

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Kristin Kaulbach Miles Transcript**

“All That Is, Seen and Unseen”

“Look toward heaven and count the stars.” As gorgeous and necessary as it is to look up to the stars like Abram, “we might sometimes feel that it’s not enough to take in the cosmic,” preaches the Rev. Kristin Kaulbach Miles. She offers that as we process our personal and communal hurts –including those streaming in from Ukraine– we are invited to be accountable as well as hopeful; to call upon the living presence of God and also follow those who are transforming their communities through service.

When we do these things, “we turn towards the light of Christ within us and around us. It’s the walk of Lent. It’s the walk of a lifetime.” The readings are Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philipians 3: 17-4:1; and Luke 13: 31-35.

Sermon Transcript:

You speak into my heart Lord and say "Seek my face." In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Holy Scripture today gives me one of my favorite pieces of advice, but I'm going to have to pause here since Evelyn is back with us today doing a reading and Evelyn always gives me another favorite piece of advice, no matter what is going on, Evelyn and her beautiful Conway always says everything is in divine order. Everything is to be in divine order. God loves you and so do I. Just to remember that remember everything's divine, that's a favorite. But in our scriptures, we have look toward heaven and count the stars. Years ago on a cold clear night, I climbed some creaky stairs and an observatory in Connecticut with my youth group. And the resident astronomer pointed out to the constellations and talked about the astronomical event that the wise men and shepherds likely saw thousands of years ago, and called The Star of Bethlehem. Given that it takes 4,000 years for light to reach us from stars, and that the stars have a lifetime of about 10,000 years, we're likely seeing the same stars of our biblical ancestors. God tells Abraham to look up to the sky, be less hemmed in, to have a sense of the possibility of what is ahead even beyond his limited time on Earth. In that observatory, this was good advice for my teens facing all the challenges of adolescence. And it's good advice for all of us. Some of you may have seen the photos from the Hubble telescope of a black hole giving birth to new stars 34 million light-years away. It reminds me of our creed. All that is seen and unseen. And it reminds us that there is still so much to know and understand. We once thought that the Earth was at the center of the universe. We then discovered that the Earth is not even at the center of our solar system.

We then discovered that our solar system is not at the center of the Milky Way galaxy. And that there are billions of galaxies like ours, about 200 billion galaxies. And that's just to the observable eye. And as gorgeous and necessary as it is to look up to the stars like Abraham, we might sometimes feel in the

words of Jane Kenyon that it's not enough to take in the cosmic. She wrote her poem looking at stars when facing her own cancer prognosis. And it speaks viscerally to me as I see the personal and communal hearts around us and the images streaming in from the Ukraine. Her poem, looking at stars goes like this. The god of curved space. The dry god is not going to help us, but the Son whose blood splattered the hem of his mother's robe. We need both to be reminded of our sense of mystery and transcendence and to know the incarnate love of God through which we are completely understood and companioned to soak this in, to feel it in our bones. As the Psalmist says, to hear this in our heart. And we need to be accountable. In our Genesis reading, after God had Abraham look at the stars, it says, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Abraham still has to go forth to proceed with this covenanted life and work, a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. It is daunting to know how much there is for us to do. How many of us when we have started something new or agreed to take on a responsibility, or have just had it handed to us have almost ontological dread? We say to ourselves, what was I thinking to get myself into this situation, and how is this possibly going to work out? We get it, we get what Abram's feeling there is gravitas about our participation in the world. It was there in that stargazing discussion with my youth. Certainly, Jesus felt it.

Jesus understand what's going on among His people occupied by Romans. Hence the go and tell the fox line. He takes up the mantle of the prophets before him, who throughout the centuries tried to remind the kings and their bureaucracies of their covenantal duty. In the words of one biblical commentator, rather than Moses's alternative community living freely under the law of the covenant, God's will came to be reified in the political apparatus of the state. We hear Jesus's lamentation. We know the brutalism of the Roman Empire. We know the brutalism of empires today. Jesus perceives in all human structures, including religious ones, that all are susceptible to their loss of ethic. Yet Jesus also teaches that the kingdom of God is at work in those places where we observe and say, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. That is you. And we will say this, listen for this in our Eucharistic prayer. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. None of us is perfect. We are not perfect together. Paul had addressed all the ways previously that the church community was messing up, was not comporting itself well. Community is fraught but it's what we've got. I think Henry Nouwen once said, the sign of a true community is the person you least want to be there is there. That's the sign of authentic community. We don't get to choose it. We worked with it. There's grace. And Paul says, look for those who are modeling ways of service that transform rather than belittle. Look for those whose words and actions create and build up. In each place, there are good, imperfect people who are modeling what it is to transform.

Last week at our annual meeting, we celebrated the next congregational cohort, the council, a band of people who are supporting the ministries of our church in outreach and small group connections. We heard the works of all that we have accomplished and our commitments to move forward. As we see the destruction and suffering in Ukraine, we also see folks along the borders taking in refugees, people tending to wounds and offering care. The collective effort to gather supplies and funds or those waiting in the wings at risk to themselves. We may choose to think of our educators who day to day watch and appreciate and accept and let our young people know that they are seen and loved, who take the time to talk through and teach children how to work things out, rather than just grabbing the crayon that another child has. We have these models I see in here, in our church community each day the quiet and stoic ways that people are witnessing, offering understanding giving of themselves. So we started with some advice for this week and I think we can distill four main points for making our way to the days ahead. To look up, to look for the stars, to call upon the living presence of God who speaks to us in our

hearts, to observe those who live according to the examples of Jesus, and to claim our own accountability. That is to do what we can in the place that we are. In this way, we turn towards the light of Christ within us and around us again and again. It's the walk of lent. It's the walk of a lifetime. Look up at the stars, call upon this living presence of God. Observe, pay attention to those who live according to the example of Jesus, and claim our own accountability in the place where we are. I want to close with this line from a poem called "The Old Astronomer to His Pupil." It's by Sarah Williams. "Though my soul may set in darkness, it will rise in perfect light. I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night." Amen. Amen.