

We are in a sermon series looking at the relationship between science and faith. A relationship often framed by those at the extremes... that leaves us with a competing world view in which the Jesus fish eats the Darwin fish or the Darwin fish eats the Jesus fish, and people are forced to pick one or the other. I just don't find that relationship to be adequately descriptive nor compelling. It is too easy for Christians to set up a scientific straw man in which God is removed from the entire process of creation and then point out all the gaps in their theory and say you're wrong. It is too easy for the scientists to set up a literal Biblical framework of a young earth - 7 day creation account and say you're crazy, the evidence refutes that. You're wrong. No you're wrong.

When it comes to the relationship of science and faith, there are not two positions – atheism or biblical literalism... According to Dr. Ted Peters, in his book, “Evolution, from creation to new creation” there are 8 different world views... 4 of them are in direct conflict warfare mode, and 4 of them are in more of a cooperative mode. Dr. Peters is a theology professor and president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkley CA.

1. Scientism – This is the belief that there exists only one reality in the world, namely, the physical, material world. There is no spiritual world. And so science, which provides the only trustworthy method for gaining knowledge about this physical world... has a total monopoly on knowledge and truth. Religion is

discounted as false knowledge about something that doesn't exist and therefore loses the war.

Scientism is a world view the church needs to speak to critically and prophetically. Not only is this framework anti-religious... it is bad science. Good science as a research enterprise just doesn't need to make those kinds of reductionary claims. This is all I am looking at, so this is all there is.

2. The second model Dr. Peters discusses is *scientific imperialism*, which is close to scientism. Although they grant the existence of God. The claim from this group is that all religious experience can be explained through materialistic explanations. In other words, what we may call spiritual, they would say, actually has a physical explanation. Again everything in the world is reduced to a material description. These would be the guys trying to weigh the soul, find the place in the brain that processes near death experiences. Give scientific explanations for all the miracles. Physicist Paul Davies, for example, says that "science has actually advanced to the point where what were formerly religious questions can be seriously tackled by the new physics." He believes that science can now begin to answer not only the what where and when questions... but the who and the why questions as well.

Again the church needs to stand up against this view as well because what we lose is a transcendent God, an active God at work in the world today, an involved

God, a gracious God, a suffering God, and a God who is capable of redemption.

This is one of the warfare models.

3. Lets now move to the other side of the field... with a position Dr Peters describes as *Ecclesiastical authoritarianism*, The Church teaches it, the Bible says it, or the Koran says it... and our literal interpretation is how it is and we don't care what scientific discovery you come up with... your wrong, Talk to the hand cause the face ain't listening.

That reflected the Roman Catholic church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century... for sure... but as I pointed out last week, even Pope John Paul II said there was no conflict between the teachings of the church, the bible, and evolutionary theory. This ecclesiastical authoritarianism is reflected most in conservative evangelical circles today embracing a word for word literal interpretation of the entire biblical record.

4. The fourth warfare model is the battle over evolution itself. Most of this conflict is a civil war between 4 groups and not really a faith science battle.

The first position would be that of *evolutionary biology strictly as science* without trying to answer the who or why question. Today this really isn't Darwinism... but Neo-Darwinism combining Charles Darwin's original nineteenth-century concept of natural selection with the twentieth-century concept of genetic mutation to explain the development of new species over 4 billion years. Defenders of quality science education in the public schools most

frequently embrace this “science alone” approach.

The second contending position combines neo-Darwinism with the scientism mentioned before to directly remove any notion of God or transcendence in the process of evolution. There is no room or need to make room for God in this world view. These are the atheists. The process of creation is random, evolution mechanized, changes through adaptation and natural selection. For those of you who saw the movie on Wednesday, you know Charles Darwin himself was not willing to go that far. He wrote, “My views are not at all necessarily atheistical.” But, many of his followers have drawn that conclusion... Oxford’s Richard Dawkins writes, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” You know what atheism is don’t you... a non-prophet organization.

The third position is *Scientific Creationism*. They oppose evolution not on the authority of the bible as strict creationists do, but rather on their own counter science. They argue, for example, that the fossil record is inadequate to support Darwinian theory... that the planet earth is less than ten thousand years old and that all species of plants and animals were originally created by God in their present form. The creation museum uses this approach presenting the arguments on scientific grounds. “Creation is true, evolution is false, and real science confirms this” writes Henry Morris. To be less overtly religious, this view is

often described as Intelligent Design. They conclude that many of the life forms that have evolved are irreducibly complex, and this counts as evidence that they have been intelligently designed. They contest that there are gaps in the scientific theory of evolution and where ever there are gaps that is where you insert God... so here scientific questions lead to theological answers. And you get a God of the gaps... but then one of the gaps is filled in by new information and the faithful are left to deny the new evidence or revise their theological position. This is an extremely defensive position.

