

The world is getting bigger. The cosmos is expanding at a zillion miles a year. The world is getting smaller. Scientists are building cells from the atom up, and organs from the cell up. We are developing communication devices, both visual and audio, that will be powered by the electricity of our skin, or eyeballs. We are using microscopes with receptors only an atom wide. Sounds like science fiction? Read this month's *Smithsonian* magazine whose theme is "40 things 40 years from now." And that's sort of where the lectionary this week leads us. We see a God, or better said, our conception of God, that expands both in grace and complexity with each new reading, starting with Psalms reading, and concluding with the Gospel of Luke.

So let's dispatch with the lectionary, and then get to the good stuff—the 40 in 40 years stuff, and related musings.

In the Psalms we have God as a high school principal. He is the maker and enforcer of rules. They're good rules—be righteous, tell the truth, no slandering or slurring of reputations, keep your word, no unfair money-lending, and so on. Follow the rules and you get to stay in school, break them and find another school district. One problem—there are no other school districts or even alternative high schools. It's a "my way or the highway" god, except there are no other highways. With a God like this, I certainly would not be one of the chosen, nor would most of the rest of us, except maybe Jane.

In Genesis we see a God who is willing to break his own rules, in this case the rule of nature. Abraham and Sarah are righteous and generous, and God grants them a child, once no doubt a huge desire of theirs, but at their age now a fading memory of longing that only stabs at them in the shadows of near-sleep. God sees into these guarded hearts, and grants them their nearly forgotten, but greatest dream, a son they name Isaac. But even then this God is not entirely magnanimous. Remember when God made Isaac take up the mountain, ostensibly to be a sacrifice? God's getting bigger, but He can still get kind of mean.

Also, this is unabashedly tangential: did you notice the term Sarah uses in reference to her spouse Abraham? She thinks, "After I am worn out, and the *master* is old." *Master!* The New International is painstaking in using the term closest to the original Hebrew. These chosen people are

still into a pretty rigid hierarchy, one reflected by, echoed by their relationship to Yahweh.

In 1st Colossians, Paul starts using phrases like “mystery . . . that is disclosed to the saints,” and implies that perhaps even these lowly non-Hebrews could be counted in the ranks of saints. We’re seeing a pretty major shift here. This is a God now being defined by Her inclusivity, not the opposite. This is a God of indiscernible ways, but those ways lean toward acceptance, and the granting of a special role to all believers—sainthood nonetheless. Never though of it before, but that great gospel and jazz number “When the Saints come Marching in” is theologically suspect. The saints aren’t *coming*. They’re here; you’re sitting next to one in fact.

Finally, we find Christ himself proclaiming the ways of God wonderful and mysterious, even if they seem selfish and shortsighted. He praises the seeming sluggard Mary while telling her sister Martha to lighten up and smell the coffee, the wonderful aroma of the presence of God in their midst. Martha is a good Jewish girl doing what good Jewish women *always* do, *take care of the Jewish men!* The Christ is telling her that there are times to let it all go, to bask in the grace of God visited upon the world in the form of His son Jesus. Maybe that’s why JC never married—he’s just too threatening to a Jewish girl’s idea of a stable catch. Or in the words of that great literary masterpiece, the 1960’s era musical *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, we hear Mary singing, “I don’t know how to love him, what to do, how to please him. I’ve been changed, yes, really changed. In the past few days, when I’ve seen myself, I’ve seemed like someone else.” Later in the same song, she cries out: “I never thought it would come to this. What’s it all about? What’s it all about?”

My point? Our relationship with God is now both profoundly mysterious and amazingly personal. It’s both larger and smaller than anything that King David, to whom the Psalms are at least traditionally ascribed, could have imagined.

And what does this have to do with the expanding universe, growing our own cells, nanoscope magnifying devices and the like? Simple—our experience of our world is parallel to and reflective of our relationship with the amazingly expansive wonderfully intimate God.

Let's start with the expansion of the universe. How fast is it happening? We've all heard that it's pretty fast, right? And that nothing in the universe can travel any faster, right? Right, on both counts, but the universe itself is expanding at the rate of $3E26$ (that is 3 followed by 26 zeroes) times faster than the speed of light! Actually, that's wrong. That was its velocity when it started expanding. It's going faster now. And it won't stop going faster anytime soon.

Back to our nano-microscope. It can see stuff at the nano-level. So what is a nanometer? It's not very big. A thin human hair or sheet of magazine paper is about 100,000 nanometers wide. A typical bacteria--which we can't see, right?--is 1,000 nanometer across. So why so we care? With the technology that goes along with size level of measuring and manipulation—don't ask me to get any more precise than that we can make all sorts of gizmos, things that capture the waste heat from anything the size of a laptop to a power plant, its-bitsy computer memory cards, even a coating to go on glasses that will resist fog. Using this technology we can build a working medical "laboratory" the size of a postage stamp. Put a drop of blood on it and it can read that blood in a way that can diagnose the presence or absence of upward of 1,000 different diseases, then communicate that information via cell phone back to experts in more populated parts of the planet. Pretty handy if you in an African desert or the Australian outback.

Those communication devices I mentioned. They are not only manufactured using nano-technology, the means of wiring them is based on the same technology, a idea arising from the study of how clams and other shellfish make their amazingly strong, light shells out of chalk, which in itself is hardly the stuff of steel. Ask any teacher who existed in the age before whiteboards. The one that allows us a visual read would be overlaid on our actual eyeball, allowing us to see images projected to them, but not interfering with our normal vision when we don't want to use it. The audio one—how it works *Smithsonian* never explained, but would the *Smithsonian* ever lie to us?

I'm about geeked out, but let me tie the God thing back together with the nature thing. Our relationship to both is both growing more rapidly expansive, and more amazingly intimate. And, this is my prediction, the

more understanding we are of our need of God—and Her need of us—is reflected in our understanding and relationship with what I now can only loosely call nature. Shakespeare wrote, “Oh brave new world, that has such people in it.” I’d like to twist the bard a bit and say, “Oh brave new human, who has such worlds about us.” Thank you, God. It is amazing! And you are telling us that we are worthy of this world, this enterprise of living in it and exploring it. May we honor that worthiness with joy, and husbandry, and awe; but not so much awe that we don’t keep digging further into its secrets. Despite the flat earth-ers, and the seven day-ers (and I might add the tea party, party poopers, as well as people on my side of the political spectrum who don’t want to look into issues with an open and inquiring mind), this is the world our God has made. Let us let our imaginations revel in it, and our intellect roll around in it, as a child does on soft grass, the first warm, dry day of summer.

Benediction

This is the world your God has made. Yours are the lives given to you by God. Enjoy, wonder, study, explore, dissect, assemble. You’ll never get to the bottom of all of it, you’ll never get it all put together; but that’s the job given us to do. Nice work if you can get it, and we got it without even trying.