

Leader-Telegram article for “Quality of Life Times”
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“Space,” Douglas Adams wrote in the opening words of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, “is big - really big - you just won’t believe how vastly, hugely mind-bogglingly big it is. You may think it’s a long way down the road to the chemist, but that’s just peanuts to space.” And big it is. Current knowledge puts it at about 93 billion light years across. That’s a lot of light years. About 540 trillion billion miles. 540,000 million million million miles. 540 sextillion miles. 540,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles. Mind-bogglingly big, indeed. No matter how I write it, it’s incomprehensible. And yet, God is there in all 540 thousand billion billion miles that make up what we call ‘space’.

I think about space a lot. My childhood in the ‘60s was full of images of astronauts and moon-landings. I played with astronaut action figures, moon rovers, and other space-based fancy. Star Trek and Lost In Space were on TV. My mind has long reached into space in unanswered wonder and curiosity. Oh, to be out there, flying faster-than-light in the Enterprise, seeing first-hand planets and solar systems and phenomena of unspeakable beauty and unfathomable terror. But even as far as the Enterprise flew, it never ventured more than a few score thousand trillions of miles. Just peanuts to space.

In the past few years in the very close space of our galaxy, astronomers have discovered a few hundred planets orbiting other stars. Scientists have also discovered signs of possible life on Mars and elsewhere. I find myself thinking of outer-space this Easter-tide because non-terrestrial

life raises questions about life, the universe, and Easter. We could soon be faced with the very real need to ask that question. Surely that other life was also created by God, and so we will have to rethink our earth-centric ideas about God's creative, life-giving power. And about the power of salvation. Imagining other sentient beings in a ludicrously huge universe is not a big stretch. How does Easter fit into that universe? Is Earth the only place that God has or ever will become incarnate? Does each sentient life get its own incarnation? Are they saved separately from humanity, or do they ride along on our coattails? Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations. Did he imply a commission for future generations to make disciples of all planets? If Earth is the epicenter of salvation, what is the speed of God's grace? Only as fast as we can carry the message, or does it go ahead of us? How will we relate to other life forms if we discover them? And what is God's relation to those life forms? These are some of the questions I'm thinking about this Easter. They might seem a little silly, certainly premature, but they are asked with serious curiosity. We live on a small pale blue dot in a minor solar system on the outer edge of a rather mundane galaxy. Just peanuts to space. And yet, somehow – marvelously, wondrously somehow – not peanuts to the God that made it all; the God who loves us individually; the God who came to earth as Jesus and who, on a long-distant Sunday, without fanfare, quietly raised himself from death to bring us eternal life in that realm which has no end. Mind-boggling, yes? But true. May you know that divine love this Easter.