28 SEPTEMBER 2025 **A Reflection** Rev Wayne Toleafoa

THE COSMIC CHRIST

Readings: Proverbs 8:22–31, Colossians 1:15–20, John 6:41–51

On this Sunday in the Season of Creation, we focus on God in the cosmos.
In our first reading from Proverbs, Wisdom (Greek: Sophia) is God's partner in birthing creation. Wisdom is the co-creator of all creation.

In our second reading (Colossians 1:15–20) St Paul identified Christ as a 'cosmic' Christ. 'The image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, through whom all things—visible and invisible—were made'. Christ is no longer confined to the earth. Christ is now everywhere in the cosmos.

In these two readings, Wisdom and Christ are portrayed as cosmic principles—that are pre-existent, creative, and intimately woven into the fabric of the universe. And woven into the story of creation.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus called himself 'The bread of Life' or the 'goodness' of life. The life force that sustains and gives us life now and eternal life. In John's gospel (Chap1 – John's Prologue) Jesus is described as the Logos/Word the life-force that sustains creation.

At the last Supper Jesus described himself as Bread. For us and for all Christians he is the Bread of heaven. The One who sustains us and sustains all of creation. God in the cosmos comes in the bread of Holy Communion and in the person of Jesus.

I'd like to invite you to think this morning of 'what is it that gives us a sense of awe these days?'

What is it that gives you a sense of awe?
Is it the sky? The sea? Mountain ranges? Outer space? People doing dangerous, or courageous deeds?
What is it that gives you a sense of awe?

For my Pacific Island ancestors and Māori, and your Celtic ancestors, nature was once a source of awe. The earth, the sky, the sea, the forests, the rivers and the mountains and all living creatures were infused with the sacred life-force (Māori = mauri).

That is still so today in the Pacific Islands, although with the influence of the Missionaries, the Christian gospel and the Jewish Scriptures (we know as the Old Testament) have become infused into most Polynesian cultures. So that even the

natural order, and the Polynesian worldview, has been over–layered with the Judaeo Christian anthropology.

In the Western world, some of the things which have held people in awe included monumental human constructions like the Pyramids in Egypt, the mighty cathedrals and castles in Europe, iconic monuments like the Colosseum. More recently, the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the giant Christ statues in some of the Catholic countries. These monumental human constructions have held people in awe (in some cases, for centuries).

I remember looking up into the dome of St Paul's Cathedral in London – the whispering gallery, and so many other older buildings in Europe which can be described as 'awe inspiring'.

I attended a church in Oxford which was built around 1040AD - St Michaels at the North Gate. The age of the church gave me a sense of awe. It pre-dated the Māori migration to Aotearoa NZ.

One/you could just imagine the tremendous amount of human energy and devotion that went into the construction of those ancient churches and castles. The energy and devotion that went into an Edinburg Castle, or a Salisbury Cathedral, a St Peter's Basilica, or a Blue Mosque in Turkey. Generations of people, working in all weathers, spent their relatively short lifetimes, building these awesome constructions.

For ordinary worshippers living in humble cottages, cathedrals/castles were awe inspiring places, rich with colour, artwork, music and learning. Places of worship and entertainment and education. Cathedrals were often seen as a kind of heaven on earth with their majestic arches, saintly statues and heavenly music.

The last two centuries have brought radical shifts in what we consider to be awe inspiring.

Scientific discoveries revealing the vastness of space and the intricate complexity of atoms and cells, have expanded our understanding of what 'awesome' truly means. We are no longer linear, one-dimensional thinkers.

Cathedrals and monasteries were built in the days when the presence of God was almost confined to Church buildings. The presence of God was closely tied to the physical church buildings. Buildings modelled after the Jewish understanding of the 'house of God', 'The Temple', or the Ark of the Covenant.

To connect with God you had to come to church where the sacraments were administered and where the divine presence was concentrated. God was in a sense, 'institutionalized' - contained within an institution.

God was like almost like the genie in a bottle, an invisible substance who lived inside the church buildings and particularly in the central sacrament of the church : The eucharist, or Holy Communion.

Life outside the church was often viewed as the 'ordinary' or 'profane' - focused on daily survival rather than spiritual connection.

In the Navy Chaplaincy we used to joke about locking the chapel doors before we left for the weekend, because 'we don't want the Big Guy running loose around the base in the weekend.'

Of Course it was only a joke, but it reflected what some people once believed about God and the church. The church was where the God-bothering and religious activities take place. It is where God is most alive. In the House of God.

Our images and pictures of God have also changed over time, alongside our ever-expanding knowledge. We have moved a long way since the days when God was virtually institutionalized.

During the Protestant and Catholic reformations (both churches went through their own reformations, which took place between 1500 – 1700, Jesus and the Holy Spirit became more like a personal presence.

'The Institutes of the Christian Religion', by Jean Calvin, invited people to believe in a personal saviour.

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola – an evangelical tool of the Catholic Counter Reformation. Modern day version is 'lectio Divina; or praying the scriptures. It invited the believer into a new intimacy with Christ.

Both Catholics and Protestants presented the possibility of knowing Jesus as a personal friend and Saviour, besides being 'The Lord'.

For the Protestant, God was tied to the Scriptures. 'All that is necessary for our salvation is contained in the Old and New Testament 'according to the Presbyterian Confession that I and every Presbyterian minister has signed up to. Jesus was 'The Word' of God, contained in the Scriptures.

For the Catholic, God was contained in the Sacraments and rites of the Church, in its tradition and in its institutional life (magisterium).

The danger in making Christ so personal was/is that people can domesticate the image of Christ – He is 'my' personal Lord and Saviour and no one else's. The danger was/is that we create a Christ in our own image. Or Jesus becomes like a 'buddy' when I'm sure that Jeus is more than that to us.

As I have said, science and space exploration have radically changed our perception of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. The divine is no longer confined to buildings or institutions. One could argue that God is no longer confined to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is still speaking to the church and to us as believers.

God is now seen as being present everywhere- in nature, in communities, and across the cosmos.

Ironically, we in the 21st Century are returning to the world of nature and the cosmos as sources of connecting with the Divine.

We have now embraced the vastness of time and space – unknown to people two centuries ago. We have had to redefine what is 'awesome'. Despite our modern way of perceiving Christ as a cosmic presence, we still maintain an intimacy with God through the Holy Spirit. Many of the Psalms like Ps 139 and Psalm 8, capture that sense of the majestic and the intimate held together.

Psalm 8

1 O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your
glory above the heavens.
3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you
have established.
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Psalm 139

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Prayer – Cosmos Sunday

God of all time and space
We give thanks for Your Word—
Spoken through Wisdom, sung by the cosmos,
Made flesh in Christ, the One through whom all things hold together.
May we live as part of Your cosmic body,
Feeding on the Bread of Heaven,
And praising You with every breath.
Teach us to honour creation,
To walk gently upon the Earth,
And to join the chorus of sun and moon,
Whales and winds, elders and children,
In worship that stretches from this land to the stars.
Through the Cosmic Christ,
Who is before all things and in whom all things are made new.
Amen.