

**13.8 Billion years ago...give or take a few billion years,
a cosmic event, more stupendous than any science fiction movie,
more brilliant than the mind can imagine
The Great Flaring Forth roared the universe into being....**

**13.8 Billion years ago....
the process which would eventually lead
to dinosaurs and to butterflies
to the Himalayas and to Grand Canyon
to puppies and whales
spicy hot peppers and sweet, juicy mangoes,
the processes and possibilities had begun.**

**13.8 Billion years ago,
in the fiery cauldron of exploding stars...
the possibility of you and I
was born.**

**Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday...the beginning of the Holy Season of Lent.
In 325 AD the Council of Nicea determined that the date of Easter would always be the
Sunday following the first full moon after the Spring equinox.
Then the Church would count back 6 Sundays...and the Wednesday before those would be
Ash Wednesday.**

**I have found it fascinating that the date of the Holiest of Days in the Christian Calendar
has been determined by the phases of moon and the tilt of the Earth...
but I guess it makes sense from the ancient point of view...
The Ancient peoples, including the hierarchy of the Church were peoples who were much
more in tune with the natural world.
They observed the stars and the cycles of the nature.**

Their understanding of the universe gave them a framework and a language to express their understanding of God and God's ways.

as you probably know, in Ancient times, people believed that Earth was flat and there were pillars which supported the heavens where the gods lived on thrones. They believed that the world was complete and unchanging.

According to their Ancient understandings:

Earth and the humans who lived on it were subjects of the gods.

If you made the god unhappy or offended him or her,

...or you wouldn't have rain for your crops or

sons to inherit your property or you would be defeated in war....

This ancient view was prevalent in all religions...even Judaism.

While the prophets tried to change the minds of the Jews,

much of the Hebrew Scriptures tell of their reverting back to this kind of thinking.

But scientists are telling us now that the universe isn't static or unchanging...

they are telling us that is expanding and evolving...

We know there is no place of heaven 'up there' where

the streets are lined with gold and beings with wings play harps and blow trumpets...

Yet, many Christians, dare I say most?, still live within an ancient understanding of a static and complete universe with a god sitting up in heaven judging them to be worthy or unworthy of love.

Many Christians still reject current scientific understandings of the universe and fail to allow beauty and wonder and immensity of the cosmos to influence their understanding of the Divine.

Many Christians resist seeing the Holy through the framework of an evolving universe, and many deny the reality of an evolving human person....

So Lent, for lots of Christians has remained time bound in an ancient and untrue understandings of the world and of God.....

Jesus tried to change all that...at least the God part.

Granted, he had no knowledge of an expanding universe.

He didn't know of evolution or the growing complexity and diversity of life on Earth.

My goodness...he didn't even know there was a North American Continent where other peoples lived!

But he did know that Yahweh loved people unconditionally...

**He knew that it wasn't ritual sacrifice in the Temple that was important to God,
but how broadly you could love and
how often you could forgive and
and how many boundaries could you cross to show compassion and mercy.**

**We know now that the Earth is not flat...and the gods, or God...
doesn't live on a throne just the other side of the stars....**

**We know now that the world in which we live is an ever unfolding mystery
always leading towards greater diversity, complexity, beauty and magnificence.**

**We know now that the world is never complete...it is never static...
it is always growing and always evolving
and so are we.**

So...our understanding of Lent and its' practices must change.

**First of all: We must give up the image of God who sits on a throne judging people as
sinful and unworthy.....that is not the Abba God Jesus.**

Secondly...we must give up the notion that humanity in some long ago time

was perfect and life was easy and the world held no pain and no one ever died.

We must be willing to acknowledge that all life on this beautiful, green Earth comes from the death of something else....

birth and death have always had an intimate, entwined relationship.

You know, Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval theologian once said,

If you misunderstand nature, you will misunderstand God.

We now know from our scientific explorations that the cosmos is an ongoing evolution of increasing complexity and diversity.

and that the human person is an ongoing process evolving higher and higher consciousness....

We now know from our spiritual explorations that God, the mysterious Graced Presence of the Cosmos, is the life force that enlivens it all!

We now know the teachings of Jesus and his way of understanding God and humanity....

Is it entirely possible to hold all of this together?

ABSOLUTELY!!....

and when we do that, when we see the teachings of Jesus within an evolutionary context...

we can see ourselves as a work in progress, as evolving creatures growing in consciousness and Love....

THEN the season of Lent can be a time to participate in the conscious evolution of our hearts and minds.

Traditionally there have been 3 spiritual practices:

One is prayer...practicing being in the presence of God is good and right and beautiful.

We will learn much about ourselves and our God.

2. Alms giving: sharing what we have, be it money or time or talent...with those who have not. Is a good and right and beautiful thing to do....

3. Fasting: Let's not worry about fasting from chocolate just to lose those last 5 lbs. but let us fast from gossiping. Let us fast from negativism and worry...Let us fast from judging other people and ourselves...let us fast from working 24/7...

Let us fast from anything., any action, any way of thinking or being or loving that clouds our awareness of our essential holy nature and the noble task to which we have been called.

This Lent let us feast on forgiveness, on kindness...on patience and the healing power of God.

13.8 Billion years ago the Holy One set into motion the great and noble adventure of Life....

Let us never forget to say thank you! amen....