulness. A covenant is an agreement between two parties that carries with it obligations and blessings. In the case of Hosea and Gomer, that covenant is the marriage covenant, and *chesed* is that particularly strong form of love by which the two persons in that covenant are bound to be loyal to each other. This idea forms a basic theme of the book of Hosea. God exercised loyal love and covenant faithfulness towards his people, but they were not loving and faithful to him in return. Their *chesed* 'vanished like the morning mist' (see 6:4-6).

Further insights into the overarching theme and metaphor can be gained when considering the way God's anger is directed in the context of bringing about the restoration of his people. As Keith Ward in his book 'What the bible really teaches' writes:

*The anger of God is often referred to in the Bible. It is anger at immorality and injustice, at the harm done to creation by created beings. Anger is not natural to God, for it is destructive, and it represents a sort of defeat of the purpose of creation. Anger is the divine reaction to the frustration of the divine purpose. The cost of sin to God is that it causes God to be destructive and to accept a frustration of the divine purpose.*

*But divine anger is NEVER the last word in the Bible. It is allied with compassion, loving-kindness. A steadfast love that is likened to the love of a husband for his wife, a passionate healing love. So the prophets insist that the Lord 'will have compassion on his afflict ones' (Isaiah 49 13) they speak of a loving personal relationship between God and Israel 'your Maker is your husband' (Isaiah 54 5) And they are sure that love will replace anger in the end "My unfailing love for you will not be shaken (Isaiah 54 10).*

*It may seem odd to speak of compassionate love as a cost to God. But compassion can only exist where suffering exists, and loving kindness in the Biblical context, is about accepting back into relationship people who have turned away. Forgiveness and compassion are costly because they require acceptance of the hurt of rejection, and patient kindness in bringing about reconciliation.*

So, returning to my Salvation Army heritage, seeking to use words set to music in order to distil these complex concepts into their simplest form, back to the Musical Hosea using simple lyrics to describe the nature and Power of the Sacred and Divine Love, penned for a Salvation Army audience back in the late 1960:

*You can't stop God from loving you  
Though you may disobey him,  
You can't stop God from loving you,  
However you betray him;  
From love like this no power on earth  
The human heart can sever,  
You can't stop God from loving you,  
Not God--not now, nor ever.*

Simple words used to convey a simple truth. And yet ....

As I have already said, I am increasingly aware and in sympathy with the concept of beyond words in describing "*A Sense Of The Sacred And Divine*" comprehending the impossible task of '*making sense of it*'.

Nothing rational about God's Love.

When have you been really moved by a Sense of the Sacred?

Speaking for myself and drawing on two recent personal experiences, the first being back in May when Judith and I travelled to the west coast of Tasmania in Strahan. We spent part of the morning in a cold climate rain forest guided to where we suddenly came alongside a Huon Pine tree and were told it was possibly over 2-3000 years old. No words, just an awe inspiring feeling of the sense of the creator and divine.

Second, sitting in the newly refurbished Sydney Opera house last Sunday afternoon listening to the climax of Mahler's second symphony "*The resurrection*". No words, just an awe inspiring feeling of the sense of the creator and divine.

So .... whether the use of words (Metaphor, parable or great literature) heightens our experience and opens the door to the sacred and divine upon our lives or something deep resonates within.

I am sure many present here this morning have a deep and profound understanding of these concepts and simple sentiments.

And yet a great many beyond our doors have yet to comprehend the essence of the eternal message of God's Love and are yet to confront it in lived action.

May we all carry the deeply embedded truth and power of God's Love in our lives?

May it stay with us as we leave this place today, knowing that the essence of such an experience is, just maybe, more likely to be conveyed without a word being spoken.