

# God's toe, and God's wisdom

*Sermon preached by the Rev. William McD. Tully, Rector,  
at the eleven o'clock service, May 23, 2010: The Day of Pentecost: Whitsunday  
Based on Genesis 1, Acts 2, and John 14:8-17*

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and the earth was without form and void. And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1)

In these first words of the Bible, we see that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” In a modern translation, “a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

In other words, at the big bang, at the first moment, the Spirit was present.

This week there were lots of headlines as always: Afghanistan. Thailand. The oil spill in the Gulf. The debt crisis in Greece and the euro. The stock market.

But for my money, this is the winner. An article from last Tuesday that began with this extraordinary statement: “In a mathematically perfect universe we would be less than dead. We would never have existed.”<sup>1</sup>

Why wasn't this a banner headline on page one?

The article continues, “According to the basic precepts of Einsteinian relativity and quantum mechanics”—bring this all to mind if you will—“equal amounts of matter and antimatter should have been created in the Big Bang and then immediately annihilated each other in a blaze of lethal energy, leaving a big fat goose egg with which to make the stars, the galaxies, and us.”

“And yet,” Dennis Overbye reports “and yet we exist, and physicists (among others) would dearly like to know why.”

Yet we exist.

This is news? Yes, it is.

The article refers to a discovery at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, portending fundamental discoveries at the Large Hadron Collider outside Geneva. One scientist called this report “very impressive and inexplicable.”

The effect that they discovered by having sub-atomic particles crash into one another at high speed is that there are particularly strange particles at the foundation of the universe called “neutral B-mesons, which are famous for not being able to make up their minds.”

Welcome to life as we know it.

Here's what the collider is proving: these “mesons” oscillate back and forth trillions of times a second between their regular state and their antimatter state. And, as it happens, they seem to go from their antimatter state to their matter state more rapidly than they go the other way around.

Let me say that again: they go from their antimatter state to their matter state more rapidly than they go the other way around.

This is the headline I wish the Times editors had used: *Eventual preponderance of matter over antimatter is about one percent.*

That's where we live.

Neil Weiner of New York University says, “If this holds up, the L.H.C. is going to be producing some fantastic results.”

I refer you to Genesis One.

Paul Davies, in his wonderful book *The*

*Mind of God* traces how all attempts to explain rationally or experiment with the origins of the universe end in paradox. He says that this does not mean that the universe is absurd or meaningless, only that an understanding of its existence lies outside the usual categories of rational human thought.

In the biblical tradition, and in the heart of Jesus, there is access to this paradox through a collection of human activities, emotional intelligence, and practical formulas for living called “Wisdom.”

In the ancient scriptures many teachers taught that wisdom, *sophia* in the Greek—yes it’s a *she*—is closely aligned with or identical to the holy Spirit of God. And it’s the same Spirit that moved over the face of the deep. Back, please, to Genesis 1.

We’re going to baptize some people in a few minutes and we’re going to pray that same Spirit will move over that little bowl of water. But more importantly, we’ll pray that the Spirit, the Wisdom, of very energy of the universe, will be let loose in these people, and they will learn from it a wisdom, a paradoxical wisdom about the nature of being itself. They won’t wake up every day conscious of the nature of being or experimenting with the sub-atomic particles that make up the power of the universe. But they will be aware that there is this gift, this Wisdom, this Spirit.

In the book of Wisdom in the Apocrypha (the books between the Old Testament and the New Testament, which we recognize in our Anglican tradition) we read this:

“Wisdom is more moving than motion. Because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. She is the breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory

of the Almighty . . . . She is a reflection of eternal light and the spotless mirror of the working of God.”

This is the gift Jesus taught that is available to all people. And it makes a profound difference not just to live as if these particles are alive in us but to *know* that they are alive in us. And more than that, to know that *we are loved because we are made of the same matter that God is made of*, the matter he used to make the universe, the matter that wins over antimatter by one percent.

The collect this morning, the opening prayer, talks of the promised gift of the Spirit. Why does that gift seem to go missing so often in this life? Why do we forget what we are made of and forget what promise is possible in our lives?

Maybe, as the writer Cynthia Bourgeault suggests, it’s because the story of God’s wisdom or spirit is not a linear one.<sup>2</sup> Like life itself, it is up and down, and the mysterious gaps in the story when the Spirit seems to go cold or go underground are all part of the dance of life.

If so, that’s not unlike that struggle between matter and antimatter, but remember: matter wins by one percent. Love wins. Life wins. And the story goes on even though physicists are quite right to tell us that it is mathematically unlikely.

One scientist looking at the information he gained from the collider, said: “I would not say that this announcement is the equivalent of seeing the face of God, but it might turn out to be the toe of God.”

Like the proverbial camel’s nose under the tent, God is real, even if by hint, or just a toe.

The ironic and sometimes baffling teaching of Jesus was to tease out of us

the possibility that God is real. That there is wisdom available. That wisdom at the heart of our own matter—and not common wisdom, not conventional wisdom, not maybe even holy wisdom, but a wisdom that is deep and loose in this world.

The Spirit of God, the gift of baptism, the gift of life itself is the Wisdom of God.

Today, on yet another Pentecost, we remember how Jesus told his friends: “Wait in that city until the power from on high comes upon you,” and then depressed and frightened behind locked doors, they found that Spirit. Mystifying language suddenly was translated for their use.

That promise was made by the One who said “seek and you shall find. Ask and you

shall receive. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you.” The One who said in one of his last testaments to his friends according to John’s Gospel today, “if in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

If you live for wisdom and ask for wisdom and search for it, so the gift of baptism says, so the teaching of Jesus says, you will find it.

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<sup>1</sup>“A New Clue to Explain Existence,” by Dennis Overbye, *The New York Times*, Science Section, May 17, 2010.

<sup>2</sup>Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus* (Shambala, 2008), p. 21ff.