

Trinity Sunday - Forest Hill United - May 22, 2016
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31, Ps 8 (VU 732), John 16:12-15

What For?

Some of you may be aware
that I have written a couple of books.
Self-published books, but still books, that I have written.
Some day I'd like to see a whole shelf of books
with my name on them.
When I read today's scriptures,
I decided that I would share with you
some of what I wrote about in chapter 2 of my first book, The Glory of Being.

My uncle's gravestone, out on Stanley Hill,
has a strange epitaph.
On the back, his tombstone asks, "What for?"
I wonder why that question is there.
Did he ask to have that on there?
Did my aunt ask that question after his death?
Was it something he said often?
I don't know.

But it is a question that many people ask.
Why are we here?
What is the meaning of life?

Our passage in Proverbs 8 reminds me of my uncle's question.
So does Psalm 8, where even the psalmist is wondering,
Who is man that God is mindful of him?

In my book, I warn readers that chapter two may be a hard one,
because I talk about Quantum Physics.
People without a science background
might find it difficult to follow.
But if you know science, it's probably simplistic.

In high school, I was taught to draw atoms
with a central nucleus surrounded by electrons on rings,
just like models of the solar system
have the planets circling the sun.

Eventually I learned that electrons
are probably more like bits of energy zipping up and down from one orbit,
or energy level, to another.

Quantum physics tells us that electrons are waves of energy
which only seem to be particles when we look at them.
It's called the Observer Effect.

It's like the question of whether a tree makes a sound
when it falls in a forest, if no one is listening.
What IS there when no one is paying any attention?
When I am sitting in my sun room, with my back to the window,
in front of me are my shelves of books, my file cabinet,
and the door to the kitchen.
Through the door I see the refrigerator, a chair, the piano,
and other miscellaneous items along that side of the room.
(Yes, I do have a piano in my kitchen.)

I still remember a Twilight Zone episode I watched many years ago.
Applying that story to my house,
all of what I can't see through my sunroom door is just blank space,
like the green screens in special effects movie sets.
Somewhere in the space between moments,
if I go into the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee,
the details of the kitchen would be projected for me,
with a coffee pot and mug where I expect them to be.
Meanwhile, the bookshelves in my sunroom would disappear,
along with everything else in there.
Of course, I don't believe things actually disappear
when I am not looking.
But if no one is observing, how would we ever know?

I bring up the subject of quantum physics
because I believe that God is energy.
Not just any energy, but all energy.
God is what everything else is made of.
God is the original substance,
the "whatever" that was there before the Big Bang.
God is the original essence of everything that is,
or ever has been.

Imagine the time before the Big Bang.
Imagine that it is possible to think of time before the Big Bang,
a time when there was nothing but God,
when no one was watching,
when no one existed to be watching.
In that time before time,
was God like that tree that falls unheard,
or the coffee pot that's not there until I need it?

In the time before anything, God, unobserved,
was indescribable and unknowable.
One way of knowing God is by looking around us.
What do you see?

Isaac Luria, a 16th century Jewish rabbi,
taught that in the time before time,
God somehow withdrew and created an emptiness.
Then, God sent a ray of God-light into the emptiness,
and shattered it into what we now know
as our world and universe.

I remember watching my mother making rolls.
My cookbook tells me to make rolls
by dividing the bread dough into equal parts.
You use a rolling pin to roll the dough into a circle,
before cutting the dough into equal pieces with a knife to form perfect rolls.
My mother, however,
would take the dough in her hand and squeeze.
A piece would bulge up out of her fist
between her thumb and index finger.
She squeezed off a bit of dough,
rolled it into a ball and popped it into the pan.
Her rolls were always different sizes,
and always delicious.

I think of creation that way,
of Mother God squeezing off a part of her massive energy self,
until there was a piece of energy to form into a tree,
or into you, or me.
Each piece is different,
yet identical in structure, taste, and function
to the vast and living dough of God.
Each “roll” is separate, yet still part of the one batch,
carefully placed in the pan to grow and bake
into rolls of godness in the world.
To use a pun, each aspect of creation as we know it
could be one of the roles played by God.

Quantum physics tells us that everything is one substance,
made of energy from one energy source.
The differences between things,
that we see around us, is true, but exaggerated.
The differences are illusion in the same way
that water in a bay is no different from the water in the rest of the ocean.

