

4th August 2023

Micro

“Since microorganisms play major roles in maintaining earth's life-support systems, there is urgent need for increased support for research in environmental microbiology and ecosystem science ...”

Eugene Odum, *Biotechnology and the Biosphere* (1985)

My piece recently about the height of Ben Nevis got me thinking about other kinds of measurements, too small for the human eye to discern.

I watched TV programme recently about the where, when and how of a suspicious drowning. But forensic scientists, skilled microbiologists, could state categorically that the microorganisms found in the lungs of the deceased did not come from the river where the body was found but from a reservoir twenty miles away. This led detectives to the site of the murder and, eventually, to the killer. “Microbes,” the scientist explained, “are distinctive to water sources. We need powerful microscopes to detect them, for they’re a fraction of the width of a human hair.”

The wonder of our universe is alive with microorganisms we cannot see, and yet they are vital for the maintenance of our ecosystems. Our mountains matter, but microbes matter too. And we can go even further, to cells and atoms, and to the structure of atoms themselves, electrons, protons and neutrons. George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, often said, “Everything is light energy.” The static chair is alive with moving electrons. The fallen stone is teeming with energy. The air around us, apparently invisible, is jumping with life. Amazing!

While we see the large, we often ignore the small. We find grandeur in the great, and forget it’s made up of the minute. We rejoice in the big picture and fail to appreciate the energy that makes it so wonderful.

In 1973, Natalie Sleeth published a lovely children’s hymn called *God of Great, and God of Small*, the opening verse of which is:

*God of great and God of small, God of one and God of all,
God of weak and God of strong, God to whom all things belong,
Alleluia, Alleluia, praise be to Your name.*

So next time I marvel at the wonder of Ben Nevis, I’ll pause for a moment and remember the light energy that makes it what it is, and give thanks to the God of all, to whom all things belong, great and small together.

A prayer for today

Lord, I pray that I can find you in tiny moments today. Amen