



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

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Luke 5:1-11

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Last Sunday after Epiphany

“Putting Out Into the Deep”

Here’s something you may not know about our astounding universe: only 4% of it is visible. Four percent! Why is that so amazing? We think the planet earth is pretty big. But our sun is huge compared to the planet earth. If you melted the earth and poured it inside the sun you could fit the equivalent volume of 1.3 million earths inside the sun. The sun is an average sized star in the universe. And in our home galaxy, the Milky Way, there are a hundred billion suns. That’s a lot of visible stuff.

But our home galaxy is just one in a local cluster of 19 galaxies, each with 100 billion stars or suns. Now, expand out from our local cluster. There are perhaps 100 billion galaxies, each with 100 billion stars. And all of that visible “stuff” constitutes only 4% of the universe.

So, what’s the rest of the universe made of? Well, the best guess of scientists is that 23% is *dark matter*. It’s called “dark” because they can’t see it anywhere, and scientists can’t even measure it yet - but it’s got to be there, or the universe would fly apart. It’s like gravity, and when you do the math, it’s hanging around somewhere. The other 73% is *dark energy*. Same deal. Scientists can’t see in anywhere, but it’s got to be there, or the universe would collapse

back in on itself in a Big Crunch. Dark energy is what keeps the universe expanding.

This is the scientific way of describing the spiritual intuition of the great mystics of every tradition – that the real action is invisible to us. The realm of the material is stunningly beautiful and compelling, but it’s the invisible matrix or field that holds it all together and keeps it all expanding. Matter is the surface level – or the exterior dimension of a fathomless depth. The great mystics always knew that you had to go below the surface of things to get a complete picture of reality – that is, to be aligned with Ultimate Reality.

So, we have this lovely story of Peter and the boys coming ashore after a fruitless night of fishing. They are cleaning their nets and quietly cursing, no doubt. Jesus takes one of their boats, pushes off shore, and does a little morning class on the nature of Reality. Then he instructs Peter to take their boats and push out into the deeper waters, and let down their nets. And, of course, when they do, they catch so many fish that they can’t even haul the fish up into their boats.

It’s one of these stories that we will never know if it actually happened

and yet is profoundly true. The point of it seems to be that if you want to reap Spirit's harvest of abundant life you've got to get below the surface of things and drop your nets into the depths of the invisible realm. That's where the action is. The story of Peter and the boys leaving behind their boats and their nets to follow Jesus is all about their choice to explore the interior, invisible, depths of reality.

Well, how do we do that today? Here's one way to think about it. The soul loves the material world, in all its glory and beauty, but because the soul lives close to reality, it has a natural allurements to the invisible – the 96% that's below the surface. And to see the true glory and beauty of the material realm, you need to see all of it through eyes that know the terrain of the immaterial depths. This gives you “eyes to see” and “ears to hear” as Jesus put it.

But we know this, though, don't we? If I spend my whole life focused on making money, so that I can buy stuff, and go on Club Med vacations, there will come a day when my soul will first protest – it's called a mid-life crisis, or depression – and if I don't listen to the protest, my soul will simply go dormant. That's called hell on earth. Life becomes one damned thing after another. Why does this happen? Because our soul's native habitat is the invisible realm of the deep.

Again, the material realm is a glorious manifestation of the divine. Science is teaching us so much about

this surface level of reality, and therefore it's also telling us important facts about the nature of God. That's why we love science. It tells us as much, or more, about God as the Bible. But when you think that it's only 4 % of reality, there's a whole lot more to know about God. And when it's confused with the *totality* of reality, life becomes an endless project of distracting ourselves from the pain of an unawakened soul.

I'm going to play for a moment by correlating invisible dimension of our human experience to dark matter and dark energy respectively. Remember, the dark energy is the invisible expansive energy of the universe. The dark matter provides the function of coherence – it holds it all together. The perfect tension between the two creates the conditions for life to emerge on the planet.

Dark Energy: Creativity

Letting our nets down into the deep waters of dark *energy* corresponds to creativity – this mode of self-expression that enables our sense of self to continue to expand and evolve. The universe itself – all the stars and planets, our own earth, all the creatures and organisms, including us – is creativity made visible. Creativity is an irreducible characteristic of the universe – and therefore of God. Creation is not something that happened once 14 billion years ago in the Big Bang. Because it's an irreducible quality of the universe, creation is happening all the time. Mystics have always intuited this – the Buddha understood that the universe

was re-making itself in every single moment. When we awaken to our own creative depths, we expand into our big Self – our cosmic self. A fundamental cosmic characteristic of creativity quality awakens in and through us. Our Big Self is an occasion of the universe re-creating itself – *and doing so through us. We are both a creative manifestation of the universe as well as the creativity of the universe in human form.*

What do I mean by creativity? By creativity, I include the creative arts – visual arts, drama, music, etc. – but let's expand the definition to include the way that we all fashion our very lives. The way we make a life for ourselves is an immensely complex and creative process. The evolution of our identity – the expansion of our sense of “self” – is a process of assuming increasing levels of responsibility for the quality and integrity of our life. At some point, we wake up to the truth that we are what we have made of ourselves. This is influenced by factors beyond our control, certainly – but it is our *response* to these uncontrollable circumstances that determines our identity. This waking up to the realization that I am responsible for my own life, (and there is no one else to blame, although plenty of room for gratitude) is both a terrifying and liberating dimension of creativity: terrifying because I am responsible for my own life and liberating for the same reason. The gift of creativity is an invisible dimension of our interior being, corresponding to the 73% of the universe that is dark energy. When we let down our nets into the deep water, we undergo a shift in identity.

