

Even though Dr. Seuss died in 1991, he still has a publicist today. And that publicist was asked whether there are religious-themed messages in Dr. Seuss' books. And his answer was:

"I believe Dr. Seuss wrote thoughtful and entertaining books for children."

In short ---- it's in the eye of the beholder. If you see the world through the lens of faith, then I'm sure you will find many lessons in Dr. Seuss stories. And they are lessons that align with Christian teachings. And if you are not a believer... well... Dr. Seuss wrote thoughtful and entertaining stories.

His most obvious lessons are in 'The Lorax' -- who speaks for the trees -- which you seem to be cutting as fast as you please. It's a very clear message about being a good steward of natural resources. But there are many people who are not religious but still admire the beauty of nature and want it preserved. And there his 'How The Grinch Stole Christmas.' The Grinch steals all the toys and even the food for the Christmas feast... and is surprised that all the who's down in Whoville still gather to sing in the town square on Christmas morning. But... all the book says is that the Grinch's heart grew three sizes that day, and that he decided that "maybe, Christmas means a little bit more." ((Please note the story does not say that the Grinch experienced a flash-of-light conversion as is now the pastor of the mega-church in the suburbs.))

When he was in college, attending chapel on Sundays was required at Dartmouth College. So Theodor Geisel was a regular church-goer for at least a part of his life. And when he was a visiting scholar at Oxford, religious instruction was a mandatory part of the curriculum. I know, faith and being forced to go to church are not the same thing. But I also know that if you swim in the waters of Christian teaching, you can't help but get wet. And, maybe, perhaps, some of that stays with you when you pick up a pen, and begin to write.

My message today is 'Finding Grace in 'I Don't Know'.

And after the scripture lessons, we will read a short passage from Dr. Seuss' 'Horton Hears a Who.'

Psalm 139: 1-6, 23-24

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 11: 33-36

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!

‘For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counsellor?’

‘Or who has given a gift to him,  
to receive a gift in return?’

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

Horton Hears a Who - by Dr. Seuss:

On the 15th of May, in the Jungle of Nool, In the heat of the day, in the cool of the pool, He was splashing... enjoying the jungle’s great joys... When Horton the elephant heard a small noise. So Horton stopped splashing. He looked toward the sound. “That’s funny,” thought Horton. “There’s no one around.” Then he heard it again! Just a very faint yelp as if some tiny person were calling for help. “I’ll help you,” said Horton. “But who are you? Where?” He looked and he looked. He could see nothing there but a small speck of dust blowing past through the air.

So, gently, and using the greatest of care, the elephant stretched his great trunk through the air, and he lifted the dust speck and carried it over and placed it down, safe, on a very soft clover.

And the other animals, think Horton is crazy. Ah, I see some of you are familiar with this... the ones who believe in the stories of our Christian faith. Sometimes we are told that we're crazy, or that we've been 'Horton-ed'.

Actually, as I've gotten older I've become much more comfortable with shrugging my shoulders and saying "I DON'T KNOW." I used to think people who said 'I don't know' are coming up short... or lacking something. They are. They're lacking knowledge or understanding.

As I've matured, I'm more comfortable than that.

Suppose I were to tell you that I wanted you to entrust your life to a machine... a very sophisticated machine... and no ONE person knows exactly how it works. Oh, some people have more understanding than others --- some know little bits and pieces of the mechanisms and the technology...

You do exactly that when you fly on a commercial aircraft...

During my vacation to Ireland, I flew on a 747. The 747 is one of the oldest and most reliable long distance airplanes... I flew on one as a kid in the 1970s... New York to Los Angeles. Lufthansa, Germany's national airline, has the most recent and most modern versions of the 747... and no ONE person knows how it ALL works. The pilot and co-pilot? They fly the plane, but they don't understand the lift and thrust and the aerodynamics that make it work. (And

a computer flies the plan for 80 percent of the flight anyway.) The engineer who designed the plane? He (or she) is an expert in aviation design -- but knows nothing about the interior of the cabin... or the in-flight entertainment systems... or all the creature comforts on-board. Someone is an expert on avionics, someone else is an expert on electronics... someone else knows the fuel system... someone else knows cabin pressure... someone else knows emergency procedures... no one person knows EVERYTHING... and yet I take it on faith that I will board the aircraft... fly over the Atlantic Ocean at 35-thousand feet... and 7 hours later arrive at my destination... and be served coffee and a not-so-good breakfast while getting there.

And, don't worry --- I don't have a full understanding of where the electricity comes from when I turn on the light-switch... or how my car starts when I turn the ignition.

