

Who Gets to Narrate the Universe, Part Two

Today I'm continuing a little series that centers on some very important questions and assumptions that are being posed by the media and politicians and government whistleblowers. Last week I shared with you some of the things that are in the news about UAPs, what we used to call UFOs and alleged evidence of alien technology and even extraterrestrial creatures. It's really all over the news, and maybe it's just because my attention has heightened to it, but it seems like it's even more so. There were several stories that came out this week, one of which was just today.

I'm not especially interested in space aliens and spaceships and that kind of thing, or really the idea of extraterrestrial life. It's interesting to ponder, and in that way, I guess, I'm interested in it. But what I want to really have the focus on here, what I really want to be clear about, is these questions that are being asked and these assumptions that are being made.

Why? Because the questions that are being asked are really important ones. They're even existential. What does that mean? It means getting right down to the matter of existence.

They're being posed, though, not by Christians, but by, once again, media, whistleblowers, politicians, scientists, etc. And so, in that way, they are setting the narrative. They're telling the story. And I think it's a vitally important thing that we Christians maintain God's story and set the narrative from a Christian perspective. Because, once again, these are big existential questions.

In last week's sermon, I laid a foundation on what was simply and profoundly God's big story. It's the place to build our case. It is the narrative. It's the single overarching story that gives meaning to life and the universe and everything.

God's big story is summed up like this, and if you remember, say it with me: Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Re-creation. Seven points that I hope you'll remember. And really, when you tell God's big story, it's a wonderful way to answer all kinds of things that may come your way.

Let's say it again. Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Re-creation.

I want to begin this week by reminding you of a couple of quotes, a couple of these questions and assumptions that are being made and have prompted this little series of mine.

One recent news article says this: "A Harvard physicist searching for UFO evidence says humanity will view alien intelligence 'like God.'" And he also predicted that the scientific discovery of an alien civilization, one that "may be potentially billions of years old" will prompt humanity to unify."

Another quote from a news item: Arthur C. Clarke, the famous science fiction writer, once wrote, “We are either alone in the universe or we are not. There are only two possibilities. Both are equally terrifying.”

One commentator said that what our government has in its possession will “completely change our understanding of the universe and our place in it.”

And then, finally, this quote. I just saw it this week. It came across one of my feeds. It's from Jill Tarter. She's a PhD in astronomy. She was once the chair of the California Academy of Sciences. She was the chair for SETI research, you may remember, “Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence” — SETI— research. And she's the one who was portrayed in the movie “Contact” by Jodie Foster, if you saw that movie. So, it was based on her life.

She had a quote that was in the news this week.

She says, “Are we alone? When we used to ask the question, ‘Are we alone?’ we used to ask priests and philosophers. We used to ask them, ‘What should we believe?’ But what any of us believe isn't going to change the way the universe is. And so, the appropriate thing to do is a scientific exploration to go and try to find out...” (listen to this) “...to go and try to find out what is we want to know how we stack up against the cosmos. Are we unique? Are we one of many? And if we are one of many, how intelligent are we in relationship to something else out there?”

Now, humans naturally are deeply interested in these kinds of questions. And they're important questions, but they're not the ultimate questions. And the reason we are deeply interested in these kinds of questions, I think, is because we're starved by the lack of asking deep questions. So, when we hear one, we want to latch onto that and ponder it. It's a good thing to do. But I'm wondering along the way if we've fallen out of the ability to ask and talk about deep things.

Science has a lot to say, and we should listen. But to assume that science can answer the fullness of the questions is not accurate.

I want you to think about that Harvard physicist and his quote just a minute. The means to discover whether there is alien intelligence does likely belong to science. But the means to know whether it will unify humankind or whether it should unify humankind is not science's domain.

We learned a few weeks ago from Psalm 133 that the only thing that can truly unify humankind is the lordship of Jesus Christ. God's desire is for the pinnacle of his creation, humankind, to live in unity under his reign and for the worship of him to be that thing which unites us— which also unites, by the way, the whole of the created order.

I want you to think a minute about that Arthur C. Clarke quote I gave a minute ago: “Are we alone in the universe?” Well, that may be answerable by science, but the assumption that the answer is terrifying does not belong to science.

