

SERMON 14th June 2026

Almighty God, your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world. May your people, illuminated by your Word, shine with radiance of his glory, that his love may be known in the world as he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever. Amen.

“We are the cosmos made conscious, and life is the means by which the universe understands itself,” wrote the Brian Cox, professor of particle physics at the University of Manchester. “We are the cosmos made conscious, and life is the means by which the universe understands itself.”

He is not the first to say something like this, Carl Sagan, professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences at Cornell University in America, said decades ago, in a T.V. series called *Cosmos*, “We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.”

In fact, this idea goes back many millennia. It is the idea that because we are made of the very same stuff, the atoms and gasses, that the universe is made of, and because we know this and can think about the universe, then we are the brain of the universe. “We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.” “We are the cosmos made conscious, and life is the means by which the universe understands itself.”

But we might very well be the way that the universe understands itself, and we might very well be the way the cosmos knows itself, but what is it that the universe needs to understand and know? For physicists like Carl Sagan and Brian Cox, and many other scientists, the things that the universe needs to know and understand are the things of science; how the universe works chemically, physically, biologically.

That might be true. Perhaps, these things are the things that we need to know. After all, if we know and understand the universe scientifically, we can make our lives better lives to live; is that not the lesson of history?

In our Gospel reading this morning we hear that Jesus ‘went from town to town ... healing every disease and illness.’¹ He then sent his disciples to heal people. He said, to them, “Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons...”² If that is our task as beings who are the way the universe understands and knows itself, then surely science is the thing that we must understand and know, for the more science we know the more we will be able to ‘heal every disease and illness.’

But Jesus did not go to the towns and villages to heal every disease and illness, nor send his disciples out to heal those who are ill, because he and they happened to be qualified or particularly skilled medical practitioners. He went to the towns and villages, and sent out his disciples not because he had a particularly good scientific understanding of the universe and scientific knowledge of the cosmos that he had passed on to his disciples, but because, as our Gospel reading says about the people he met in these towns and villages and the people he sent his disciples out to meet, ‘...they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.’³ And he had ‘... compassion on them...’⁴

¹ Matthew 9: 35

² Matthew 10: 8

³ Matthew 9: 36

⁴ Matthew 9: 36

If it is true that, as science professors Carl Sagan and Brian Cox say, we are a way for the cosmos to know itself, and we are the cosmos made conscious, and life is the means by which the universe understands itself, then the thing that Jesus teaches us, or in the case of the lost sheep of Israel, the thing that Jesus wanted to remind those lost sheep about, is that someone cares about us; someone has compassion on us.

In this otherwise cold, dark, bare, lonely lifeless universe the thing that we are to understand and know first and above all other things is that we who are a part of this universe are cared for; someone has compassion for us. Understanding the universe scientifically will do us no good, will only bore us to tears, will only ever amount to pieces of knowledge floating around in a vacuum if we do not appreciate first that we are not alone and that we live in a place that is warm, light and alive.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spends a lot of time telling people this. He preached a long sermon on a mountainside which told people that, more than anything, the most important thing they needed to know was that they should care for and about one another.

In the Gospel of Matthew it appears that people had forgotten this, or commonly had been misled by those who lead them, to believe that the most important thing they needed to know and do was to understand and know the Law and abide by it; the Law that was the equivalent in Jesus' day of science in our day. This had led to the people of Israel becoming lost. Jesus describes them as lost sheep, and lost coins waiting to be found.

It is to the people of Israel that Jesus first went, and first sent his disciples for this was not the first time that the people of Israel had been lost. They had been lost for almost forty years back at the beginning of their history, when God had led them out of Egypt and across the wilderness to the Promised Land. In that story of their origins, their journey from tyranny and slavery to freedom, the people of Israel had repeatedly become lost. That had not become lost because they were without a good map of the Sinai Peninsula, which they were crossing, but because they repeatedly ignored, or were led astray and forgot, that God, the universe made conscious, cared for them, loved them.

We become lost when we are unloved or feel ourselves to be unloved. We fail to truly understand and know the universe around us when we are unloved or believe that we are unloved. No matter how much understanding and knowledge we have of the universe, it is useless to us if we do not have compassion for ourselves and others, lost sheep who are harassed and helpless. In this otherwise cold, dark, bare, lonely, lifeless universe the thing that we want to know and understand more than anything else is that someone cares. If we don't believe someone cares about us in this world, very quickly we become lost.

That is why, when he called his disciples, Jesus didn't call them into the synagogue to learn the Law, or call them together using the school bell, or teach them some far reaching philosophy, or teach them the healing properties of medicinal herbs, or lay out for them a revolutionary political program, or start a war to topple their oppressors. Instead, he passed on to them his compassion; he gave his twelve disciples 'authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness.'⁵

In the other similar Gospels to Matthew, the Gospels of Mark and Luke, those Gospel writers give us a list of the names of Jesus' disciples near the beginning of the Gospels' stories shortly after Jesus calls them to become his disciples. But in the Gospel of Matthew, we do

⁵ Matthew 10: 1

not discover the names of Jesus' disciples near the beginning of the Gospel when they are first called to him. In the Gospel of Matthew, we discover the names of all Jesus' disciples not when Jesus calls them to follow him, but here in chapter nine, when he sends them out to do his work.

Following Jesus means going out into the world to make the Kingdom of God known to people, "As you go," said Jesus, "proclaim this message: 'The Kingdom of God has come near.'" The Kingdom of God has come near, that is the message. The Kingdom of God, the universe, is making itself known and understood to us, and we know and understand the universe when we care for it. And we first care for it when we have compassion for each other. When we have compassion for each other, then we know that we are not alone in this cold, dark, universe, instead we feel, know and understand that the universe, that God, loves us.

Now to the one who can keep you from falling and set you in the presence of his glory, jubilant and above reproach, to the only God our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and for evermore. Amen.