

C Lectionary 17 7.24.22

Luke 11:1-13

Focus Statement: God is as vast as the universe and as intimate as our daily bread.

As a word of warning before we get there, you don't know the Hymn of the Day, it's a new one. I don't even know if it's singable, I picked it because of the words. The song is called Ask the Complicated Questions, and it pulls on the end of the Gospel passage, the metaphor about asking, seeking, and knocking. "Ask the complicated questions," the song urges. "Do not fear to be found out... Seek the disconcerting answers, follow where the Spirit blows... Knock on doors of new ideas, test assumptions long grown stale... in the knocking, asking, seeking, we are opened, answered, found." I love the way this song pushes what it means to ask. And this may be my intellectual bias showing a little bit, but those of you who've been to bible chat with me know, I love to complicate things. I never give a straight answer to scripture. This became a bit of a joke at my first call, where I was known for launching into theological discourse during the children's sermon. Leading to one particularly memorable Christmas Eve where in response to my question, eight-year-old Hannah calmly patted me on the arm and said, "Pastor, we have no idea what you're talking about, we're kids. But we like you anyway."

Part of what got me thinking about this was the breathtaking images coming back from the Webb Telescope. One of the most popular images being shared right now is called the Deep Field, a black background speckled with spots of light too numerous to count in a variety of whites, oranges, yellows, and blues. Some of the spots are bright with beams coming off while others are softer with round whorls. The bright lights are stars, the softer whorls are galaxies, each in their own right consisting of hundreds of billions of stars. It's mind

boggling the scope of it. Even more so when you realize the size of this image in comparison to the universe is like holding a grain of sand at arm's length, that is how much of the sky is in this one photo. The amount of sky covered by a grain of sand held at arm's length contains billions upon billions of stars. The universe is vast, vaster than our wildest imaginings. It's vast and it's inordinately complicated. And the more we learn about it, the more complicated it becomes. And there's incredible beauty in that. I'm sure I've quoted it before, but one of my all time favorite conversations ever is an interview Krista Tippett from the radio show On Being did with two Jesuit astronomers, Father George Coyne and Brother Guy Consolmagno. I'll put a link to it up on the Facebook page, it's an hour or so and it is so worth a listen. What I love about this interview is when you listen to it, you can hear how Father Coyne and Brother Consolmagno are like giddy with excitement when they talk about the universe. You can hear in their excitement how the more they learn about the universe the more they find there's yet to learn. Each new discovery opens hundreds of new questions, ideas, possibilities. As people of faith, they connect their wonder at science to their wonder of God. Each new discovery helps them know a little more about the nature of God, see a little more of God's creation. Just as they can never know all there is to know about the universe, they can never know all there is to know about God. But in their study God reveals Godself to them, the revelation of Godself an act of love. Brother Consolmagno makes a comparison to his mom playing cards with him when he was a child. She couldn't come out and say, Son, I love you, because he was nine, he would have gotten all squirmy and uncomfortable. Playing cards was a way to demonstrate her love for him. Science, the study of science, the ability to learn about the

universe, for Brother Consolmagno, that is God displaying God's love for him, letting him learn more about God.

Dear people of God, God is vast. God is expansive. Beyond our comprehending. But God is also simple, God is also small, God is also common, every day, familiar. I wanted to start with the vastness of God, because our Gospel reading for today is something so familiar, the Lord's Prayer. We say it every Sunday, you all know it by heart, though you might not know you know it by heart. But trust me, you do. You do and you will, you always will. That too I can assure you, because I've seen it. The Lord's Prayer is a funny thing, because it's slippery. If I tried to say it right now, I'd get mixed up because I'm thinking about it. But in the course of the liturgy, in the flow of the service, or when I'm sitting in someone's living room with communion, or on the corner of a hospital bed, or standing beside a grave, if I start the Lord's prayer, inevitably other voices will join in. I used to work in a memory care unit in seminary, I've recited the Lord's Prayer with people who could not tell me the day of the week, their spouse, even their own name, will mouth along with the words of this prayer.

This isn't because this prayer is magical, or particular, or even all that memorable. It is because it is familiar. The words, the cadence are well-worn and smooth, the message simple. The Lord's Prayer is Jesus taking the complexities of the lawyer's question from a few weeks ago, what does it mean to love God and love neighbor and distilling it into a few short phrases that you can carry in your heart. Dear people of God, the Lord's prayer is the God of the universe, a God so vast that a grain of the sky contains billions upon billions of

galaxies containing even more billions of stars, that God coming to dwell in you through your breath.

This God who is both vast and personal is why we can, why we have to, ask big questions, challenge our assumptions, let ourselves be changed. Because there is always more God to know, always more love to discover, always greater appreciation of the deep and intimate affection this God has for not just the whole of the universe but also for each and every one of us. Challenge, wonder, ask, learn, change, grow. Because the God of everything is at the same time everywhere and right here with you. Try to pin it down, like if I tried to say the Lords' prayer while thinking about it, and it might feel slippery and hard to catch. But let it come to you like breathing, for God is every breath. Thanks be to God. Amen.