



## *Richmond Hill Reflections*

**“Cosmic Incarnation”** (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

September 15, 2019; Ember Day 1 (Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Readings: Psalm 104; Excerpt from *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness* by Ilia Delio

As we enter an election campaign, I’m struck by how many words we use that carry emotional weight yet mean different things. Religion has lots of these “loaded words”. When I say “sin”, do you hear what I want to say? Or do you hear what it means not just in your mind but heart as well? “G-d” is a loaded word. We use lots of G-d language in church, but do we all mean the same thing? As we give thanks for “creation” today, I thought I’d also share some thoughts about the “creator”.

For me creation and creator go hand in. The imagery of Psalm 104 speaks to this. Admittedly, the psalmist writes in human terms, ironic given that people take a backseat in the psalm, showing up to farm. We hear how light is G-d's robe. The sky is a tent with G-d enthroned above it; wind and fire are G-d's servants. Yet as I listen to the words, I hear the poet share an experience of divine presence in and through light and the sky, how wind and flame are ways by which creation’s source speaks.

Note the words I shifted to - presence, source, divine. Theologian Paul Tillich suggested we stop using the word “G-d” for a hundred years because it’s laden with human imagery. We see the Holy as “a” being rather than the foundation of what we understand as “Being”, existence itself; as distant not close, separate rather than connected. But the psalmist sees creation and creator as one.

My theology is incarnational too, but not just in terms of Jesus, even if it’s what we’ve inherited. We read in John, in the beginning was the Word. He tells us the Word was with G-d yet became flesh. This is what incarnation means: enfleshed divinity. The Word was viewed as the principle of order that brought shape to the cosmos. This, John wrote, was in the world. yet the world did not recognize it. Notice how we read “Word” but hear “Jesus”, interpret it as the world not recognizing Jesus as the Word. But what if it means that we look at the world yet fail to see divine presence all around us. Because Jesus was human, the first interpretation shows how we image G-d in human terms, and even then, male terms, Zeus really. We betray too that we see ourselves in the top spot when the psalmist makes clear we’re but one part of a diverse universe. As Ilia Delio writes, we need to be more cosmic in our theologizing, starting earlier than two thousand years ago with Jesus, or one hundred thousand years ago with modern humans, but 13.8 billion years ago with the Big Bang.

A more cosmic than human theology makes sense to me and not just intellectually. I don't recall if I shared this with you in worship before. Indulge me if I have. When I was in seminary, each year we went on a week-long, silent retreat. We were all together, about sixty of us. It wasn't easy to stay quiet when you saw people everywhere you went. So one year I brought my bike. I would find a spot far away from everyone else. On one occasion I rode to an isolated beach. I found a spot in the sand where I could lean on a log and look out over the water. I centred myself and began to pray. With the warmth of the sun on my face, I watched as a sandpiper darted along the shore. I closed my eyes and listened to the rhythm of the waves. I don't recall how long I was there but suddenly everything fell away. I was embraced by a powerful energy of love. I felt a deep peace and unity. This experience didn't come from outside of me nor from within me. It simply was.

What's key to me about my experience is that it didn't happen in spite of the sand and sun and a sandpiper. For me they're an essential part of the experience. The unity of love I experienced that day included them. The connection I felt was beyond me and the sandpiper but included us both. This is why being in nature is so special. It's where I remember that every star and bird, the lake and the log I leaned against, every person, is a holy gift. There I most feel divine presence, not as a Father on a throne over the sky, nor even a Mother, although if I used human images it would come closer, but as a thrum, an energy of life, of love, flowing through everything and beyond it. The fancy term for this is "panentheism". I think I shared once how in describing my theology to a friend she said, "So you're a Jedi." I think I sound more like a Druid. But in the end I don't think it matters. Our experiences are personal. This way of speaking about the Holy makes sense to me.

I'm sure over time you've picked up how Jesus is still important to me, grounded as I am in my connection to him, and striving to live the values of "the reign of G-d" he named. But I believe the living G-d Ilia Delio writes of, is experienced profoundly in Jesus but not exclusively. Rather incarnation is a revealing of the living love of one we call "G-d" in and through creation, starting with the Big Bang, unfolding in stars, and a sandpiper, and each of us. Jesus as Word made flesh reveals who "G-d" is, who we are, and how we are to be in a relationship of love with all things.

And there it is. Some of my personal theology, "loaded" words and all. The truth is, given how personal spirituality is, the word "G-d" will always be loaded. As a community of faith, we can't really avoid G-d language, but at least when I use it, you will have some sense of what I mean.