

Welcome to Feb... home of the 2008 Superbowl, groundhogs day, National wear red day, Ash Wednesday, Lincoln's birthday, Washington's birthday, Black History month, Valentine's Day, and a much less celebrated day... Feb 12, Charles Darwin's Birthday – do you realize there is not one Hallmark Card dedicated to the 199<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Father of Evolutionary theory.

Perhaps no surprise. Ever since Darwin's book, the Origin of Species was published in 1859, and ever since the trial of John Scopes in Tennessee in 1925, the arguments persist. The debate goes on.

A zookeeper came across an orangutan reading two books. One was the Bible; the other was Darwin's Origin of Species. "Why are you reading such opposite books?" the zookeeper asked. Replied the orangutan, "Well, I'm trying to figure out if I'm supposed to be my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother."

Darwin has become the symbol of the controversy between the Christian right and scientific atheism. Creation by intelligent design verses a godless process of natural selection. The Bible verses the biology text book. Faith verses skepticism. It's a debate we see carried out in school boards, in the courts, in the news, in the presidential debates, and on our car's bumperstickers.

You know the fish symbol Christians use to let people know they're believers. In Greek the word for fish is IKTUS. Each letter begins the words... "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior." Back when Christianity was underground, they used the symbol to identify one another. I guess its still that way today... somebody cuts you off in traffic, you see the little fish sign, on their car and go... oh they're a Christian.

But it seems you are just as likely these days to see on somebody's bumper... a fish with legs on it. The Darwin fish. Evolving out of the murky deep to crawl onto the land and continue the process of natural selection. But not to be outdone... the creationists have come back with a bumpersticker in which the Christian fish is eating the Darwin fish. And the debate rages on.

For many the two fish seem diametrically opposed. You gotta choose one or the other... you're going to believe the Bible or you're going to be a doubter. You're going to go with God or some other explanation for the world. So you got to make up your mind... which fish are you going to go with? Creationism or Evolution. And many of our Christian young people have simply accepted the dichotomy that one is true at school and another is true at church. Until they can no longer believe in talking snakes, and a

6,000 year old planet, and 6 days of creation, and a boat with every species in the world on it... and they stop listening to the church all together.

Well there is another position, in which I find myself, and many many other faithful Christians, perhaps you too, which has largely been outside the passionate fish wars... because we see no controversy whatsoever between science and scripture. There is no debate.

We believe that God is our creator, and yet we believe in natural process as well. We probably have in our congregation a higher percentage of people with advanced degrees in science and engineering than perhaps any other in the synod. We understand something of scientific process and theory. We know what carbon dating means. We understand plate tectonics. We know about the revelations of the Galapagos islands. So we just can't read the opening words of the Bible literally. Our fish has legs on it... but then I feel conspicuous, perhaps a little subversive in the wider Christian community... where evolution is still a misguided theory.

I am a Christian pastor who believes passionately in the Word of God which comes to us through scripture, and... I am without hesitation able to embrace the discoveries of science that give us meaningful insight into the geological age of this planet and meaningful insight into the formation of

life as we know it. And I think the God is able to speak to us eloquently in both languages.

And by sitting quietly on the sidelines I don't think I or you are doing anybody any favors, especially the young people among us trying to figure out how to reconcile their faith in God in a rational, scientific, 21<sup>st</sup> century, post-modern world.

So I am going to begin a sermon series today in which we consider the relationship between science and faith, how we understand and apply the truths of the Bible in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context, and what we have in the church to offer the world that it can't get anyplace else. I am excited and passionate about this subject and I hope you find some interesting things here as well.

We read earlier from Genesis 1 recounting the story of God creating the world. It's a story at the heart of a major struggle taking place in Kansas and Pennsylvania and Tennessee, in their school systems right now. A number of Christians are convinced that evolution could not be the process by which modern life came to be. They believe in the description of creation given by Genesis down to the letter. Life came into being in seven days, set into motion by an "Intelligent Designer," not, as they would name it, by an "atheistic process." They say that they cannot espouse or teach evolution

because they are Christians, and as true believers, they cannot question the literal word of God.

(show clip)

At the heart of the debate is whether the creation story in Genesis is history? Is it accurate science? Or is it parable? Is it a metaphor? Is it imagery? Is it poetry? Is it the literal word of God dictated into the minds of the authors? Is it true? Before we even get to the science of creation, the geology of the age of the earth... the biology of evolution – we have to settle the matter of how we are going to read the Bible.

I've told you before and I want to say it again: I take the Bible very seriously; it is the inspired Word of God and the norm and guide of our faith and life in Christ... but I do not always take it literally. I was taught in grad school, Luther Theological seminary, by the some of the best Biblical scholars and theologians in the world today, the Bible is not always to be interpreted literally. And in particular to our discussion of creation, Genesis 1-11 - it is not to be read as documented history. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Joshua and David and Solomon were real historical figures. Hebron and Bethel, and Beersheba and Shechem and Jerusalem, the River Jordan and Jabbok, the Red Sea, real places that you can visit today, On our trip we visit many of the sites and saw a plethora of

archeological evidence of the ancient events of the Old Testament.

However, the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, the 7 days of creation, the talking snake, Cain and Able, the giants of Genesis 6 who were the offspring of human women and heavenly beings, Noah and the ark, Mt Ararat, the tower of Babel, simply not historical... Genesis 1-11 is a rich collection of stories and parables, songs and poetry, colorful metaphors and imagery that speak to a great truth about who God is and who we are and the relationship God has with his beautiful creation. But you can dig around all you want and you're not going to find any seeds from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, you're not going to uncover any wood from Noah's ark... you're not going to find any bones from the giants – and you are not going to trace DNA back to two common ancestors for the human race.

