

May 26, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Nine years ago, Luanne bought me a small telescope for my birthday. I had read books of astronomy and knew that on that first night, after the clouds cleared, I would be able to point my new telescope toward the sky and see Saturn along with its rings. There it was in the eyepiece, tiny but sharp, with its ring clearly articulated. I'd pan over and see Jupiter – you could see the belts of color and four of its moons arrayed in a horizontal line. I've looked at stars in constellations, famous stars at unimaginable distances, along with the moon that when full can almost blind you in the eyepiece. But nothing has ever been as thrilling as that first night seeing Saturn and Jupiter.

Almost exactly 400 years before me, Galileo was also looking up through his telescope and in July 1610, found Saturn as well. What's funny about this is that my telescope is better than his was, so when he looked, he first thought that Saturn was a small cluster of three planets, mistaking the rings. When he looked more closely, he thought Saturn had something like jug handles attached to the planet – again, not quite understanding the rings. While I'm no Galileo, even with my better telescope, I would like to imagine that one thing unites us over the years – curiosity about the cosmos.

While we don't directly remember Galileo today, he's important to the story because he would raise up, some 80 years later, the ideas of one we do remember – Nicolaus Copernicus. It would be Copernicus, not Galileo, who would propose the scandalous idea that the earth revolves around the sun. And in all of this, these people were trying to understand how the world works. As we know, Copernicus's book containing his theory would be banned until 1758 and Galileo would end his life under something like house arrest for his curiosity. And now, some 410 years later, it all sounds a little crazy.

But remembering these people, particularly Copernicus, Kepler and Euler, along with Galileo and a host of other teachers, scientists and countless curious people we're presented with a few challenges ourselves. First, we're reminded that there is something deep inside of church [religion, even?] that has a tendency to get stuck and has a hard time moving. We can see that with Paul and even Jesus – people around these two imagined the world/God in one way and struggled to see something new. Copernicus was afraid to publish his book because he knew how the church would react. Galileo sort of unscientifically confirmed this in his life.

I suppose that this raises all sorts of interesting questions. And we continue to struggle with these things. There are all sorts of stripes of Christian that struggle with the ideas of science. While there are all sorts of scientists, Copernicus, Kepler, Euler and Galileo show that deeply spiritual people can be curious about the cosmos. Curiosity about how the world works isn't a bad thing – we all probably have a bit of curiosity about the world ourselves. But we also need to know that curiosity and discovery do not limit God. Or, at least, curiosity doesn't limit a God who is large enough to contain the curiosity. The questions we continue to ask some 400/500 years later do not limit God, but actually help us expand the understanding of the grandeur of God and the creation. The inexplicable nature of some of the things we see, along with the curiosity of God's creatures – us – should be seen as a sign of the grandeur of what God has and continues to create, not a limitation or even a denial.

One of the tragedies of church has been something of the church's unwillingness to look at the world around it and not be afraid to ask serious questions and be willing to revise how we look at the world when we find answers to questions, confident that, sometimes, new questions will lead to revisions of old answers. Why we have, as an institution, refused to embrace the curiosity inherent in all of us, is something of a great mystery yet to be puzzled out.

The people we remember today, in the middle of the newness of the Easter season, remind us that we shouldn't be afraid of the glory of the cosmos that God has created. The person who first taught me theology once said to me that I was to remember that believing in God makes us bigger, not smaller. We should allow ourselves to embrace a larger, grander world. Doing so honors the creation and the one who created it.

So, go and look at something. Look at it with new eyes and a new sense of wonder and curiosity.

Amen.

Pastor Erdos

Easter 6

Feast Day of Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Leonhard Euler

St Matthew 13:44-52