

# Adjusting the Lens to Tell a Bigger Story

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 10 September 2023

A Reflection by Rev Penny Jones

Season of Creation 2A

**Job 38: 1-28; Contemporary Reading: *Grace Interrupted*, a Poem by Mikko Harvey**

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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In his tender and tantalising work Anam Cara John O'Donohue writes:

*“the way you look at things is the most powerful force in shaping your life.”*

I want to talk about three ways of looking at things suggested by our readings today – the microscopic that allows us to appreciate our own smallness and uniqueness; the telescopic that invites us to move imaginatively towards universes beyond this one; and the cosmic that calls us to a bigger story. For story is critical and it is only through story that we shall be able to effect the extraordinary changes required by our current ecological crisis.

Let's take a moment to tell the story of right here, right now. Take a deep breath in and out and ground down through the layers of the church floor and all the layers of building, to connect with the earth. Aboriginal people have connected with this earth for tens of thousands of years and they can help us with this connection – that's one reason they need a Voice. But even they are only a tiny part of the story that brings us to here, today.

For 13.8 billion years our earth has been evolving – from molten rock to opera, from swirling gases to artificial intelligence. Connect your feet to the earth, to this evolving story. But then realise that only gravity keeps your feet on the ground and that your head, my head is sticking down into deep space. All of us are like pins on a pin cushion, sticking out and whirling through space at about 30 kilometres per second. There are 100 billion galaxies in the universe to our existing knowledge – each with 100 billion stars. And our galaxy the Milky Way is travelling through space at a speed of 2.1million kilometres per hour.

Feeling giddy yet? Ok – maybe let that practice go...

Feeling very, very tiny yet? I do hope so – because it certainly gives us perspective when we start to get worked up about whatever it is that we are worrying about this week. It is the kind of perspective that the author of the book of Job sought to provide in their own day. Now we may not be very happy with the so called 'answer to Job' of which today's reading is a part. We may feel that, as an answer to the kinds of human suffering Job endured, it is somewhat lacking in what we might call compassion. The author would probably have failed Pastoral Care 101. But what it does is helps Job – and us as readers – to re-frame what is going on with some small appreciation of the vastness and mystery that we are dealing with.

*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Have you commanded the morning since your days began have you seen the gates of deep darkness?”*

Well ‘no’ – Job has not – and nor have we. We are only now beginning to be able to acknowledge that 96% the universe is dark. The mystics have apprehended this ahead of the scientists - *‘the ground of the soul is dark’*, Meister Eckhart wrote in the thirteenth century. But essentially our view has been, and largely continues to be, anthropocentric – we are concerned with ourselves and the survival of our species. And as a species we continue to be very self-interested in our use and abuse of the resources of our planet – with very little regard to the much larger evolving story of the universes of which we are an infinitesimally tiny part.

Tiny – but not insignificant. Tiny things have impact - as anyone who’s been in bed with a mosquito knows very well! And God gives to us, as they gave to Job, the ability to see the world from a God’s-eye point of view and to delight in its beauty and freedom as God does. As human beings we have a humble but important part to play in the evolution of the cosmos. As Brian Swimme expresses it *‘we are seamlessly woven into universe; we are beautiful, sacred, earth/universe in human form’* - just as a flower is earth/universe in flower form – and when we look at a flower we are looking at the whole universe in flower form and the flower looks back at us and sees the whole universe in human form – because we are made of the same stuff. We are all star dust. We are all earth creatures. We are as Thomas Berry reminds us *‘a communion of subjects not a collection of objects.’* And hence as he says *‘to tell the story of anything is to tell the story of everything’* – for which we need the telescopic view.

Which brings us to imagination. If we are to tackle the issues of global boiling, climate crisis and ecological catastrophe we are going to need our God-given powers of imagination to conceive of our planet and our place in the cosmos on a much larger scale. As the condemned and exiled Catholic priest Teilhard de Chardin recognised years ago *‘the fragments of the world seek each other so that the world may come into being’* and the *‘artificial separation between the human and the cosmos is at the root of contemporary moral confusion’*

How do we heal that separation? Nagging and moralising will not change people’s minds and hearts. Even education will only scratch the surface. Getting out there with a banner and protesting will help and we must do it – but it will not be enough.

It will not be enough because we have a spiritual problem, a God-problem that we can only address by using our imaginations to tell a different story, imagine a new way and create a new chain of events.

I don’t know what you made of today’s contemporary reading, Mikko Harvey’s poem *“The Poem Grace Interrupted”*. I found it very hard to understand with my rational thinking mind. He wrote about it,

*“I wrote this poem while walking down the street one night in midtown Manhattan. Being at the base of all those tall buildings somehow turned my imagination planetary. I think the poem shows just a few links in a chain of accidents: somebody hurts somebody else while trying to heal herself, somebody becomes an idol to others who don’t understand his particular hurt, and the atmosphere nods along acceptingly; the type of little chain that probably happens every day among children on playgrounds at recess.”*

My rational mind is still struggling a bit – but my heart knows what he’s talking about: about the ways one little thing impacts another; about the chain reactions good and bad.

The poem suggests that we are *'delightfully, awkwardly, heartbreakingly entangled: with each other, with the environment we inhabit, and with the psychological environments that inhabit us.'* Harvey in the manner of magical realism takes us to a place that is at once fabulous and yet wholly realistic and recognisable – it is the world we know but not as we have known it. So, whether in his terms it is an animal sucked into the eyeball of the planet, or a whale on fire that in sinking to the ocean depths inspires devotion, we recognise our planet – *'beautiful yet sick'*. And through the power of imagination, we are invited to do something about that. John O'Donoghue in talking about imagination reminds us *'...the linear mind, despite its sincerity and commitment, can totally miss the gift. The imagination in its loyalty to possibility often takes the curved path rather than the linear way.'* Can we take the risk at least in our prayer, in our quiet moments, of opening ourselves to the curved path, to extraordinary possibility – especially the possibilities opened up by love?

As Joanna Macy puts it, *'Our task is to fall in love with the earth again – embodied in everyone and everything that is.'*

We will not hurt that which we truly love – by the exercise of our wide lens – our broad imagination – can we help ourselves and others to fall in love once again? Can we tell a different story?

For the collective story, that we are separate from nature and superior to it has brought us to the brink of destruction - and Christian ideas of subduing the earth are a part of that unhelpful story. It is a story that allows Christians in 2019 in America to declare that *'refusing to use fossil fuels hurts God's feelings!'* We have to tell a different story!

And any new story will need to be amplified by the storytellers – and that's us! Others across the scientific community and the green movement have stories they can tell. But as people of faith, we are responsible for telling a yet bigger story. We are responsible for looking through the lens of Love and telling the cosmic story that binds us to mysteries well beyond our power to speak, yet enacted in our very cells.

This is our unique calling - a call we are only just beginning to recognise, for indeed God is always calling us into the future – always ahead of us co-creating our lives.

I suspect most of us would like an easier call – let's just try some small actions of love towards our fellow human beings and the other creatures with whom we share this extraordinary planet. That is hard enough and too hard for most of us, even on the best of days – and it is certainly a place to begin.

Yet let us dare in the grace of God – for it is grace that 'interrupted' Mikko Harvey's poem, his 'making' – let us in the gift and grace of God dare to imagine and tell a story of a Love so irresistible, so potent in its action, so tender in its care that every atom, every cell of our universe will respond for good. Let us indeed imagine as Teilhard de Chardin once did, that

*'the day will come, when after witnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.'*

Amen