Genesis was written thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago where they accepted that light was created before the Sun and the Moon... the earth was flat... there was a dome that covered the earth with water on top of the dome... God could open the windows of the dome and let water fall down as rain... there was water under the flat earth, an idea supported by springs and rivers that burst forth from openings in the earth. The flat earth rested on pillars, the earth was the center of the universe, the sun and the moon and the stars were suspended on the dome and tracked across each

day. Heaven was up and Hell was down and that made sense. It is recorded in the Bible.

Which is not to denigrate the Bible, or its significance, or its power to communicate the will of God. But the inspiration it contains is not in scientific conclusions... the inspiration is in the stories and the metaphors, and the images... timeless truths that tell us about ourselves and our God the world God created.

The writer of Genesis one actually uses two different words that we can miss unless someone points it out. Sometimes he (and I'll use he) uses the word "made." God made this or that. "Made" refers to a marvelous but somewhat comprehensible act. In other places the writer uses the word "create." And he only uses the word create when he is talking about the "God Only" events. The God only events, according to the Genesis writer, are heaven and earth, the initial life forms in the sea, and human beings. It is just interesting to imagine him using those particular words in those places. That has got to be inspiration... that is what makes it God's word.

Images have always been at the heart of the Bible. Images and stories are the way our spiritual forebears thought. It is the way Jesus himself often taught. He told the story of the Prodigal Son and the waiting Father(Luke 15). Did there have to actually be such a family to make his point that that's

how God feels about us. No. Jesus told about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). Did there actually have to be that incident of roadside heroism to convince us that's how we should treat our neighbor? No. Was there a shepherd who had a flock of exactly 100 sheep, who went after a lost one, to make it true that God pursues us no matter what? No. There are many many stories in the Bible that were never ever intended to be considered a part of the historical record. And I will defend that position with all my reputation as a biblical scholar. There are also some stories that have as the subject a real historical person but the context may or may not have been totally accurate. George Washington and the Cherry Tree... real guy, legendary in his honesty, but did he really chop it down? Who knows? Does it matter? Did Paul really write the letter to the Collosians, even though he had never been there, and it doesn't quite sound like him... but its got his name on it? Who knows, does it matter? There are many things in the Bible left open to interpretation and personal opinion. Which takes nothing away from the profound truths it contains.

Lets get back to Genesis 1. I have always been impressed with the "order" of creation in Genesis 1. In the ancient mind, first there was nothing... then light and water, and land and then the first sign of life... plants... and then sea creatures, followed by birds and animals and finally

the crown of creation, the greatest mystery of all—humankind. Imagine it... thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago, they thought through this fairly sophisticated order of things... fairly similar to what science today suggests.

The other creation story... is a bit messier... about a God who walks on the earth gathers up mud to form the first Man, Adam, and then the rest of creation, and at the end after he got really good at it, creating the first woman, Eve. These are stories that beg questions by their very juxtaposition. They ask us to dig deeper, to wonder with each other, to seek a meaning from these stories beyond a literal telling of creation.

I also learned a long time ago in college and grad school that Genesis 1 is a Hebrew worship hymn. It is a litany. A responsive reading. That is why we did it that way this morning. It is an affirmation of faith in song. It is the worship expression of an ancient people that says at the very least, *“There is a current taking us somewhere, and there is a creative, loving intelligence underlying it all.”*

There were asking the same question we sometimes ask: *Is there an overarching purpose to the universe? Or are we the lucky adaptations of an evolving, fundamentally random world that has only the meaning we choose to give it?*

Science isn't nearly as able to answer those kinds of questions. And for that we turn to the Bible and the creation stories tells us quietly... "In the beginning always...God."

no attempt to answer the scientific question as to the age of the earth...

no mention of geographically where you would exactly find the Garden of Eden,

no description of the kind of fruit on the tree of Knowledge,

no explanation of who did Cain married if his parents Adam and Eve were the only two people on earth.

no acknowledgement that a talking snake is hard to run with.

Here is how I read these stories... I read Genesis one and two and I think about God, who is the creator of it all. I think about human beings as being God's greatest miracle. There's a wonderful passage in the second creation story that says God scooped up the dust of the earth, formed it into a human being, and breathed into that person the breath of life. What a marvelous metaphor for saying we are both the elemental dust of the earth and the breath of God.

When I read these stories I think about how human beings try to take charge. We think we know more than God. We think we know better than

God. The ancient story is still the same story in us today. When I read these stories I think about the wonder of it all.

Finally, when I read the creation stories I think about creation as a mysterious gift, thanks to science, its complexities become more known all the time.

We need to see creation as a mysterious gift again today. One that Genesis reminds us over which we have been given dominion. God has put us in charge. For us the issues of the environment are not so much political issues, but theological issues. We are to approach environmental issues with reverence and responsibility.

We are made disciples not to choose sides in a faith science debate. But we are also not called to seek some sort of middle ground in some nebulous place between the two. In the words of Dr. King, *we are not to seek a common ground but a higher one.*

Ground that is higher than a Jesus fish or a Darwin fish. Problem is, it just doesn't fit neatly on a bumper sticker. It means that we believe in an intelligent designer who created a wonderful world... through evolution. It means we believe in a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit even if we can't explain how they all fit together. It means we believe in a Saviour who is at the same time a person, and God Almighty. It means we see not a black and

white world, and not even a grey one.. but a deeper, wider, higher world  
shining with all the colors of the rainbow.

Science and faith are not incompatible... in fact they need each other for  
belaying to higher ground.