

Meditation: Stardust

Written by: Rev. Jessica M. Ashcroft-Townsley

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Science and religion are frequently pitted against one another. We think because the Bible says God spoke creation into being, but science theorizes a “Big Bang” phenomenon, that the two cannot meet in any way, shape, manner, or form. But the truth is, science and religion exist in the same world. One does not exist to the exclusion of the other, in fact, I would argue that they can enhance one another. When I think about the intricacies of what scientists believe happened at the beginning of the universe, I marvel at the Creator who orchestrated it all. It does not matter to me if the stories in Genesis literally happened precisely as they are described. What matters to me, is that we have a record of how humankind tried desperately to make sense of it in a time when so little was known about the inner-workings of our magnificent universe. What gives more glory to God, magic words that make something from nothing *or* designing an intricate process through which an entire universe would evolve into being? You can make up your own mind about that.

You may wonder why your pastor has chosen Ash Wednesday to venture into such a controversial topic. I comment on the origins of the universe because today is the day we reflect on our finite existence in an infinite reality. As ashes are smudged on our foreheads, we are returned to humility, reminded of what God said to the first humans millennia ago: “you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Lent is a time when we reflect not just on the finitude of our human bodies, but also on their origins. As astronauts look down upon the earth from their vantage point on the International Space Station, they are reminded daily of how small the

individual is in the grand scheme of the universe. As spring approaches and we begin thinking of lying out beneath the stars on camping adventures yet to come, we are reminded that the stars we gaze at are millions of lightyears away and that some of them are already gone, exploding into supernovas, their particles of dust hurling through space, spreading the length of the universe and bringing new things into being. Scientists believe this is how the earth was created, from tiny particles of stardust that formed together over eons of time to make this planet what it has become. And, if we are formed from the Earth, then we, too are made up of the stuff of stars.

As we reflect with humility on our boundedness in the boundless universe created by the boundless Creator of all things, let us also reflect on how loving and generous that Creator is, that we, too, come from the mysterious process of these precious particles who joined together in such a way as to make us into who we are. A season of penitence and humbleness is not a call to reflect on some imagined worthlessness, but rather one that reminds us of our interconnectivity, that we are all made of the same stuff and are called to love one another in kind.

As we begin learning to walk through the darkness of Lent once again, let us remember the promises of the Triune God given through the prophets: that when we call, God will answer. When you cry for help, God will say, "Here I am." When you feed the hungry and help the afflicted, showing mercy to others, you, too, will be shown mercy.

In this wilderness time, let us turn toward one another rather than away, letting God create in us open hearts that reflect the best humanity has to

offer. Let us remember that even as we walk through the darkness, we do not do so alone, but with the magnificent presence of God and in beloved community. Christ, himself, calls us to humility in Lent, defining practices such as giving alms, praying, and fasting. As we, in gratitude for the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, seek to draw nearer to him in this season by engaging in these practices, may we never forget that the same glorious stardust that formed us also formed Mary, the mother of God among us. As we practice our spirituality, may we remember more deeply our connectedness to all things lovingly created by our God and called good. Even in our humility, may we remember that we are magnificent stardust and to that same stardust we will one day return. Amen.