I want to tell you about my guilty summer pleasure. Actually, I don’t feel guilty at all – and I highly recommend this, and it’s not just ice cream:

Lori and I have been binge watching the NOVA series on the planets, which is a five-part Public Television series about the Solar System well worth watching. The visual imagery in this series is breathtaking, and the science behind it is mind-boggling.

I am here to tell you that nearly everything you learned in 4th grade about the planets and the Solar System is wrong.

Did you know that the Earth is not the only place in our Solar System that has oceans? Ganymede, one of the moons of Jupiter, has oceans of liquid methane. Millions of years ago, both Venus and Mars looked from space much like Earth, with watery oceans.

Mars has tantalizing hints that life once existed, with traces of organic elements and water on the surface.

Did you know that Mercury is nearly all melted metal? Billions of years ago Mercury collided with Venus, careening Mercury into a bizarre elliptical orbit that brings it regularly close to the Sun.

Then there is Jupiter, the monster planet of our Solar System. Life on earth is possible only because Jupiter has swept away most of the asteroids that would have crashed into the earth, obliterating all life.

As I watch this NOVA series, I get a new appreciation for how life on our planet is dependent on seemingly disconnected events millions of years ago and millions of miles away on other planets.

Indeed, everything in our Solar System is intricately connected, as we are connected with each other, and with the planets and rocks and dust tens of millions of miles from this good earth.

As I watch this public television series, I am reminded of the words in the Eucharistic prayer we will pray this morning:

“At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home.”

I bring this up today because with all the turmoil, chaos and violence on our tiny planet, we sometimes need reminding that there are things much larger than ourselves, and that God is always in the act of creating this amazing universe. We as human beings have the amazing ability to touch this reality of the divine.
Prayer can give us a vision of reality far beyond our horizons, transcending the challenges of our time.

In the gospel lesson from Luke today, Jesus beckons us into this larger reality.

We do well to remember that Jesus lived in a time of chaos and violence far worse than our own time. Life was cheap. Israel was occupied by a brutal foreign power, the Roman Empire. The poor were desperately poor.

Jesus went about the land teaching and healing, and confronting the institutional forces that held people down.

But he always found time to gather with his closest followers for prayer, refreshment and renewal. Jesus and his disciples could not breathe without prayers.

Today we find Jesus in one of these prayerful retreat moments.

He had been challenged by a man to intervene in a family dispute about the inheritance of property, and Jesus had admonished the man to not make wealth into an idol, but to be “rich towards God.” We heard about this confrontation last Sunday.

Today, Jesus goes to a quiet place with his disciples. They are anxious about everything, where they will sleep, what they will eat.

But Jesus tells them to stop worrying about material things, and instead put their treasure where they want their heart to go.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

This is a profoundly curious turn of phrase. Don’t miss it.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus isn’t asking, where is your heart now? Jesus is asking, where do you want your heart to go? Where does your heart need to go and grow? Where does your heart need to stretch.

Put your treasure there – “there your heart will be also.”

Your heart will follow your treasure.

And this begs another question: What is your treasure?

It might be your money and your possessions. But it might be something else. What is it you treasure the most in life? Put this where you want your heart to go – and grow. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

How do we do this?

Bring these questions to prayer. Look deep within yourself, and bring it to God. Make prayer a way of daily life.

And then bring your prayers and the longings of your heart here to this sacred place. Pray with others. Be upheld by the prayers of others.

There are times we are called to work and act the world, but there are also times to draw inward together in prayer.
Jesus acts in the world, and then draws back with his disciples to pray before going back into the world to act.

Jesus prayed especially when everything and everyone around him was in turmoil.

We do this also.

A major role of our being a cathedral is to be a place where the community comes together in difficult times, to pray together, to cry together, to hope together – and to do so across the divides of religion and politics.

We can differ – and do differ sharply – about our politics, but here come together to pray, touch God together, and find the sustenance we need to go back into the world and act, each in our own way.

We did this after 9/11, and we’ve done this more times than I can count.

We did this on Friday evening – led by our new bishop Megan – as we prayed for an end to gun violence, an end to all violence, and for a safer, more loving world.

We invited faith leaders from other religious traditions to join us. And they came. This is what being a cathedral is about.

I want to close by telling you about one of my favorite writers from our Anglican tradition.

His name was Jeremy Taylor, and he lived in the 1600s at a time when England was at war with itself. The violence and political turmoil we encounter nowadays is nothing compared to the violence and turmoil in England of the mid-1600s.

The king of England had been executed, and as the king’s chaplain, Taylor was arrested and then exiled to Wales.

He wrote a series of books about how to lead a holy life in the midst of this mess. To even preach put his life in danger.

So what was his favorite topic?

Prayer.

Here is what Jeremy Taylor preached about prayer in a sermon in 1653, and I close with this:

“Prayer is the peace of our spirit, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the seat of meditation, the rest of our cares and the calm of our tempest; Prayer is the issue of a quiet mind, of untroubled thoughts, it is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meekness.”

My friends, my prayer for all of us is that we find peace of our spirit, the rest of a quiet mind, connect us to realities far behind ourselves, and then may we go forth once again to do God’s good work in this hurting and hungry world. AMEN.