We realize that we *are* the universe in the process of creation.

Dark Matter: Coherence

What about the interior dimension of the human that might correspond to dark matter? Recall that dark matter is the invisible 23% percent of the universe that is holding the universe together so that it doesn't fly off in all directions. (In which case all creativity would cease). I associate dark matter with the power of focused commitment and dedication in the human being. This is like the soul's gravity. To let down our nets into deeper water means that we need to harness the power of commitment.

Our city and Whistler is filled with athletes who know all about the energy of focused commitment. They have trained for 6-8 hours a day, in one form or another, for most of their young lives, to compete in a race that in some cases will last for less than a minute. If you watched the women's mogul event last evening, the race lasts less the 30 seconds. That's commitment! The drive toward perfection – or excellence – is often denigrated by our egalitarian culture. But like creativity, this impulse to excellence – to maximize our full creative potential – is also a fundamental characteristic of the universe. It is irreducible. No doubt, perfectionism as an expression of the ego can be hazardous. But suppressing this urge to excellence is equally hazardous for the future of the planet.

Start with some hydrogen and helium molecules, leave it alone for 13.7 billion years, and what emerges are creatures and systems that are beautiful in form, function, and consciousness. In other words, what emerges through dedication and commitment is an Olympic athlete.

The universe itself is an Olympic event. It is hard-wired to produce excellence – creatures striving to be the fullest, and most beautiful expression of the universe that they can possibly be. You are an Olympian. In your body and in your consciousness you carry five billion years of life on earth yearning to manifest goodness, truth, and beauty. That's who you are, and when you forget that or shrink from it, you are not living in alignment with truth.

In the Christian tradition, this impulse to excellence that is the fruit of focused commitment is called discipleship, which simply means a disciplined spiritual life. What does that mean? It means the willingness to explore the invisible dimensions of our being as a disciplined practice. Prayer, compassionate acts, radical gratitude, generosity, contemplation, and study – these are spiritual practices or disciplines that function in us like the dark matter of the universe.

Like gravity, these practices draw us back to center in a world that carries an immense centrifugal force – spinning us outward toward the outer space of oblivion. This state of oblivion is a life focused exclusively on the surface or the material aspects of

life. (Again, I'm not denigrating the material realm. But remember, it's only 4% of reality).

Last Sunday, we witnessed 22 souls make a commitment to this community and to the path of evolutionary Christian spirituality. They became members. They made this commitment, not because it's the only, true path – that's nonsense. Rather, it's the one they are choosing to go deep with. They are letting down their nets with us! And we have a tremendous responsibility and privilege of creating a culture in which they can do this. The choice they have made to commit to this path is significant in a culture that is commitment-phobic. I've said it before, but we live in a neighborhood with the highest level of people claiming no religious affiliation whatsoever. In a city like Vancouver, any form of spiritual commitment is suspect. Except for yoga, of course. ☺

But there is no spiritual progress without accessing the deep energies of focused commitment. Commitment acts like a gravitational pull for the soul. It is a container for creativity, a crucible for all the creative impulses of the cosmos, so that they can be transformed by the alchemy of discipline. When we remain wishy-washy, keeping all our options open-ended, creativity is dispersed and dissipated. Nothing gets accomplished. The name we give to people who are all creativity with no focused commitment is “flaky” – every breeze blows them off in a new direction. So, this is the dark matter of the spiritual life. I want to congratulate all of our

new members on your courage. You are our very own Olympians! With your energy, creativity and commitment, whole new universes will come into being through us.

I want to take this one step further and apply it specifically to the one we call Christ. In the New Testament, Christ is presented as both the Fountainhead of dark energy, (the Source of all creativity), and the Cohering Power of dark matter. In the prologue of John's gospel, Christ is the Word, the one who was in the beginning with God and who was God, and through whom all things came into being. This is the divine power that took up residence in Jesus of Nazareth. Which is why we call him, Jesus "Christ" – the creative Word made flesh, possessing the power to usher in a new creation. This is the Christ who gives birth to the dark energy of the cosmos.

But Paul also speak about Christ as "the One in whom all things are held together" (Colossians). This alludes to the power of dark matter, the gravitational force that draws all of this creativity into a coherent whole. This is the Christ, who is omni-centric – the spiritual centre of the universe. So, we have all these stories about

Jesus' power to elicit tremendous commitment from people. He utters two words, "Follow me", and his pull is so compelling that a new movement forms around him – a movement which today we call the church. You've felt it or you wouldn't be here today.

This two invisible dynamics of depth animate the church of the 21st century within an evolutionary Christian spirituality. We have the divine pull toward towards the centre and source – the commitment to a spiritual path and the disciplined life of Spirit. And we have the divine creative urge to realize our full potential – to forge new futures, to live out of our Big Identity *as* the creative impulse of the cosmos, as the very presence of the Christ in our day and age.

And when you come to the table this morning, you not only receive the interior depths of this Christ – you become the interior depths of the Christ as you take the bread and the cup. Your identity deepens and expands, so that you know your self as a spiritual being comprised of deep coherence and profound creative capacities – a spiritual being gloriously enfleshed in order to bring forth a future for our planet that is Spirit's dream.