

Pastor's Letter

I find myself expanding this time of year. “Good pastor”, you may say, “After a big Spring dinner, assorted graduation feasts, and countless summer picnics...who doesn't?” But I'm not talking about my girth so much as my “living space.” Winter is all about hunkering down, packing in, and buttoning up. Summers, by contrast, mean opening up, dusting off and airing out. It's a season of expansion, when our “functional living space” may double or triple, perhaps simply by the addition of a now-inhabitable back yard!

The tight constraints of colder months give way to a blessed spaciousness. Our behaviors reflect this widening phenomenon: at church, we leave our 4 walls to gather and worship and laugh and pray and eat in other places – down in the valley, up at the park, along the lake. Many of us leave our homes to visit family. And family comes to visit us. We reclaim our yards and gardens, which for long months had been impounded by Old Man Winter. Quite simply, this time of year we “live larger.”

Perhaps it's no coincidence that we landed on the moon in July. During a season of maximum expansion, humanity reached its pinnacle of exploration: just over 245,000 miles beyond our backyard. And with that journey to our nearest celestial neighbor came the opportunity to gaze back at ourselves and appreciate both our blue-green beauty and our finiteness.

A recent NPR radio program raised the question of intelligent life in the universe. (Depending on the day, some may question whether we humans qualify!) Scientists remind us that our radio broadcasts have only been emanating from Earth for about 100 years – since the first radio was invented. This mere 100 light years of transmission doesn't make for much of a “calling card” in a universe measured in billions of light-years. But it's a start!

As a race, we once believed that just beyond the horizon lay a dreadful place where we would surely fall off the face of the earth. I wonder if, in all our supposed sophistication, we might still harbor a similar fear about the inner world of the heart: that if we let it range too far and wide it might be lost over the edge, plummeting into relativism and stripping us of our sense of “us” and “home.”

Of course, unlike those early maps featuring fearful waterfalls and sea serpents at the “end of the earth”, we now know that if we travel far enough, we come back to where we started. It's very difficult to fall off a sphere.

Could this be true spiritually, as well? Could it be that our wanderings into other realms – of people, places, cultures, ideas and even faiths – will lead us home? And perhaps like the Apollo astronauts, lead us home with deeper gratitude, humility and awe?

The universe is God's, and the fullness thereof. “If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me.” (Psalm 139)

Many of us may not even cross the border of Ontario County this season. But it doesn't mean our thoughts; our love and our souls can't range far and wide, seeking the face of God in all we see.

Happy travels to all!
Tim