The fourth position in the battle over evolution, could be called *theistic evolution*. Here the theory is that God created the world and everything in it through an evolutionary processes over deep time to bring about the human race and a natural world which continues to creatively evolve. The focus is on working through questions raised by natural selection – in particular to randomness and chance – in light of our knowledge of God’s purposes and ultimate ends.

Now the most common model for constructively relating science and religion is what Dr. Peters calls, 5. **the two languages model**. You heard me talk about it last week. Science speaks one language, what, where and when, the material facts and religion speaks a different language, the who and why... language of values. Modern persons need both, according to Albert Einstein,

who wrote the following: “Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind.” Conflict is thus avoided by establishing a border and keeping science and faith in their respective territories.

## **6. Dialogue**

Taking it a step further... science and faith respecting and learning from each other about the Truth with a capital “T”. The theologian asks: if it is true that the God of Israel, is the creator of this world; and if it is true that natural sciences are gaining accurate knowledge of how this world works; then, sooner or later, we would expect to see some convergence or at least consonance between the two domains of knowing.

Jürgen Moltmann, for example, complains about the lack of interaction between science and theology. “Today the dilemma between theology and science is no longer that they present conflicting statements. It is rather the lack of conflict between statements which stand side by side without any relation to one another...”

Here is how I take it... there is truth. As a Christian I believe in God, and that god created everything in the world, and there is a way that god did it. And there is a reason God did it the way God did it. What I think or what you think doesn't alter one little bit the truth of how it all went down. So whatever science uncovers about the created world... it can only reveal a snippet of that truth. Any window

that science or theology opens can only be a view into the Truth as to what God accomplished. There is nothing to be fearful of. If science discovers life on another planet... if science discovers there were four little bangs that preceded the big bang, if science discovers that people evolved directly from platypuses and not apes... that won't shake my faith one little bit... I will just want to ask, what was God thinking... why did God choose to do it like that? How does Jesus death and resurrection relate to the redemption of the space creatures. Are they blessed with free will. Are they too plagued with sin. I trust that the open and fair discussion of any theological idea or scientific data can only lead to eventual insights into the truth as God designed it. No other conclusions are even possible. Science can never embarrass my faith with a new discovery, nor will my faith lead me to reject an empirically verifiable scientific conclusion. Both enterprises should embrace an atmosphere of confident openness and exploration.

## **7. Ethical Overlap**

The third nonwarfare model and number seven on our comprehensive list is *ethical overlap*. If science is the knowing how something works, technology is acting on that knowledge. In between those two movements of knowing and doing, there needs to be a commentary from the faith community. Just because we can, doesn't mean we should. On policies involving cloning, dna technology, just war, health, the ecology, privacy issues, human values questions, and many

yet to arise... there needs to be creative cooperation. Science creates new tools for possibilities, faith needs to weigh in on whether we want to go there or not. We're going to talk more about the environment and ethics further along in the series.

**8. New Age Spirituality** They take a little here Buddhism, Hinduism and a little there, physics and quantum theory and weave a custom blend of creation ideologies that vary widely.

I would hope that here at First Lutheran Community Church, and in our South Kitsap schools, we would so celebrate the world of nature as seen through telescopes and microscopes that our young people would become inspired by science. Our society needs scientists, good scientists. Tomorrow's scientific ideas and insights will come from the pool of today's kids... the little ones gathered around Theodore every Sunday. I hope some of them go into the Ministry... its an awesome calling... but I also hope some of them hear a call into science – without fear of some superficial animosity between science and faith. There is no reason to give that perception. We need mutual respect and cooperation. We need to together construct an understanding of the real world, that which is seen and that which is unseen, as we say in the Nicene Creed, in which everything important is oriented toward the God of grace.

I really thought it was important to get that distinction out there before we

moved any further. At least so we could be clear as to who is fighting with who.

Now what I want to do is conclude with the introduction to next week. How can faith speak compellingly to a sophisticated, scientific 21<sup>st</sup> century world. What kind of language would be most effective. And I want to acknowledge that by speaking compellingly to the world out there, I am also speaking reassuringly to the world in here... my own doubts and questions. The dialogue between science and faith isn't played out as much out there as it is in here.

