

Faith

It seems people have always been curious about the world they live in and how it came to be. Awed by the vastness of the sky and its domelike appearance, aware that nothing could be seen if not for light, the ancients were given a story to tell...the story of God's creation of the universe.

Very ancient people wouldn't have known the word science or anything like it, but they too made observations about the natural world around them. They saw the natural world as a reflection of the divine...a reflection of God. That is a notion we have at best underappreciated and at worst rejected.

In the 1500's, the mathematician and astronomer Copernicus wrote a paper based on his observations of the movement of planets and stars in the sky. In it, he proposed that the earth moved around the sun instead of everything revolving around the earth. Before that time, it was assumed our earth was unmovable and the center of everything. The sun is what moved. After all, that is what it looks like.

In the early 1600's, Galileo said the same thing as Copernicus. This did not go over well with the church. The Inquisition was a reaction of the church to a changing world. The purpose of the Inquisition was to root out heresy, or false teachings.

The Inquisition found Galileo guilty of heresy for his proposal of a sun centered universe instead of an earth centered one. He spent the rest of his life under house arrest.

Thus began a centuries long refusal of the church to be swayed by findings of science if they didn't fit with a very literal interpretation of scripture.

Well, at this point we have at least been convinced that the earth does indeed revolve around the sun. But there are still too many Christians who fear that faith will be threatened by the discoveries of science.

In our time and place, the Big Bang and evolution have replaced the sun-centered universe as the perceived threat to faith. But as science learns more and more, those too have become more and more likely to be the best explanations for the universe and the diversity of life we see now.

Is there more to learn? Yes. Will there be modifications and refinements as we learn more? Yes.

But what I most want to do is empower us to tell the world that our faith will not be crumbled by new discoveries.

In fact, if we let our God-given curiosity guide us, we will more likely find God hidden in the very places we never thought possible. We will glimpse the workings of a creator whose brilliance will astound us.

Any time we fear that a new discovery will shatter faith, we forget that the one in whom we place our faith created all this...and is still creating.

We forget that that creator is too vast and too amazing a creator to be undone by anything science will discover. In fact some are beginning to suspect the opposite.

The theory of relativity and quantum theory were theories worked out in the 20th Century. They have both been repeatedly verified by experiments and observations of how things work. But they are not compatible theories for everything. Relativity works in the vastness of space, but not at the level of the subatomic world.

Quantum theory works in the subatomic world but not in the vast realms of space. Scientists believe there is a deeper reality that will somehow bring the two together and explain everything.

Faith tells us when we get to the deepest reality there is, we'll find God the creator peeking back at us. Faith tells us we don't need to fear that search.

In fact I think faith can help us be excited to learn more and more about the wonderful world in which we live.

When Christians feel the need to defend God against the discoveries of science, their fear says something about what they really believe. Perhaps real faith is simple amazement, awe, and curiosity at the things we might learn about this unbelievably vast and beautiful universe.

These little passages from Hebrews and John can be our mantras as we explore the intersection of science and faith.

The writer of Hebrews had zero understanding of relativity or the quantum world or the big bang. But imagine this...in the beginning there was a tiny pinpoint of nothing but infinite potential. It was invisible. God said let there be light. And suddenly that tiny pinpoint exploded and began expanding.

As God continued to speak a world into being, the tiny particles begin to come together to form elements and molecules and then planets and stars and the earth...and so on.

Well, of course you don't need to be a scientist, or really know anything about science to appreciate God's creative power. We can use just our eyes to look around, to gaze up at the night sky. We can spend time in the natural world, preferably for real, but in pictures if need be.

The theme for this week is faith. Faith means trusting that God is still creating and sustaining this universe. Faith can also mean being curious and not fearful about what we can learn about how.

And faith means trusting that somehow, as creation repeats the pattern of death and resurrection, God is in the midst of it. We'll talk more about that next week when we talk about hope and evolution and the cosmic Christ.

Mostly, faith means trusting that God does reveal Godself to us in the natural world. Maybe science will continue to get closer and closer to seeing how that revelation unfolds.

But we don't need to understand complex theories to watch God's revelation. All we need is eyes, curiosity and the willingness to pay attention...to actually create a space of quiet in which we can appreciate the beauty of creation.

That's the essence of the contemplative practices. We are again observing A Contemplative Advent. The focus this year is on God's created world...the natural world. We approach this season in faith that God wants to show himself to us...that God wants to spend time with us and hopes we want to spend time with God.

Contemplation really has no theological agenda. Contemplation sets aside our own agendas. It is simply paying attention and waiting for how God will be made known to us.

And that's really what Advent is all about. We talk about Advent as a season of waiting. But it's not just about waiting for Christmas.

We are waiting for God to be revealed over and over again in the world around us. We are waiting for Christ's return and the completion of creation in the new creation.

We are waiting for Christ's revelation in our own experiences of death and resurrection, sorrow and joy, pain and comfort.

Faith means trusting that a loving God created us and created everything around us. Faith means trusting that God is delighted every time we learn something new or see something we'd never really noticed before.

And it means that in times of quiet contemplation, whether we're outside walking or sitting in our living room, God does come to us, even if that doesn't happen in the way we thought it would.

And faith means trusting that the very nature of God is reflected in the beauty and awe of the universe and the earth and its life.