One Sunday last month, we talked about God's names,
and how, in the Jewish tradition,
God's true name is unpronounced.
To pronounce the name
is to diminish the immensity and fullness of God.

The vastness of God is impossible to describe in words.

It was this unnamed God that existed before beginnings. Unworded. Unspoken.

Then . . . “In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;
all things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made that was made.”

The story of beginnings, as recorded in the book of Genesis,
outlines the coming into existence
of each aspect of our world.

Aside from the Genesis creation narrative,
the story of beginnings is retold in Proverbs 8,
John 1, and Revelation 12.

From these, we infer
that before our world was spoken into existence,
God, the Source of All, was already no longer alone.
Many thousands of angels,
as well as the entities
known as the Word and Sophia/Wisdom,
were already part of the vast cosmos.

Sophia/Wisdom, who speaks in Proverbs 8,
can be thought of, in part,
as the feminine aspect of creation,
from the word “Sophia” in Greek,
and “Hokhmah” in Hebrew, Holy Wisdom.

In Proverbs 8, Wisdom takes her place
in the busiest intersection in the town, in the city centre. She calls out in a loud voice,
saying:

“God made me before making anything else,
well before the Earth was made.
I was here before the ocean, before the rivers,
before the mountains, before the sky.
I was with God at Creation, like a master workman.
I rejoiced to see the world come into being,
and all the families of humanity.”

Apparently Sophia/Wisdom helped
in squeezing off the rolls of God dough, so to speak.
Like the thumb and index finger of my mother’s hand,
Sophia/Wisdom assisted
in making the Oneness of God
into what we know as all Creation.

She was made first, before anything else was made.
She is what makes individuality possible.
She allows us to know ourselves as separate,
as observers able to observe
what was never observable before.

The idea of one God having several faces, with distinct essences, is a difficult concept.
Today is Trinity Sunday,

and some consider the Christian doctrine of Trinity
to be a belief in three gods instead of one.

Yet each of us shows different aspects of ourselves, depending on the circumstance.

I have a different way of behaving with my clients in therapy
than I have with my family, for example.

But the two sides of a coin are still one coin.

The Bible begins with the Genesis story

of the creation of a world of opposites

- light and darkness, sky and ocean,

water and dry land, work and rest, male and female.

Before this duality of opposites, there was a nothingness,

what Genesis describes as being “without form and void.”

Yet, there, in or around or on the void,

was the “Spirit of God.”

The word for “spirit” is also translated as “wind” or “breath.”

The wind was blowing.

God was breathing.

Quiet reigned.

And then God spoke.

The first thing created, according to Genesis, was light. Darkness was already there.

The unknowable God, according to Genesis,

was like a dense unknowable darkness

moving as wind, as breath,

expressing itself into variations of dark and light,

just like the colours in the spinner we looked at earlier.

One by one the structures of our world

were spoken into existence,

ending with the creation of humankind,

and finally, rest.

And all of this brought pleasure to God.

“And God saw everything that he had made,

and behold, it was very good.”

To return to the concepts of quantum physics,
my hypothesis is that God's purpose in creation
was to make observers.
Just as an observer can turn energy waves into particles simply by looking at them,
creation makes God knowable.

God took pleasure in Creation,
because God was happy to be seen and known.
Each of us longs for someone to love,
who can look at us and know us.
We want to see ourselves in someone else's eyes,
to have ourselves mirrored back, to be loved.

God knew that desire, and created humans.
God said, "Let's make human in our image, after our likeness."
We look into a mirror to experience ourselves,
to see OUR likeness,
to see what we are like.
Could God have planned to look at creation
the way we look in a mirror?
Are we mirrors reflecting God's face?

In making humans in God's image, out of God Energy
God became both the observer and the observed.

We also read from John 16 today,
where Jesus said he still had many things
to tell them, but they could not handle them now.
Can you imagine Jesus trying to explain
Quantum Physics to the disciples?
Can you imagine Jesus trying to talk
about a God made of energy,
or that each of them, each of the disciples,
was made of the same stuff?
It's hard enough to understand now.

What he says, though, is that the Spirit of Truth
would take them by the hand,
take them into relationship,
and guide them into all truth.

So what is the purpose of life?
Why are we here?
Who is man that God is mindful of him?
Or, as my uncle's tombstone says, "What for?"
For relationship, that's what. Amen