I have heard it said that faith is believing things that couldn't have happened. Believing things that are impossible. If it were possible and verifiable than it wouldn't require faith, just eyes. When we take something on faith, we agree to suspend a certain degree of verifiability. If we could prove something 100%, we wouldn't need faith to believe it. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas after his resurrection appearance in the upper room... John 20:29 (NIV)

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

What do we do with that? Are we supposed to ignore scientific conclusions... Is he advocating that ignorance is bliss? Does our faith in God necessarily lead us to an intellectual position of unreasonableness. Something like 98 % of our population believes God created the heavens and the earth. Given the scientific data, is that a reasonable conclusion to come to? Now, my underlying assumption

is that all of us in this room are fairly reasonable people. We treat you each week as you come here as a reasonable person. I never intend to speak down to anybody who comes in this church. Like many of you, I believe my faith and theological world view can in fact withstand intellectual, philosophical, scientific, and historical scrutiny? Because it all leads to the Truth behind it all, which is God and God's processes and design and purpose... and there can be no other revelation, because God is all that is there to uncover behind it all. That's faith.

When we confess in the creed, I believe in God the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Is that a reasonable position to hold? When Pastor Orv declares with the psalmist, This is the day the Lord has made... do I have to suspend my intellectual curiosity in order to rejoice and be glad in it. How can I talk to young people today, steeped in sophisticated scientific understanding, about the reality of God?

As human beings, it is built within us to decide if something is reasonable or unreasonable on the basis of the evidence. We use our minds. We compile facts. Then we consider the evidence carefully. And finally human beings make a decision on this or that on the basis of the weight of evidence. That what judges do. Moses did it. The period of the Judges. The Kings. We sat in the judges seat when we were at Tel Dan. Solomon in his wisdom would look at the evidence.

Of course, all of us understand that seldom, if ever, in this life is anything

knowable with absolute certainty. There appears to be at least a degree of randomness that happens in our lives. What happens when and with whom as a matter of happenchance... We can and do look back in life and find meaning and purpose in stuff that happens and often pull out part of a divine plan... but with certainty, we never know. We take it on faith.

And not just in matters of faith, but everyday life. If you ever turn you television on at night, you have seen Law and Order, its on every night... the judge reminds the jury of the process of coming to a verdict. He tells the jurors that evidence is going to be presented during the trial, and it is the responsibility of the jurors to listen carefully in an unbiased fashion to all of the evidence and then to go into the deliberation room.

There they are to assess whether or not the prosecuting attorney presented compelling enough evidence to convince the jurors of guilt – beyond what point? -- beyond a reasonable doubt.

Notice the judge doesn't say, beyond the shadow of a doubt; but beyond a reasonable doubt, because we have learned that in our judicial system, it is unrealistic to expect anybody to prove something beyond the shadow of a doubt. So therefore a reasonable doubt is what is required. That is good enough to decide somebody's fate, perhaps their life.

When you think about it, in almost every dimension of every day life, we all

make decisions based on high probability as opposed to absolute certainty.

When I got on the plane Monday morning bound for Minnesota, I did not know with absolute certainty that when it left SeaTac, it would indeed land in Minneapolis. I was even less sure about my luggage. But there was a high probability that the plane would end up where it was suppose to go... based on thousands of flights around the country, everyday, I had sufficient reason to believe I would land in Minneapolis so I boarded the plane.

When you get your paycheck and you take it to your bank, you are not absolutely certain that the bank staff won't run off with your money. Deny they ever saw you. Give you a fake receipt. But you've looked at the financial statements of the bank, it is reputable, you know and have witnessed other satisfied customers, and you have deemed it sufficiently probable that they will take good care of your money, so you make the deposit.

You weren't absolutely certain about your spouse on your wedding day. You aren't absolutely certain you're going to have a job tomorrow morning. You are not absolutely certain you are going to have tomorrow. You're not absolutely sure that they didn't add a hallucinogenic to your espresso this morning. But there is the highest probability the coffee is safe, the donuts are yummy, the smoothies are smooth.

And in everyday life, all of us learn to live with a measure of uncertainty, and

we grow accustomed to being reasonable folks. We weigh evidence, consider data and finally we make decisions based on high probability factors.

Now I bring this up because it must be understood from the outset that insistence on absolute proof for the existence of God, absolute certainty into the nature of the spiritual realm, verifiable evidence into God's process and purpose in creation... is an unreasonable and unrealistic expectation. As we just looked at, life doesn't operate that way. We don't even place that kind of evidential burden on the judicial system of our land.

What is a reasonable thing to ask is for enough evidence to tip the scales of probability to the point where a person can say, "I am genuinely convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that there is more to life than meets the eye, there is a transcendent realm. I am compelled, not by complete, but by sufficient evidence that there is a God who created the heavens and the earth. I am moved by the arguments to the point where if I'm going to be true to my intellect – and my intuition, if I'm going to be a reasonable person – I have to conclude there is, in fact, a God." The psalmist wrote: Fools say to themselves, there is no God."

Psalm 14:1 I want to ask the psalmist... why did you say that... why is denying God foolish. What are your reasons? That's what we're going to talk about next week.