

“Cosmic Particularity”
Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:1-18
Second Sunday after Christmas, Year C, January 2, 2022
First Presbyterian Church, Sandpoint, Idaho
Andy Kennaly, Pastor

In the action-adventure movie, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Harrison Ford stars as Indiana Jones, the son of Dr. Jones, Sr., who is played by Sean Connery. His father has the lifelong passion of discovering the Holy Grail, the very cup used by Christ in the upper room during the Last Supper. The myth was that this cup was like a fountain of youth because Christ’s blood had been in it. Of course, in the movie, they have a dualistic plot with good guys and bad guys. The bad guys also try to get the cup and it’s near the end of the movie that all of them, good guys and bad guys, discover the cup together. Of course, there is a struggle to get it and in the process of struggling over who has the cup, there’s an earthquake. The ground cracks and heaves as the Holy Grail gets lodged on a ledge just out of reach. One of the bad guys, a woman, falls to her death as she tries to reach for this cup of eternal life. Just after that, Indiana Jones also slips and must choose between reaching for safety or stretching out to try and get the cup; it’s so close! His father, despite the lifelong passion of finding the cup, convinces his son to let

it go. He reaches for his father who pulls him to safety and as the remote temple begins to collapse, the good guys make their escape, but the cup is left behind.

As they look back through the dust, Dr. Jones Sr., Sean Connery, says that the woman who fell thought of the Holy Grail as a prize; she sought it as one seeking power. Indiana Jones asks his dad what he had sought the Holy Grail for. With one of Sean Connery's greatest movie lines ever, Dr. Jones Sr. replies with a gleam in his eye, "For illumination."

While this movie is a fictional adventure, it's based on some facts. Jesus did use a cup at the Last Supper as he says, "This is my blood shed for you." And the cup on our table symbolizes our eternal redemption in Christ Jesus. Eternity in this case has less to do with Hollywood's version of the fountain of youth, or sequential time as duration without end, but is qualitative, as life is grounded on God's unending love and presence. This eternal life is the gift of God's very Self, and we don't seek this for power, not even as a prize. In fact, if you really think about it, the fullness of life has less to do with seeking and more with being found as God's grace comes to us and illuminates our lives as we learn to let go and fall into this love.

The Protestant Reformer, John Calvin, says that we can't truly know who we are before we know who God is, which is interesting because God is mystery. But, Calvin and the Protestant Reformation help lead to the later period of The Enlightenment, so with a focus on rational thought, he says, "Without the knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self...it is certain that a person never achieves a clear knowledge of themselves unless they have first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating God to scrutinizing themselves." As John's Gospel puts it, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."

When we read from the Gospel of John, especially this prologue section from chapter one, we notice right away how high and lofty the language sounds. John embraces God's mystery. John looks for signs and uses symbolic language to share deep truth. John sounds like Genesis; "In the beginning," with all the darkness and light, and sweeping images like Word with a capital W, and that "all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." This is life, and this life is the light of all people.

How something is written depends a great deal on who the readers are. John is written after the other three Gospels, some 70 years after the crucifixion of

Jesus, after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. By then, the Christian audience was less rooted in the Jewish faith and was mostly Gentile, based on the Greek world. There were far more Gentile than Jewish Christians, and so John is using images and words that the Greek world would understand. Also, by then, Christology had developed and John, in speaking of Jesus, speaks of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. He has what we may call a very high Christology and he celebrates the glorious, cosmic scale of Christ's divinity through the particularity of Jesus' humanity. Spirit and matter merge, and this is the Incarnation. That's the message of Christmas.

John uses the term Word, the Word of God; in Greek, Logos. To the Greeks, the "unseen world was the real one; the seen world was only shadowy unreality." Plato, the philosopher whose teachings Western culture are based on, put it into terms of ideas vs. physical material, that "in the unseen world there was the perfect pattern of everything, and the things of this world were shadowy copies of these eternal patterns. The great reality to John's Greek audience would have been that the pattern of all patterns and the form of all forms was the unseen God." John's declaring that in Jesus, God's Logos, the Christ, we have the way to get out of our shadows and into eternal truths; Jesus *is* reality come to earth." For John, Jesus is the true light, the true bread, the true vine, and for "true" we can also read

“Real.” Jesus is the real light, the real bread, the real vine. For people under Plato’s spell, John’s declaring that it’s “Jesus alone who has Reality in our world of shadows and imperfections.” This was very liberating for the Greek audience.

But what about us in our context? We need to see if this really represents our image of God and reveals our true Self. Do we agree, for example, that Plato had it right, and material things are not worthy of dignity compared to other virtues like sight or thought? There are so many Christians who use this traditional, western paradigm to filter understandings of John’s use of light and life, the Logos, God’s Word, but what about us? What does the Incarnation in Jesus, God’s Cosmic Christ expressed in the particularity of a person, mean for us today?

As we gather around this table and drink (symbolically) from this cup, we are renewed. This cup is offered, and so as we reach out, it is not to grasp or control, but to receive for we partake in God’s illumination that the true, real Light gives light to every person and the Christmas message proclaims this Light comes into the world. With open hearts, we partake, we receive, from God, the right to become children of God. In grace and truth Christ makes God known to us, and it’s Jesus that invites us to this table. Christ appears in fullness through Jesus to show us that it’s good to be human (not easy, but good), that grace is Reality, and Love is the relational shape of everything. Even as we partake, we can let go of

our desire to understand this through mental structures, or paradigms, cultural assumptions, philosophy, and doctrinal interpretations. Through the Holy Spirit, filled with renewed faith, God sends us to share this real Light with a world that so often assumes and settles for shadows. Yet its often the shadows that have the most to teach us, and even in the shadows we take our next breath, a gift from God.

Thanks be to God for Christmas joy, that in Christ Jesus, the light of God shines in this blessed and beautiful world. As Christ comes to Christ's own, may humble hearts receive this Love, and may our living be courageous reflections of cosmic realities shared through Christ. And may God be glorified, now, even as forever. Amen.