

1 Christmas, Year 2017

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147:13-21

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Today I want us
to do something a little different . . .
a meditation of sorts.

So get comfortable, relax—
do *not* fall asleep!—
and close your eyes.

As you fill your lungs
with good, long, deep breaths of air,
I want you to visualize . . . the universe.
(We think big here at St. Anne's.)

Pulling yourself far, far, far back
as far as you can go
and visualizing it the best you know how,
I want you to look from some great, unfathomable vantage point,
and see the universe in all its fascinating glory.

As its borders expand outward in all directions,
what does it look like?
How is it organized?
What do you see swirling around?
Galaxies, black holes, star clusters,
radiation, dark matter, deep space.
Behold the cosmos in its frightful beauty.

Now, as you're watching all of this swirl and expand,
scan the universe until you find . . . our galaxy.
Somewhere out there is our own Milky Way,
a handsome barred spiral floating out on its own.

Once you spot it, zoom in
and get a good, long look.
As it churns and turns,
look deep into its bright, hot center
where all of that energy powers forth.
Let your eyes run across its purple edges,

and take in the full majesty
of our galaxy's 200 billion stars.

And now, moving deeper, closer,
scan our galaxy until you find . . . our Sun.
What does it look like?
What does it feel like?

As you fly around its edges,
absorb the blazing hot energy
as it radiates with fire and heat,
glimmering with reds, oranges, yellows, and searing whites.
Watch as flares burst into space,
arching their joyful, violent energy
hundreds and hundreds of miles into the solar system.

As you shift your focus,
look outward toward all the planets and their moons
spinning around the sun in perfect balance, perfect harmony.
Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars . . .
all the way to Pluto (if you still count Pluto).
Tumble through the rocky remains of the asteroid belt;
glance at the great red storm on the surface of Jupiter;
fly through the dusty rings of Saturn.
Imagine all the energy it must take
to keep these incredible bodies in motion.

Then, as Earth swings around again,
hop onto our little green-blue planet,
and take time to voyage around
our magnificently diverse globe.

Beneath the cloud cover,
find the frigid winds and snows of the polar ice caps.
Dive into the oceans,
where whales, sea turtles, jellyfish, and plankton
do their eternal aquatic dance.
Roam across the Sahara Desert,
where camels trek on their long, comical legs.
Rush through the Amazon,
where massive trees
drip with the steamy water of life,
and birds bellow their constant call.

And last, find little ol' Tifton, Georgia,
where the long leaf pines
stretch their trunks and branches toward the heavens,
and open fields await next year's plantings
of peanuts, cotton, cantaloupe, and corn.

Look across the Tifton landscape for St. Anne's,
And come in close to find . . . yourself,
sitting right here in your pew.

As you continue to take in long deep breaths,
feel the rhythm of your heart and lungs working together.
Feel your cells dividing, multiplying, bonding together
to make you *you*.

Feel the energy that courses through your body,
pure electricity firing
from your brain, to your fingers, to your toes,
keeping you alive,
keeping you in balance.

Marvel over the fact that this electricity—this dynamic power—
is the same energy that causes the ocean's tides to swell;
that sends our earth on its orbit around the sun;
that binds our galaxy together;
that causes the whole entire universe
to live, and breathe, and thrive.

Now slowly, slowly, slowly . . .
open your eyes
and join us back here.

With all that as background,
there are only two things
I want you to know today.

Number one: When John says,
“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God,”
that is what John is talking about.

That energy that you just experienced—
the energy that orders everything

from your brain cells,
to the rings of Saturn,
to the swirling galaxies,
to the balance of the universe—
that is what John means when he says,
“In the beginning was the Word.”

In Greek, the word for “word” is *logos*,
which is also the word they used
to describe the balance of the universe,
that eternal “thing” that orders all other things.

So when John says,
“In the beginning was the Word,”
to all the learned, ancient thinkers of his day—
who, like many today, declared themselves
‘spiritual but not religious’—
John is saying, “Yes! Yes!
You believe in a divine force
that orders everything and makes it go!
I believe in that thing, too.”
For John, it is *with* God; it *is* God;
and all things came into being through it.

But here’s what’s more.
Here’s the second thing,
the exhilarating thing,
the thing that changes the game completely:

**Whatever that force is,
by whatever word you call it—
whether it be God, or Love, or the Logos,
Brahman, String Theory, or the Force—
IT IS NOT INDIFFERENT.
It has being.
It has personality.
It has a name. . . .
And it loves you.**

In fact, it loves you so much
that despite all its immensity,
it found a way to come to us
in the form of a person,
in the form of a child . . .
Jesus of Nazareth.

It was always *with* God.
It always *was* God.
And then, despite all the known laws of the universe,
it “became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Folks, *this* is John’s Christmas story.
In John’s Gospel, there are
no babies or shepherds,
no mangers or magi.

Instead, John just gives you
the straight-up metaphysical truth
that all that was,
and all that is,
and all that is yet to come
has come . . . to *you*.

So, on this seventh day of Christmas,
if you’re looking for that one last gift—
the one that actually matters most—
try this on:

The Word of God,
the mighty, eternal Force
through which everything exists . . .
has come to *you*.
It knows you;
it loves you;
and it has come to your rescue.

The heartbeat of the universe is none other
than the heartbeat of God himself.

And it beats for you.

Merry Christmas,
and amen.