

Cheyenne Boon:

Today's service will begin with a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter book, Psalm number 52, found on page 26. Please rise in body or spirit to read responsively by whole verse. Why do you boast O mighty man, of mischief done against the godly?

Congregation:

All the day you are plotting destruction, your tongue is sharp like razors, you worker of treachery.

Cheyenne Boon:

You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth.

Congregation:

You love all words that devour O deceitful tongue.

Cheyenne Boon:

But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.

Congregation:

The righteous shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying,

Cheyenne Boon:

"See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and sought refuge in his wealth.

Congregation:

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

Cheyenne Boon:

I will thank thee forever, because thou has done it. I will proclaim thy name, for it is good in the presence of the godly."

Choir:

(singing)

Charles Stang:

Good morning. This morning's reading comes from Plato's dialogue, the Timaeus, in which the autonomous character, Timaeus, declares, "None of our present statements about the universe could ever have been made if we had never seen any stars, sun, or heaven. As it is, however, our ability to see the periods of day and night, of months and of years, of equinoxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number, and has given us the idea of time, and opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the

universe. These pursuits have given us philosophy, a gift from the gods to the mortal race, whose value neither has been, nor ever will be, surpassed. God invented sight, and gave it to us so that we might see the orbits of intelligence in the heavens, and apply them to the revolutions of our own understanding. There's a kinship between them, even though our revolutions are disturbed, whereas the universe's orbits are undisturbed. So once we have come to know them and share in the ability to make correct calculations, according to nature, we should stabilize the strain revolutions within us by imitating the completely unstrained revolutions of the universe."

Last summer, I spent a week in the main woods with my family and closest friends, in a so-called dark zone, free from any light pollution. Twice during our week in the woods, we had a incredibly luminous night sky. I love the stars. I know a few constellations by name, but I'm largely dumbfounded when I gap at them. I don't understand their movements. For me, they're neither heralds nor guides nor storytellers. I'm largely illiterate in their presence. I can't read them, interpret them, or live by them. Having eyes, I do not see.

Laden has at least two words for star, stella, from which we get words like constellation, and sider, from which we get the verb, consider. To consider means, to look at something carefully, or think about it carefully. But at root, it means, to gaze at the stars. So too with our verb desire, which comes from the Latin desiderare. To desire, of course, is to wish or long for something. As if in staring at a star, we register an absence and long for something lost. But why should that be? Why should stars awaken longing in us?

I went into the woods with questions like these on my mind and in my heart. And I brought with me an old friend, Plato. In his dialogue, you've just heard, the Timaeus, the autonomous character declares that if we had never seen any stars, we would never have learned of numbers and of time, which together have opened the path to inquiry into the nature of the universe. He goes further. "The God who created us and the world gave us eyes so that we might observe the movements of the stars and the other heavenly bodies." That's why we have eyes. He goes on, "There's a deep kinship between us and the stars he says, and between our respective movements. But whereas, our soul's movements are disturbed, the stars' orbits are undisturbed. By staring at the stars and learning their rhythmic wents and wither. We quote, stabilize the straying revolutions within ourselves."

Our sense of sight was designed for precisely this, that we learn to dance to the music of time, the time of stars. Now, how is it that we are the stars' kin? Timaeus explains that the creator made an equal number of souls and stars and assigned each soul to a star. When those souls were given bodies, and mortal lives to live on earth, they could choose to live a just, or an unjust life. Whoever lived a just life, quote, "Would at the end, return to his dwelling place in his companion star, to live a life of happiness that agreed with his character."

Not only is there a kinship between our soul's movements and the stars then, but we each have, according to Plato, a companion or kindred star. Does this help explain why our verb for longing derives from the word star? Do we look to the stars, longing to behold, and to be held by, our long lost stellar or sidereal siblings? All this, of course, is a myth, a likely tale, or a probable story, as Plato says.

Of what use are such myths today? We know so much more about the nature of the universe, including ourselves and the stars, but do we know so much more? Look at what our knowledge has wrought. Our night skies are washed out by the light of our own making. Fewer and fewer of us can even see the stars, nevermind contemplate them. We're content to let an elite and learned group, astronomers, do our star gazing for us. But how many astronomers spend their nights craning their necks and gaping at an open sky? I hazard to guess, that like the rest of us, they've been forced instead to gaze at the pixelated light of computer screens for endless hours. We have all exchanged the play of light and darkness in our night skies, for a sad simulacrum.

Beloved astronomer, Carl Sagan, once famously said, "The cosmos is within us. We are made of star stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself." This is Timaeus' old story made new. And embodied in that quote from Sagan, is a story older than Timaeus', and that's the story of self-knowledge. The imperative, nosce te ipsum, or know yourself, was inscribed in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. And Plato often has Socrates quote from it. Some have worried, now and then, that the pursuit of self-knowledge amounts to little more than naval gazing or narcissism. But if Timaeus is right, that the universe is a truly living thing of which all living things are a part, and if he's right, that there's a deep kinship between us and the stars, then self-knowledge is no solipsistic exercise.

To know who you are, you must literally look to the very edges of time and space. Literally, into the past, to starlight that has traveled light years, billions of miles, trillions of miles, to reach our eyes. And paradoxically, straining to see those edges, we come to see that the stars are not so distant after all. While their light reaches our eyes from some unimaginable past, the stars are also always our intimates. They are our kin, and we are theirs. To know this, is to further, not only our own, but the universe's self-knowledge. Having eyes, I do not see. Having eyes, I long to see, and longing is the beginning of all knowledge. Thank you.

Cheyenne Boon:

If you would please rise in body or spirit and let us pray. Almighty God, you are our refuge and our strength. Bless us this day, with the comfort of your presence, and the courage to be changed by your presence in those we meet. Grant us thy peace. Grant us thy peace. Grant us thy peace. Amen.

Cheyenne Boon/Congregation:

And together, let us recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, saying, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Cheyenne Boon:

And now, we'll sing, O Love of God, How Strong and True. Hymn number 218, in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation:

(singing)

This transcript was exported on Feb 14, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Cheyenne Boon:

As we go into this day, let us bless and keep one another. Let us make peace. Let us be at peace. May it be so, and may the church say, amen.