

The pale blue dot

By Tony Goudie

Many people remember where they were when big events happen. We all have our memory moments: JFK, Martin Luther King, Princess Diana. I remember I was watching a television comedy with a gale blowing outside when the news broke of Nelson Mandela's demise.

Perhaps you remember 'The Pale Blue Dot'? Carl Sagan (1934-1996) was an American cosmologist who gave the request to Voyager's cameras in 1977 to turn and take a last look at earth from 6 billion kilometres out as the probe travelled away at 63,000 kilometres an hour heading out of the solar system. The resulting image very faintly showed our good Earth as "a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam" as he cleverly commented.

His poetic and sobering words are recorded for us: "That's here. That's home. That's us. On it every one you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar', every 'supreme leader', every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam".

He ended by saying, "The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of

underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the Pale Blue Dot, the only home we've ever known".¹

Mandela and others looked for a time when mankind could live at peace, and Nelson Mandela did his part in bringing this about. President Obama commented after Mandela's death: "Nelson Mandela doesn't now belong to us; he belongs to the Ages".

'I wish the whole world could see what I see. Sometimes you have to go up really high to understand how small you really are.'

—Felix Baumgartner, record-setting Austrian skydiver

a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants on one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light...There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it

Another One who belongs to all the ages is Jesus Christ. He is eternal, everlasting, the Creator of all, and the real Peacemaker and Reconciler—the Jesus who loves us, and who has the greatest love and favour for our Pale Blue Dot and all who live, have ever lived, and will ever live, upon it.

Notes

¹ Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, 1997, pp xv-xvi.