Psalm 91 says, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys it midday. A thousand may fall at your side, 10,000 at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”

The assumption that our government allegedly has in its possession some things that would “change our understanding of the universe and our place in it” should be completely outside of and of no import to Christians whatsoever.

That's so good, I'm going to say it again: The assumption that what the government allegedly has in its possession would “change our understanding of the universe and our place in it” should be completely outside of and of no import to Christians whatsoever.

Psalm 8 says this, “You have set your glory in the 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? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet.”

And I want you to think about that quote from Jill Tartar, the PhD., the one about what we used to ask priests and philosophers. The thing about her statement that really struck me is that it kind of scrambles up and then combines meaning and belief with scientific certainty. So, somehow, she talks about things that have to do with meaning and belief—remember she says we used to ask philosophers, priests, what should we believe—and then it kind of scrambles it up and combines it with scientific certainty. And yes, sometimes those things overlap, but they're not the same thing. And we have to be discerning about that which does belong in the area of the sciences and that which does belong in the area of theology.

But really, I'm a little uncomfortable with that bifurcation, because there was a long, long time where they weren't separated at all in our thinking.

So, what I'd like to do today is focus on the question that seems to be at the root of most of the things that these folks are saying. Here it is: “Are we alone in the universe and what's our place in it?”

Now, why do you suppose that question might seem to terrify some people (and it shouldn't be terrifying to us at all)? Well, I think for one of two reasons.

Here's why that might terrify somebody— “Are we alone in the universe and what's our place in it?”

One, because people who are not very deep Christians have a God and a story that are not very big. They haven't remembered Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Re-creation.

And the second reason is because people who don't believe in God do believe this: that life must arise from nonlife. If you are a Darwinist, if you're a nontheist, then you believe that life somehow comes out of nonlife. So, for them, think about this, extraterrestrial life has become an article of faith.

For them, the universe has to be filled. It has to be filled up with habitable planets. And those habitable planets must be packed with life both unintelligent and intelligent.

And yet, at least so far, we appear to be, "alone."

So, the question, "Is there life on other planets?" is interesting to us believers. But it's absolutely essential to those who don't believe in God if their speculation about life and the universe and everything is true.

And yet we seem to be "alone"?

There was a fellow by the name of Enrico Fermi. He was an Italian American physicist, and he was most famous, I guess, for being the creator of the world's first nuclear reactor. It happened in Chicago. It was called the "Chicago Pile." And they were the first ones or the first place to be able to get a reaction sustained.

He was also a member of the Manhattan Project, which is kind of near and dear to my heart because when I was in Knoxville, Tennessee, my father worked in Oak Ridge not with the Manhattan Project, but with some of the aftermaths of that, most especially nuclear energy, radiation, and moving on to the health-related aspects of that.

Enrico Fermi's name has been attached to something called the "Fermi Paradox." The Fermi Paradox. And here's the paradox: The paradox is the contradiction between the supposed high probability of many advanced alien civilizations out there and the complete lack of evidence for them.

The story goes like this: He and his buddies were at Los Alamos back in 1950 and they're sitting around the lunch table and there's a cartoon that they're looking at from the "New Yorker Magazine," and it shows smiling aliens coming out of a spacecraft. And they were all very much involved in talking about this. And Fermi sits back and says, "Okay, but where is everybody?" In other words, "If that's the case, and you all believe that there are thousands and thousands and thousands, perhaps even billion-years-old alien civilizations, where are they?"

Listen to this: Christians have never believed that we are alone in the universe. I want you to think about that for just half a jiffy. Christians have never believed that we are alone in the universe.

It's part of God's big story. Apart from the sure presence of angelic and other beings that we can even scarcely imagine (more on that next week)— apart from the saints of God who have gone before us and even now are in the heavenly places with Christ— apart from the millions upon millions of wondrous creatures from the microscopic to the gargantuan on this particular

planet, probably most of which we have yet to discover— apart from of that there is God. There is the Godhead, the forever and endless Family of Three, Father/Creator, eternally begotten Son, Holy Spirit, from all time, from before time, for long after time. They are a Community, a Family of three. They are God.

