

## Sermon for the Fourth Week in the Season of Creation

### Readings: Proverbs 8:22–31; Colossians 1:15–20 & John 6:41–51

The most contentious question in the history of humankind is arguably that concerning the origins of the universe: how did the universe come to be?

Perhaps the most widely accepted answer to that question, at least from the perspective of science, is the Big Bang theory. According to this theory, space and time emerged together approximately 13.7 billion years ago, and the universe has been expanding ever since. Of course another possible answer is that God created the universe. This possibility is understandably greeted with scepticism by those in the field of science, and also by those who identify themselves as atheists.

A question often asked by atheists (Professor Richard Dawkins being an example), is that if God created the universe, who created God? My response to that question is to ask another question: if it is reasonable to accept that space and time just suddenly emerged together, then why isn't it reasonable to accept that God just emerged? I don't know what your view on the matter is, but I'm happy to believe that God "just was", and that God provided the essential "building blocks" of the universe which then developed as theorised by cosmologists and other scientists.

The Bible has a lot to say about the origins of the universe, and each of today's readings bear witness to that. In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman. Today's passage from Proverbs, describes her birth at the beginning of time. It tells us of her intimate relationship with God, and of her knowledge of the order within the cosmos. Wisdom issues from the very character of God; it is not something created apart from Him. And as an attribute of God, wisdom is a characteristic He employed to create the cosmos.

This depiction of Wisdom as being present with God at the time when the universe was created, and being an agent of that creation, is consistent with the description of Jesus as the *Logos* or Word of God in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (John 1:1–3 NRSV)

This is what the Apostle Paul is referring to in today's passage from the Letter to the Colossians when he says that all things in heaven and on earth were created in and through Jesus. He writes that Jesus is before all things, and that all things are held together in him. This is a reference to the preexistence of Jesus before creation. Jesus is the key who unlocks the meaning and purpose of the universe and of what God has done, is doing, and will do. And, if Jesus preserves and perpetuates the whole universe, then he can preserve and perpetuate all those who believe in him.

Paul also says that God reconciled all things to Himself through the death of Jesus on the cross. Everything was created through Jesus, but the created universe is fallen and needs reconciliation to God. That reconciliation was achieved within history through Jesus alone, who took on the flesh of his creation and endured the agonising suffering of the cross.

In today's passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus has made certain claims about himself that can only be understood in terms of his origins: that being a descent from his Father above. However the religious leaders who oppose him will not consider such a possibility; after all, they know his father Joseph. So Jesus explains his role in terms of his origins with God the Father. The Father sends Jesus, the Father draws believers to Jesus, and the response of those drawn to the revelation of the Father in Jesus, will be the measure of their everlasting life. It is Jesus who will raise up the believer on the last day. While God determines the process, it is the encounter between the human being and the revelation of God in Jesus, that determines life, death, and everlasting life.

In the opening chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus is compared to the figure of Moses, when John writes, "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (John 1:17–18 NRSV) We must remember that the Jewish people believed the only way for a person to be reconciled to God was through strict observance of the Torah, which was the collection of statutes and commandments that God gave to Moses. But Jesus is teaching the Jews that the way to God is through him.

Moses is a revered figure in the Bible, the greatest of the prophets in the Old Testament, but he is surpassed by Jesus. The difference between Moses and Jesus is their respective origins. Jesus' origins were with God, which gave him a unique authority to make God known to humankind. Because this is the case, whoever believes in the revelation of Jesus, has eternal life.

John continues the comparison between Moses and Jesus in today's passage when he reminds his readers that Moses was able to sustain the ancient Israelites in the wilderness through the manna from heaven. However it is no longer Moses, represented by the law and manna from heaven, who sustains life. It is Jesus, whom John refers to as the true bread who has come down from heaven.

Jesus, the true bread from heaven, came to make the Father known and, in doing so, surpasses the former gift of the manna from heaven. He is the bread of life. As the comparison of two "breads" draws to a conclusion Jesus recalls the experience of Israel's ancestors who ate the bread that came down from heaven in the form of manna: they all died. The bread that comes down from heaven, in the person of Jesus, promises eternal life.