

Life on Mars

by Pastor Bill Mosley

Matthew 14:22-33

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St Peter, Doss/Christ, Cherry Spring

Last night and again this week Mars appears big and bright next to the moon. On March 21, 2017 President Donald Trump signed a law mandating NASA to send people to Mars by 2033. July 30 NASA launched a spacecraft aimed at Mars with a rover and a helicopter.

Boeing and Elon Musk are both racing to be first, to put people there, perhaps by 2022.

Hearing the news makes me wonder how that is ever going to happen.

There are signs of life on Mars. A meteor was found in Antarctica. Chemical analysis shows that it is not made of iron like most meteors, but of the substances we know to be common on Mars. And after slicing this rock into thin pieces and examining each sliver, they have found evidence of microbial life on the meteor. Since they believe the meteor came from Mars, some believe it's evidence that there is or once was life on Mars. Others dispute that.

Sure, theories need to be tested before they are accepted as fact. But I think people are questioning this because they don't want it to be true. If there is life on other planets, it raises questions about our place in the universe, and our relationship to God.

Bishop Krister Stendahl was asked, "If they have found evidence of life on Mars, what does it do to your faith?" Stendahl replied, "Then my god has suddenly gotten a whole lot bigger!!!" For God, he said, "is, as scripture says, the one in whom we live, move and have our being."

I question that. Sure, God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being, but that doesn't have to mean that we are the only ones! If life on Mars means God is bigger now, maybe his idea of God was too small to begin with.

One of the most puzzling relationships in my life is the one with a childhood buddy who went to college with me, dropped out, went to seminary, dropped out, eventually got a divorce and remarried and was on the verge of another divorce when he was "born again." His new religion had a lot of do's and don'ts and one of these was, the pastor said they couldn't watch STAR TREK or any other show with space travel.

I asked him why this was, and he was vague about it, but it had to do with "man's relationship to God" and its uniqueness and how those Sci-Fi shows all were humanism, plain and simple.

We were sitting near a big oak tree. I said, "The real point of STAR TREK is ***not that man is the center of everything***, but that there is **a future**, and that future is **hope-filled**, and that we can overcome the obstacles before us. That oak tree has dropped thousands of acorns. Some of them sprouted and grew. Some did not. Some of them are still living. Some of them are still waiting to sprout and grow. That's how God has worked in the world -- in abundance. **Each new baby is God's yes to Creation. Now would a God who acts like this in SMALL things *like trees* do any differently in big things like planets or life forms?** How many stars are there? How many are like our sun? How many of those have planets similar in size to earth? I guess there's thousands. And some of them will have life. At least I hope so. Because that's the way God works. ***Or else he's smaller than I think he is.***"

The real question is not "how big is your God?" The real question is how big is your faith? Or how big is your relationship to God? Can it handle the idea that God has other children, not just you? How about the idea that God has other planets, not just your own?

I ask these questions for a reason. I don't want to convince you of life on Mars. I want to open up new horizons for the growth of faith.

I am asking how big is your faith, how much do you trustdo you hang back like the disciples and watch others reach out to God...or do you take the step and experience the comfort of knowing the saving hand of God?

When you think God, think BIG! Envision the impossible and strive for it. Make it become reality.

Jesus told the disciples to go out in the boat to cross the lake. Once they were out in open water a terrible storm blew up. They could not make any progress because the wind was against them. Rowing against the wind is difficult. You have to expend a tremendous amount of energy just to stay in one spot. The disciples would have been even more frustrated if someone on shore with a megaphone had yelled out, "Hey guys! Row harder!"

"Row harder? We are about to drown out here! Do you think we forgot to row harder? We are rowing as hard as we can!"

Jesus doesn't tell us to row faster. He comes out to be with us in the middle of the storm.

The other disciples are not reprimanded for staying in the boat. Peter is not rebuked for leaving the boat, but is rebuked for lack of faith.

The good news is that they are all in the boat together. Together trying to get to the other side.

None of us are out of the storm. We may hide, but we are in it together. I wonder if, as a church, we will stay together to help each other through the storm. Or if we will all go our own ways, examples of Texan individualism.

A farmer, sitting on the steps of his home was approached by a stranger asking for water. The stranger, making conversation, asked the farmer, "How's your wheat coming along?"

"Didn't plant none," said the farmer matter-of-factly.

"Really? I thought this was good wheat country."

"Afraid it would rain," said the farmer.

"Oh! Well, how's your corn crop?"

"Ain't got none."

"You didn't plant corn either?"

Nope! 'Fraid of corn blight."

The stranger, confused but persevering, continued, "Well, how's your potatoes?" "Didn't plant potatoes," the farmer said flatly. "Potato bugs would take 'em."

"Didn't you plant anything?" the stranger asked. **"Nope," the farmer replied, "I play it safe."**

The church is not called to play it safe, but to take the risk of walking on the water. "Ships are safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are made for." An old French seaman's prayer goes, "Lord, thy sea is so great and my ship is so small."

Want to buy a ticket for Mars? That would take faith, but here's the deal:

For some folks all the storms they face make them feel small, and hearing that there may be life on Mars makes them feel even smaller. It should tell them more, that God is bigger than that, and with him, even the storm seems small. The place to be is in the boat with the rest of us when Jesus comes walking toward it. For us the real question is, Is Jesus going with us to Mars?

Lord, help us to walk with you even when we feel small, to walk with you, that we may say no to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.