You ever think about what God's life is like? That interior life of the Trinity? You ever wonder what is a “day” like to God, how wonderfully full it must be? I'm reading right now a marvelous book called *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard. If you've not read it, you need to, and I have a couple of passages I'm going to share, all toward getting to the idea of how full God's life must really be. Pay careful attention, would you?

“Central to the understanding and proclamation of the Christian Gospel today, as in Jesus' day, is a revisioning of what God's own life is like and how the physical cosmos fits into it. We should begin with this: God leads a very interesting life and that he is full of joy.

“Undoubtedly, he is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of his love and generosity is inseparable from his infinite joy. All of the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul exhilarating joy God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth and richness.

“We pay a lot of money to get a tank with a few tropical fish and never tire of looking at their brilliant, iridescence, and marvelous forms and movements. But God has seas full of them which he constantly enjoys.

“We are enraptured by a well-done movie sequence, or by a few bars from an opera, or lines from a poem. We treasure our great experiences for a lifetime, and we may have very few of them, but he is simply one great inexhaustible and eternal experience of all that is good and true and beautiful and right. This is what we must think of when we hear theologians and philosophers speak of him as a perfect being. This is his life.

“A short while ago, the Hubble Space Telescope gave us pictures of the ‘Eagle Nebula,’ showing clouds of gas and microscopic dust reaching six trillion miles from top to bottom. Hundreds of stars were emerging here and there in it hotter and larger than our sun.

“Human beings can lose themselves in card games or electric trains and think they are fortunate. But to God there is available, in the language of one reporter, ‘towering clouds of gases trillions of miles high, backlit by nuclear fires, in newly forming stars, galaxies cartwheeling into collision and sending explosive shockwaves, boiling through millions of light years of time and space.’ These things are all before him, along with numberless unfolding rosebuds souls and songs and immeasurably more of which we know nothing.”

God's life is wonderfully full with things we cannot see or even imagine. God is not alone, and therefore neither are we.

Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are God's handiwork—workmanship, your translation may say it. The Greek word is *poema*. The word we get poem. You are God's artwork.

Here it is: “God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms, in Christ Jesus. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Seated us with him. That's our place in the universe. Glory to God. And not only are we seated with him, we are in him, and he is in us.

One of my favorite passages in all the Bible, John 14:16-20: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows him.” (Scientists can't measure it) “But you know Him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.”

Jesus says, “Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me, because I live. You also will live. On that day you will realize...” (this is the key part) “that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”

We are made in the image and likeness of a Creator God. I don't know why he chose to do that, but pressed upon you, his *poema*, his workmanship, are his very own fingerprints, if I can say it that way. Did he do that somewhere else in the universe? I don't know. It's okay with me if he did. It's not terrifying. And it's okay with me if he didn't. That's not terrifying either.

To be united to Christ is to share in a union with Christ, made possible by the indwelling of the Spirit, who is in the Father as the Father is in him. And union with Christ means nothing less than fellowship with all three Persons of the Trinity. The Godhead. You are in Christ. You are in union with the eternal family.

We are not alone in the universe, because that's where we are located. God is not alone, and neither are you. And we know where our place is.

Let's pray. Father, we will not let “science” try to answer or set the narrative to questions and pose things that have to do with meaning and belief.

Lord, science is beautiful. It allows us to think your thoughts after you in many cases. But, Lord, we will move and live and have our being in you, as Paul said to those who were wondering about a foreign God.

Lord, I thank you for the redemption of the whole of the cosmos, for all of creation being redeemed in and through and by you. I don't know why you chose Earth to do that, but it has cosmic implications, and today, especially this day, when people are saying, “are we alone and what's our place in the universe?” and “I'm terrified,” we have the answer because we tell the story that puts it all together.

So, this day we come in humble praise and worship, giving thanks, bowing our knees before the Father who has done this ineffable, wondrous, amazing thing, and who, apart from us, and before we even came along, was living a wonderfully, full life in that union of the Trinity, the eternal family. Thank you for inviting us to be a part of it.

And we will pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.