

Look Up

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
September 11, 2022, Season of Creation Cosmos Sunday
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Anyone here saw the movie "Don't Look Up"?¹ Briefly summarized – it is about an astronomy student and her professor desperately trying to warn humanity about a catastrophic event; a very large comet is about to collide with the earth. The problem is, politicians, other leaders and the media don't seem to care about the danger. Hence the title – "Don't Look Up". The movie is a satire about our present situation we face with climate change.

When I was working for a summer in Toronto, I had to get onto the subway at a very early hour for a 45-minute ride across the entire city. During my ride, I noticed that no one looked up. Riders on the subway seemed to actively avoid one another's gaze, and out on the street people all looked down. Perhaps I was that annoying stranger people tried to ignore at 5am. I realize that it was probably also perceived as a safety issue, but it struck me, this pattern.

Look Up!

The James Webb telescope is flying through space now; it is "Looking Out" for science and humanity as it takes photos like the one of the Southern Ring planetary nebula 2,500 light years away. Did you know that our own Canadian Space Agency collaborated on this project?² A family friend worked in Canada on one piece of the James Webb. Over the years he would make passing references to this project and role, but I had no idea how iconic this instrument would become for our world. Now I pay attention! Having seen new images from that telescope in regular news reports, I'm inspired to linger outside at night, to look up.

And how do you propose that this all relates to Jesus as the bread from heaven in today's Gospel reading? You might ask.

The spiritual Bread that Jesus talks about in the Gospel of John is the kind that, when you eat it, you won't be left hungry. Jesus is not talking literally here. In the story, instead, in John's Gospel, Jesus frequently talks about this bread that seems cosmic in scope. By that I mean that Jesus offered his friends an everyday symbol, bread, that, when they share it together, they are connected to all things, each other, Christ and God, to Creation. Said another way, breaking bread together inspires their hearts to Look Up and give thanks.

The writer of John wrote these stories of Jesus 60 or 70 years after Jesus had died. They were tumultuous times when these stories from John were circulating – great sense of uncertainty, loss and persecution by the Roman Empire.

Today, when we share in Communion, we share much more than physical bread and juice. We share with the people of Jesus' time a sense of tumult, anything-but-normal,

¹ For more information about "Don't Look Up!", https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dont_look_up_2021

² To learn about the James Webb Telescope and the Canadian role, <https://www.asc-csa.gc.ca/eng/satellites/jwst/about.asp>

strange times – with the cost of everything spiking, strains on health care, a strain on our sense of neighbourliness, and political extremism seems too often tolerated.

Add to all this, the most recent loss, the death of Queen Elizabeth after a 70-year reign. We grieve, even as we also must heed the voices decrying the colonialism associated with the institution of the British Monarchy. As we struggle with these realities, Jesus of John's Gospel, invites us to nourish not just our bodies, but also our souls.

"I am the bread of life." Jesus says.

Together we bless this bread and cup. That is a moment of transformation – not necessarily literal, but spiritual. We are connected, to one another, to the universal Church. In the Baptism I said that Cooper was part of the Holy Catholic Church – Catholic is the Universal Church. This cosmic bread connects us with the Christ and Creator. It's a mystery how it all happens – let's just stay in the wonder, not worrying about explaining the how or why.

Every one of us is loved, and we are all welcome at this Table. May our hearts Look Up. Amen.