

Thought for the Day – 31st August, 2020

My God is a great big God

with Philip Rice

Imagine that one night you have a dream and you're floating in the utter blackness of deep space. An eternity seems to pass, but nothing changes. It's just you and the velvety, dark, star-sprinkled sky.

Far off in the remote distance, you notice a tiny disk of light. Squinting, you see it slowly unfurl into a spangled, spinning, puddle of stars. Somehow you know this is the Milky Way. For eons, you drift slowly toward the glowing, expanding mass.

Scanning its starry arms, you hope against hope that you can pick out an insignificant dot that you've known all your life as the "sun". For some reason, you seem to be attracted to a dim pinpoint buried in an arm about two thirds of the way out.

After drifting closer to the little dot for many millennia, you're finally so near that you can see planets! You spot a tiny Saturn with rings and then ,make out Jupiter with its red spot.

Then your heart leaps to see a blue-green marble appear.

Slowly the spinning orb grows larger. Continents and oceans become visible under a blanket of clouds. As you descend through the stratosphere, mountain ranges and deserts flash past.

Now, below, you see splashes of light – cities aglow by night. Orienting yourself toward home, you feel yourself slowing as you fall. Through some amazing miracle, you gently land on your own front lawn.

Then you wake up, go outside, and look up at the night sky. You realise that the scene you dreamed isn't make believe – it's reality. Every night that you look up into the starry, black sky, you're peering into the farthest reaches of the universe. You are but one single inhabitant out of billions on a planet that is a speck within the scope of the wider universe. You are mind-bogglingly infinitesimal.

We don't tend to focus on our smallness these days. In fact, I think that in biblical times they were much more aware of the reality of our smallness than most people are today. A common theme in ancient writings is that human beings are a small part of a larger system, at the mercy of forces much greater than themselves.

This sense of smallness is at the very core of Israel's consciousness of God and it forms the very essence of biblical worship.

"Do you not know?" asked the prophet Isaiah.

"Have you not heard?"

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers." (Isaiah 40:21-22)

It's remarkable that technology has shown us in more detail than ever before the immensity of the universe and our microscopic existence within it, yet this doesn't seem to have given us any sense of humility as a result.

It's as if our 21st century western culture is so dazzled by its own brilliance that it's blinded to anything bigger than itself. We think we can overcome anything and take charge of it.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel writes: "Greeks learned in order to comprehend. Hebrews learned in order to revere. The modern man learns in order to use he is sure of his ability to explain all mystery away."

It is good to learn and to use what we learn, but only if we use it for good and preferably in line with God's purposes. In order to do that we must first have an understanding of just how much bigger God is and then we must set about learning God's ways and God's purposes. Then one day, all things will be revealed by him who already knows everything.

Song:

Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God,
and he holds us in his hands.

He's higher than a skyscraper
and he's deeper than a submarine.
He's wider than the universe
and beyond my wildest dreams.
And he's known me and he's loved me
since before the world began
How wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan.

Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God
Our God is a great big God,
and he holds us in his hands.
And he holds us in his hands.