"I don't know"

And there are some things that I'm simply not supposed to understand.

A skeptic looks at the creation story from Genesis. God created the heavens and the earth. And on the 7th day, God rested. Well that can't be right. We have fossils and carbon dating. And science seems to be in direct conflict with that story. One or the other HAS to be wrong... Now, listen carefully to my response. "I don't know." Really... I don't. There are some things that my mind is simply not made to comprehend, and how 'we', and everything around us, came into being is one of those things.

But I know this.

If you think the bible's creation story as a lesson in Earth Science or geology, you're missing the point. This is a story about an author of all things... just like a clock implies a clock-maker... our being here implies a creator.

You've probably heard many questions about Noah and the great flood. He took two of EVERY animal? How'd that work? Alligators next to lambs? Couldn't he have left the mosquitoes behind? And the great flood REALLY covered all the Earth? I don't know.

But I know that the story of Noah isn't a lesson about zoology, or seamanship, or boat-building... or a weather report from thousands of years ago. If that's how you see the story, you will miss the entire point. As the flood waters recede, God makes a new promise -- a covenant with Noah and everyone who comes after him. That God will never wipe us out and start over. That God will love us more than God will hate some of the things we do.

Jesus was crucified. Nailed to a cross. A spear was jabbed into his side. He said, 'It is finished'. And he stopped breathing. He was buried in a tomb sealed with a giant stone. He was most certainly dead. But three days later he appeared to the women... and to his disciples in the upper room... and on the road to Emmaus... and on the shores while the apostles were fishing. ? How ? I do not know. But I know this isn't a story about biology or forensics. It's not the first episode of NCIS Jerusalem. If that's what you focus on -- you won't get it. This is a story about God's

love for us... it confirms that Jesus is exactly who he says he is... and that OUR lives are more than just our time on this earth... that Christ's followers receive life EVERLASTING.

Well... let's go back to Horton. He hears something. The other animals tell him that's impossible. But he, gradually, becomes certain.

Actually, I think the story is more interesting from the perspective of the "whos".... the creatures who are living on the spec of dust.

And if there is only one thing you take away from today's message -- it should be this. WE live on a spec of dust.

Consider for a moment where we live....

We are placed on a planet that is more water than land. Yet we do not drown. We are placed here in a spot where we can grow food and sustain ourselves, when there are many other places where that would be difficult or impossible. Our planet is in precisely the right place for us to live. We cannot live on the planets that are closest to us... Mars, not without spacesuits and an artificial environment. (And I can't find two gloves and a hat when it's cold out... I wonder what getting all of my spacesuit parts would be like living on Mars....) Venus, which is our other planetary neighbor, is too close to the sun. In fact, if Earth were one degree closer to the sun--we would burn. Two degrees further away, and we would freeze. And our sun is one of about 10-thousand stars that might be not-to-hot or not-to-cold to sustain life on other planets that might revolve around them. And there are millions of stars in our galaxy... and we are not the only galaxy... and God created IT ALL.

And yet GOD tells us that we, individually, are known by HIM.

Just like Horton gradually knows that on that spec of dust there are families... a mayor... a church, and town, even a place to go shopping --- ugh. Horton takes an interest in... and cares for... the whos on the spec. To them, surely, Horton is a god.

I'd like to suggest to you that God knowing us, on our spec, is part of God's grace. It's not the way we normally think of grace... normally we think of God's grace as forgiveness, and our heavenly reward for our faith... we don't deserve forgiveness for our sins... we don't deserve salvation... we are saved by GRACE.

But perhaps God even knowing us, individually, is grace too.

I've been coming to this church for 14 years. I recognize almost all of you. But I'm thankful for name tags. I don't know a lot about you. You certainly don't know everything about me. We are familiar strangers.

And yet God tells us that we are called by name. That our thoughts are discerned from afar. That before a word is on our tongue, it is known. We have a hymn that tells us our God is the God of the Whale and the God of the Sparrow.... God of the tiny-est atomic particle.... God of the

vastness of the universe... and God that calls us, personally, into relationship with Him... the God that tells us that we, each of us, are known... and are valued... and are made in God's image... God who knows the farthest corner of anywhere, calls to us this morning and says 'I know YOU.'

How does THAT work? I don't know -- but I think that's the very beginning of God's grace.

And, I'm thankful for the 'I don't know' in my life. If I knew everything -- we'd have no need for God. If there's no 'I don't know' -- God gets crowded out of our lives. I Don't Know is the space where faith resides; a firm belief in that which cannot be proven.

I am a who on a tiny spec. And God sets us down on a clover. And says 'I am here.'

Thanks be to God.