

What God Is Doing

Pastor Chuck Harris

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Well, welcome once again to our service of worship on Cosmos Sunday. This Sunday we are going to think a little bit about the big picture, so I want to ask this question as we begin:

Are we living in alignment with the way things really are, or are we just making it up to suit ourselves?

I want to kind of bring this into focus by sharing with you what I did in elementary school.

One late spring—when my mom was planting the garden outside the backyard—she had bought some tomato plants. And I said, *I think I know the right way to grow a tomato plant.*

She had them in the ground. She had them protected. They had lots of sunlight. I said, *I know a better way.*

So she said, *Fine.* Being mom, she said, *I'll let you hang yourself,* and she gave me a tomato plant.

I put the tomato plant in a small brown paper bag, and I hid it in my closet in my room for about six weeks. I was certain that—well-protected and out of any harm's way in my closet, in the bag—that this tomato plant would thrive.

In fact, I think I made a little bit of a bet with my mom that the tomatoes I raised in my closet were going to be better than the ones that she was raising outside in the garden. I even said something

to the effect that *all the world is going to see and be amazed*. And this is from an elementary school student.

Six weeks later I went to my closet, opened the door, and took out the brown paper bag. When I opened the bag, there was literally just dust inside of it.

It reminds me now—at this point of life—of that great thing we say on Ash Wednesday: *ashes to ashes and dust to dust*. That was my tomato plants.

God had set things up a little differently.

And when we're out of alignment like that—like I was out of alignment with how tomato plants actually are set up to grow—life suffers and things die. I would say that one more time.

When we are out of alignment with how it is set up to be, life suffers and things die.

The flip side of that is that—when we are in alignment, life thrives. All can see it. We know when life is thriving; we can see it, and we know it. The whole cosmos ends up praising God.

Like Alan read in Psalm 148:

Praise the Lord from the highest heavens

Praise Him in the heights

Angels praise him.

All his hosts praises him.

The shining stars? They're shining. They praise God. The heavens are where they're supposed to be. And they're containing the waters like they're supposed to. They praise God, who established and fixed everything in their bounds.

All of it praises God.

Stormy winds fulfilling their commands? They praise God. Birds fly? They praise God. Snow and frost doing their job? They praise God. Mountains, hills, cedars, people, young and old alike? Everyone shouting:

We can see it! We know it! Praise to you, O God!

And then there's a beautiful part at the end of the Psalm where it talks about everyone being close to God.

If we look at our lives, though, how many of us can actually say that—day in and day out—we live in that beautiful mosaic alignment? How many of us can actually say that?

I know I can't.

We mostly end up praising *ourselves* and how *we* want to make everything happen. Like my little tomato project.

Look at what I'm doing! Praise me!

What a burden that is in the end. I mean, we know that's what we do, but don't we also feel the burden of trying to be the

Creator of the entire cosmos? Doesn't it get a little tiring at the end of the day?

It's just like my Legos when I can't put them all back together. Don't we feel—not just burdened, but taken apart ourselves—when we set ourselves up to be the ruler of it all?

There's something in us, and I think in the whole cosmos, that knows who the Creator is and that we are the creatures. And staying in that alignment is important.

A friend of mine named Gary is fond of saying it this way:

The way God has set it up is that God loves you and there is nothing you can do about it at all. Zip, zilch, end of conversation.

That's part of the alignment. God loves us unconditionally and there is nothing we can do about that.

There was a time in my life (earlier than the tomato project) that I remember hanging out with my mom in the kitchen while she was sewing. She had an old-fashioned sewing machine that had all sorts of belts and I don't know what. I was so fascinated by how all of it fit together and worked to make that needle go up and down, to make that thread go through the pieces that she was sewing.

It was an amazing thing. Everything was working in alignment. I was so fascinated and in awe of it. I walked up and—when she

wasn't looking—stuck my finger right there where that needle was up and down.

I don't think the devil himself made the same kind of terrible noise that I made at that moment.

I remember the world going kind of blurry and my hearing not working very well. My mom caught me, wrapping something on my finger and just holding me. When I came back to my senses, I felt encapsulated, and I started to struggle. I started like, *I'm getting out of here. This kitchen is a dangerous place. I'm going outside and playing in the street where it's safe.*

The more I fought against my mother's arms, the worse I felt. The flip side of that was, the more I relaxed into her love, the more amazing I felt.

It's the same way with God. As we relax into what God is doing, as we let God align us with the way things really are, the better it actually feels. And the burden of trying to be God is taken away from us.

Colossians understands this dynamic between the Creator and the creature. What is it that God has done to help us, move us into right alignment with the way things all are supposed to be?

Colossians knows exactly what God has done. On a cross, two-thousand years ago, God reconciled all things to God's self, whether in heaven or on the earth.

Two-thousand years ago.

Let this sink in, folks. Two-thousand years ago, Colossian says God made things right and we didn't do anything to make it that way. **It's a gift to us.**

God took over all our scheming, all our *look at me, I'm God, it's all about me* kind of ways. Our *I'm in charge of everything* attitude.

God said, *I'm sorry, I've already taken care of that. I have reconciled everything. It's done.*

There's only one thing left for you, precious creatures and the whole rest of creation to do: praise me and live like it's true.

Praise me and live like it is true.

Not in order to get something, but because we've already received everything. Lutheran's call that **grace**.

We live—not in order to get something from God—but because we've already been given everything that we need. It is a life that is fully a gift, and it is set up to be an ongoing communion with God.

Jesus says it this way: *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Eat of this bread and live like you're supposed to.*

God has already drawn everything together. In fact, you can't come to the Father unless the Father is drawing you, which is what God is doing now.

Live like that's the way things are supposed to be. Can you imagine the burden of life actually being taken away? Well, it was.

Can you actually imagine living in alignment with that? That it's not up to us anymore? What grace that is. And the cosmos knows it and sees it and praises it.

Think about it. Instead of saying *if only I can _____, then I'll be happy*. Imagine letting go of those kinds of statements and saying *because God is so amazing, therefore I'm going to go into _____*.

Do you see the difference? **It's not about us anymore.**

It's about God and living beautifully out of what God has done all around us. It's grace upon grace. It's what we Lutherans are known for.

And here's the rub: we're known for it *in theory*. We just got to get better at practicing it. But that's what we're here for: once again being brought back to the center, put in alignment, and then going out and joyfully living it.

That's what I love about us: every week we get a chance to come back, get realigned, and go out into it.

Thanks be to God, and all God's people say Amen.