

This week's theme is hope. We're going to think about hope through the lens of evolution, incarnation, and what some have called the cosmic Christ.

In some ways, I am bringing you along on a journey that I've been on for a very long time. I suspect it's one I'll be on until I die. Hopefully then I will truly know what I'm now only seeing dimly. So the first thing I want you to know is that uncertainty is part of that journey. I've learned not to be afraid of uncertainty.

Maybe a better word is mystery. After all, the heart of so much of faith really is mystery...incarnation itself is mystery. Once we can live with mystery, we're free to imagine how science can actually reveal God rather than deny God.

My goal this morning is not to teach you evolutionary science or try to convince you of its truth if you aren't already. My main goal is twofold...to help us contemplate the majesty of God revealed in the workings of the natural world and second, to not be afraid that the things scientists discover will somehow undo faith.

Carl Sagan, an astronomer and science writer said this: "how is it that religion has not looked at science and said 'This is even better than we thought? God must be even greater than we dreamed.'" That's my sentiment exactly.

Typically in the perceived conflicts between science and faith, the creation stories from Genesis are the go to scripture.

But there are other creation texts in the Bible. We read one last week from the beginning of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Then there's this passage we read today from the letter to the Colossians. There's a similar one in Ephesians.

These passages make clear that Christ is the one through whom the creator created the universe and everything in it. It's OK to just leave it at that. We can marvel at Christ's presence in and throughout the created world. We can meditate on it without asking how that works.

But I think it's also OK to wonder how. That seems to me to be the place where science and faith can meet.

When I talk about Christ involved in creation, I'm going to use the title Cosmic Christ. It helps clarify things a bit, even though the Cosmic Christ isn't separate from Christ who is God's anointed who came to us as the human being Jesus. There's that mystery again.

The image I get from passages like this one from Colossians is one where the very life of Christ is somehow woven into an evolving creation...that evolution is how creation unfolds, and the cosmic Christ evolves ahead of it, drawing it forward.

Since the work of God in Christ was so profoundly revealed in Christ's death and resurrection, perhaps death and resurrection is the whole key to seeing Christ in evolution. Death and resurrection is a pattern repeated over and over everywhere we see God at work...in the cycles of the seasons, in the new life coming out of a stump or a compost pile, in the ancient stories of scripture, in the evolutionary process, in the failures and triumphs of our lives, and ultimately in our own bodies as we die and are born to new life.

If this is true, that death and resurrection is the key, then every evolutionary dead end, every extinction of a species is another death that allows a resurrection. And Christ is with and somehow in every single one of them. It all belongs to Christ. Nothing is lost, nothing is futile. And it is all going somewhere. That is hope.

That might be the key difference between science and faith...science observes the evolutionary process. Faith makes meaning of it...and finds hope in it.

But there's more. God in this cosmos creating Christ desired even more. God desired an even deeper connection to those beloved but often difficult creatures called humans. That's where incarnation comes in.

When John the Baptist is standing by the River Jordan, he knows things are changing. The people who come out to hear him and receive his baptism know things are changing. Something new is on the horizon.

This cosmic Christ who has been so powerfully present in all of creation had now chosen to dwell in a human body alongside other human beings. He would eat with them, sleep with them, walk the dusty roads with them and love them and teach them.

And his death and resurrection would begin a whole new unfolding of creation...one that will bring us to the completion of creation...where God reigns totally over all the powers of the world, with peace, love and justice.

And that unfolding...that evolution...is happening as we speak. Christ truly is the alpha and omega – the beginning and end – of everything.

So this is all pretty heady. What does it mean for us in the quiet places of our hearts and our time together in worship? What does it mean for the world as we are living in it now? What are the implications of a cosmic Christ whose very life has been and continues to be woven into an evolving and changing world?

I think the first implication is just that...the life of the risen Christ is woven into our very lives. The life of the risen Christ is woven into the life of our church and the lives of our communities.

Everything that happens to us, good and bad, is touched by a Christ whose life is intimately intertwined with ours. We can trust that everything belongs to Christ who is drawing it toward something good. Nothing is lost...nothing is futile. That is where we place our hope for our own lives in our everyday struggles.

I think the second implication is that Christ's incarnation wasn't just a plan B because of sin – it's what God intended all along. The incarnation and the cross are the ultimate revelations of a God whose love knows no bounds. The life of Christ is woven through yours because he loves you...period. Our sin gets taken up by Christ every day...just as it was taken up on the cross...and is transformed. That's where we place our hope for freedom and forgiveness.

And the third implication is that if Christ's life is woven through all of creation, that changes how we see everything in the created world.

Friday I had what I felt was a pretty profound experience of this. I'd invite you to try it. I went for a walk in the park in Waverly specifically as a spiritual practice. In practical terms I was looking for things to take pictures of, but when you do that you actually have to pay attention to the creation around you – you are contemplating it.

As I looked, I imagined Christ being somehow connected to everything. It seems weird to describe a feeling of love toward plants and trees and rocks and stuff, but that's kind of what it was. That really is a gift of being more contemplative.

And that has another implication...when we can see God in everything, it suddenly seems very much not OK that some of the things we do are bad for the rest of God's creation.

One of the things that caught my eye was an earthworm on the sidewalk. Kind of unusual in December but it was so warm he decided to venture out. When you see an earthworm as a creature made by God, loved by God and connected to the life of Christ, it makes reading an

article about the finding of microscopic bits of plastic in earthworms in the Minnesota wilderness just that much more troubling.

I believe it will be our ability to see Christ's life connected to everything that will bring hope for the natural world.

When we can see the world in this way, when we can see Christ's life interwoven through it all, when we can see this whole creation evolving and unfolding toward new creation and God's reign, when we can see Christ's life intimately connected to ours, drawing us towards life and love, we can't help but hope.