

**PENTECOST 6C 17072022** *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Amos 8. 1-12; Ps 52; Colossians 1. 15-29; Luke 10. 38-42

*Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'*

Douglas Adams wrote 'The Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy' novels. In the first novel, a group of hyper-intelligent pan-dimensional beings demand to learn the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, The Universe, and Everything from the supercomputer Deep Thought, specially built for this purpose. It takes Deep Thought 7+1/2 million years to compute and check the answer, which turns out to be 42. But you already knew that, I'm sure.

Deep Thought points out that the answer seems meaningless because the beings who instructed it never knew what the question was.

So what IS the question? What is life all about? Why ARE we here; and what are we supposed to do? Working out what is important seems to me to be the task of a lifetime. When we are born, all that's important is food, warmth, and loving parental care. Through childhood we learn that getting what we want isn't always what we need, and that other people also have needs and wants so it's important we learn to share.

As we grow into adulthood it all gets very complicated. Relationships are important as is earning a living, making a home, and perhaps growing some new little humans along the way.

We can become so absorbed in the everyday busy-ness of living that we lose track of our place in the scheme of things; we haven't got time to wonder and ponder and meditate and consider- what is *really* important.

This week you may have seen some of the incredible images produced by those clever people at NASA using the new James Webb Space Telescope. These images will be of enormous help to astronomers, providing new information about the universe.

As we who are not knowledgeable scientists look at these pictures, we are reminded that the universe is much, MUCH bigger and stranger and more awesome than we can imagine. Our planet, our solar system, our galaxy, everything we think we might just be able to get our heads around- all of it is TINY in comparison to the vastness that surrounds us.

Should this give us a new perspective? Yes, I think it should. Do we need to realise that we are merely short-lived specks on an insignificant planet? Maybe..... And does that mean our lives are meaningless and insignificant? No, I don't think it does.

Being reminded of the vastness of the universe might nudge us to re-think our images and understandings of God. If we truly believe that God made everything that is, seen and unseen, then how big is God? God is more than we can imagine; so how big is MY understanding of God?

Referring to God as 'the Man Upstairs', or picturing God as a bearded old man sitting on a cloud, or any of the imaginings we might have grown up with- just doesn't cut it. More than that, isn't it disrespectful to think of the Creator as any less awesome than the universe God created?

The Letter to the Colossians, a section of which we heard this morning, contains a hymn to Christ.

Theologians are not sure whether it was sung or used as part of the liturgy before it was written in this letter; whichever, it is a wonderful description of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ.

“He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

This hymn seeks to affirm the pre-eminence of Christ in creation and redemption: he was involved in creation and holds it together and he is bringing about a new creation by reconciling us to God. Today’s gospel passage brings our perspective down to a smaller, more human scale. From the unimaginably distant stars and galaxies seen by a telescope in space, we focus on a simple domestic scene. Luke tells us this story straight after Jesus has told the parable of the Good Samaritan. He went to the home of Martha and Mary, who welcomed him; and we all know what happened next. Martha bustled around preparing food for their guest, while Mary just sat and listened to Jesus. Martha got fed up of doing all the work while her sister did nothing, and had a moan to Jesus about it.

Many of us can identify with Martha because we know what it’s like to be busily working away while someone who SHOULD be helping does nothing. I’m sure many of us could say ‘Been there....done that...’ But this homely little story isn’t about whether preparing lunch or listening to Jesus is better. It isn’t about irritating sisters or even whether the contemplative life of prayer is better than the life of active service. The point is not that Martha was working, but that she was ‘worried and distracted by many things’. Jesus pointed out to her that there is ‘need of only one thing’. What did he mean? Was he saying that a 3-course meal wasn’t necessary, and one sandwich would be fine?

Martha had lost her focus. The ‘one thing’ that needed to be the focus and the point of her work was Jesus; but she had become distracted.

What does this say to us? I think it is a timely reminder that the focus for us as Christians, and for the local and the global church, must always be on Christ, who is all in all. Separating our lives into chunks of time, deciding that this bit is for prayer, this bit for work, this bit for family, this bit for worship, this bit for doing good- misses the point. The focus of the *whole* of our lives needs to be on Christ; giving him our full attention so we are in touch with the one thing that is needed, the answer to all our questions.

Why are we here, and what is the meaning of life? ‘42’ certainly isn’t the answer! We are here because God made us for love; to love God and each other, to love our wonderful little planet Earth, and to demonstrate that love just as Jesus did. Let’s keep our focus on Christ- and see where he leads us.

The Lord be with you.