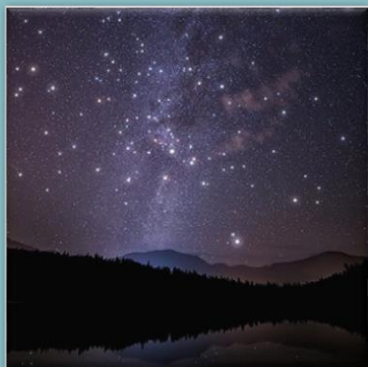


When I consider your heavens



*"When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?"
Psalm 8:3-4*

"...what is mankind that you are mindful of them?"

Some people have been telling us that the night sky is clearer these days because of reduced atmospheric pollution. If that is true, it's certainly good news for stargazers who turn their eyes to the heavens in wonder.

Astronomers currently estimate that there are one quadrillion stars in the universe. That's a one with 24 zeros after it, a *seriously* big number! Contemplating such a number boggles the imagination and is surely a great antidote to any feelings of self-importance we may be tempted to have.

When the Psalmist contemplated the vastness of the universe, he was prompted to write:

***"When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?"***

Psalm 8:3-4

He was expressing in poetic language the question "Why would the God who made the vast universe and everything in it be remotely interested in little me or you?" It's a good question and one addressed by the very first book in the Bible – Genesis.

Genesis 1 provides a statement of purpose and function. It's not a "how?" description but a "why?" explanation. It affirms that that humankind is the pinnacle of God's creation. To mankind God has delegated the responsibility of caring for this world on His behalf – as a sort of vice-regent. That's why he described us as being made in the *image* of God.

The universe is indeed vast and so is its creator. He knows each one of us and he loves us. John, whose gospel begins with a brief reference to creation, declares very simply that "God loved the world so much that He gave his only son" But, sadly, not everyone *experiences* this love which for many remains hidden like undiscovered buried treasure. It's real but it's unknown.

What sort of people do come to experience God's love? Can anyone find the treasure or is that only for the favoured-few? It's certainly not something that can be earned by worthy deeds nor can it be worked out by clever calculation or reasoning. God's love is experienced when He reveals it. He opens our eyes. The apostle Paul, formerly Saul, had his eyes opened on the Damascus road – possibly the most unlikely U-turn in history.

But if we can't work to get it, there are things we can do to *position* ourselves to know and experience the love of God. To use an analogy – withdrawing cash from an ATM; whilst we need to be given the PIN, we do need to go to the machine and stand there, finger at the ready! Position is important.

How can we position ourselves to allow God to disclose His love? Here are four things:

- **Seek and you shall find.** (Matthew 7:7) God tends to reveal his love to people who want Him but not to those who don't.
- **He fills the hungry with good things, the rich he has sent empty away.** (Luke 1:53) God tends to reveal his love to those who feel empty but not to the self-satisfied and self-confident.
- **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”** (John 14:23) God reveals his love to those who are willing to respond with obedient commitment but not to those who go their own way.
- **How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** (Romans 10:14) God tends to reveal his love when it is communicated. That involves speaking and listening, which is why it is good for Christians to share the good news and not keep it private and hidden. Some Christians are reluctant to initiate conversations for fear of being pushy or causing offence. They might need a little nudge but are very ready to respond when asked questions, as in the case of a certain Ethiopian in the book of Acts.

These are just four things which put us in a good place to have “the eyes of our heart opened.” To conclude: another big number: One hundred billion. That's a one with 11 zeros after it. It's an estimate of the number of people who have ever lived on earth. And Jesus said that God knows the number of hairs on our heads which is good for a few more zeros.

Yes, God's universe is indeed vast. But so is his love and you're included! May you *experience* this love, and may it carry you through these challenging times!

Chris Moffett, Trust Director