

Going Deep

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

September 4, 2022

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

The Ocean, awe-inspiring. Awe and wonder. We humans don't often do awe and wonder well. Fear is the shadow side of wonder, that is, an array of irrational responses we might have to mystery and life's unpredictability. I don't know about you, but I don't tend to make sensible decisions when I am in fight or flight mode. Depictions from the 1800s of the mythological Kraken¹, dragging boats and seafarers into the ocean – a giant octopus. Of course, we know that there are giant squids, and whales, and sharks in the oceans. However, irrational myths around them have given way to better understanding, thanks to modern marine biology.

The ocean for millennia has been seen by cultures as an enemy. Our biblical stories are infused with a sense of fear; in the book of Genesis, the storyteller tells us that God told humans to dominate, subdue the earth, the water, and its animals. Science itself has not always been a friend of nature, human ingenuity and brilliance focusing on vehicles, and factories, technologies that we know to have caused great harm to Creation.

Ah humans. We can read the story of Job in the Bible, a good man who was hit by every imaginable tragedy. He complained to God, understandably, seeing that he lost everything.

God responds, and I paraphrase: *Are you done, Job? Ok, let me put this in perspective.*

God puts Job's reality into a cosmic, a big picture, perspective. A whole "Creation" perspective is revealed from the Divine Voice, reminding Job, and us, how intricate and interconnected everything is. Job only sees his reality, but he, and we, are part of a much grander scheme.

When we are in crisis, it can be like we have blinders on, preventing us from finding a bigger – getting to the top of the mountain to see it – perspective. Job got that perspective. I had not realized how many different ancient ocean myths there were until I did a quick internet search. The best known is in Greek mythology, Poseidon who ruled the oceans. Typical of deities, human moodiness is projected onto him in the various stories. When he was in good humour, Poseidon created islands and calmed the seas. When he was offended or ignored, he was said to strike the ground with his trident and cause chaotic springs, earthquakes, drownings, and shipwrecks.

It's time to find perspective, to look a bit deeper at the myths, the ancient ones and our modern-day ones. Perspective.

Science tells us that the ocean drives our planetary chemistry, governs climate and weather. The ocean is the foundation of the life-support system for all creatures on our planet. If the sea is sick, we'll feel it. If it dies, we die. Our future and the state of the oceans are one.² A fun fact, oceans absorb roughly one-third of the carbon dioxide

¹ An interesting overview of the Kraken and other sea monster mythologies can be found at <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/sea-monsters-inspiration-serpents-mermaids-the-kraken.html>

² Sylvia Earle, Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 1990-1992

emitted by human activity, slowing the buildup of heat-trapping gasses and working against global warming.³

Oceans cover 70% of earth's surface; so, our earth is primarily a "marine" habitat. The graphic you see, many of you have probably figured out, is the Mariana Trench. It is the deepest oceanic trench on Earth. Here is some perspective that captivated me: it is 11,000 metres below sea level. You have probably heard the highest point on earth is considered Mount Everest; it is only 8,900 metres. Imagine flipping Mount Everest, submerging it in the water, but add another 2 kilometres. That is deep, and dark down there.

There was a famous expedition to the bottom of that trench in 1960. The explorer's name, Jacques Piccard. Piccard wanted to see what was down there, and to his surprise, there was life down there. This was startling to scientists in 1960 because that was a pressure that would instantly crush a skull, but here were sea creatures and plants. Captain Kirk famously calls space the "final frontier" in the science fiction series, *Star Trek*. Many modern scientists suggest that the ocean is less understood than space.

Theologian Richard Bauckham suggests that we need to relearn from our Scriptures, our true place in the created world.⁴ Too long we have imagined the relationship between humans and God as "only a little lower than the angels" (Ps 8:5), having dominion over Creation. In 2022, we need to go deeper in our theology.

What do we believe about God and Jesus and how they want us, the faithful, to live in relationship to this ecosystem we theologically call "Creation"?

In the beginning, God created... and God saw that it was good. God created heaven and earth, night and day, seas and land, plants and creatures on land and in the sea. In that Genesis creation story, humans were not at all first.

I'm betting that a lucky few of you have spent time out on the sea, perhaps on a cruise ship or sailboat, or gone whale watching, or scuba diving. Benjamin and I realized our dream last summer when we found ourselves, and our family, on a massive beach along the Pacific Ocean. We were in search of tidal pools on Vancouver Island, looking for creatures, like us, who don't quite make it out into the deep ocean. There on the shore, we beheld the colours of anemones, sea stars, urchins, all clustered in shallow water, waiting for the immersion when the tide comes in.

We hear the words of Gabriel, the angel, bringing good news to a teenaged Mary, that she is to give birth to a Saviour. *How can this be?* Mary wonders. "Nothing is impossible with God." Says the Angel in the story.⁵

In this world where we resort to fear, bitterness, turning to instincts of control rather than just sitting in wonder. Jesus, our Christian tradition, calls us to wonder at that Good News when we might doubt that we can change the course of climate change. Turn to God, stay in wonder, invite others to awe and wonder, and anything is possible. Amen.

³ Ibid

⁴ *Seasons of the Spirit, Fusion*. Season of Creation, Year C. © 2022 Wood Lake Books Inc

⁵ Gospel of Luke, chapter 1. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A+26-38&version=NRSVUE>