

Sermon: Do You Really Want to Know

I want to begin by expressing my sincere and great appreciation to Charlie for bringing his talent and this particular piece of music to this service tonight. This song “Do you Really Want to Know” was written by Peter Mayer, the same Unitarian Universalist musician who wrote “Blue Boat Home” and “Everything in Holy Now.” Peter Mayer is a member of the White Bear congregation in Minnesota. He is one of my heroes.

This music opens up for me a theme that is central to my personal religious faith... a faith in God that is not diminished by scientific discoveries but rather is strengthened by scientific discoveries. I keep returning to this theme because I feel this so strongly, and yet I struggle to find a way to articulate it powerfully.

Galileo, looking into his telescope asks the Pope... and Charles Darwin working on the theory of natural selection asks his wife Emma... “do you really want to know?” Why would the Pope or Emma or you or I not want to know? Why... because new facts might destroy the faith that the Pope or Emma or you or I are basing our lives on. Once you open that door, Peter Mayer warns us that there is no going back. You can no longer live in a world where the sun goes around the earth. You say sun rise but instead the earth itself will move.

At one level then the song is about the destruction of religious faith... the earth and humanity can no longer be seen as the center of the universe. Human beings can no longer be the product of God’s direct intervention on the sixth day of creation. On another level the song is about the birth of a greater faith, the opening up to a greater vision. In the song, the simplistic and rigid faith is challenged and the singer is left spinning round amid the wonder of it all. The same telescope that destroyed one vision of creation can open our eyes to another more marvelous awesome vision of creation.

Some would argue that before we had a scientific explanation for the creation of the universe and the complexity of life in the universe, we needed God. And now that we have the knowledge of the Big Bang and the process of evolution we no longer need God to explain what we observe.

When science opened the door to knowledge of the universe and its processes, for me it exposed a creation that was much more mysterious magnificent and awesome than any previous vision. To illustrate my point I invite you to look at one of the iconic images of our time... The Hubble Ultra Deep Field View.

This image released in March 2004 is view of one tiny section of the sky that appears completely blank to any earth based telescope. The patch of sky is so small that it is the size of a grain of sand, held out at arm’s length. It would take 12,700,000 of these images to cover the sky.

There are approximately 10,000 galaxies in this view, each equivalent to our home galaxy the Milky Way. Each of these galaxies is made up of hundreds of billions of stars. This image takes us to the very edge of the visible universe. Note that I said the visible universe. What we can see is limited by the fact that we can only see those galaxies that are close enough that light could travel to us in the 14 billion years or so since the Big Bang. This is a look back in time for what we see is what the universe was like 10 Billion years ago.

A little discussed fact is that the universe is now thought to be infinite. INFINITE INFINITE Galaxy after Galaxy going on forever... I could sit for 30 minutes of meditation just staring at this picture. Does science explain all of this?

In their recent book, "The Grand Design" by Steven Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, they purport to prove that given the laws of quantum mechanics and relativity the creation of the universe was inevitable and requires no act of divine intervention. Yes, I said, given the laws of quantum mechanics and relativity... But Hawking and Mlodinow make no attempt to explain why there should be laws of quantum mechanics and relativity. If the universe was created spontaneously by the laws of quantum mechanics, how were the laws of quantum mechanics created. The ultimate question... why should there be anything.

Our first reaction to Galileo or Darwin might be... "Wow... this changes everything." Or as George Carlin once said "This is Vueja De... Man I've never been here before." But in fact after the discoveries of Galileo and Darwin and all of the scientists before and after them, we are still in the same philosophical quandary... how do we explain the beginning the ultimate awesome mystery... creation.

Just as the discoveries of Galileo and Darwin changed our perspectives, so for me, the ever more amazing discoveries of science change our perspective again. Each scientific discovery just makes the created world more and more mysterious. The more questions we answer the more answers we question. None of this proves the existence of God.

I believe that it is impossible to prove the existence of God. If it is impossible to prove the existence of God then belief in God becomes a choice, a matter of faith... but certainly not a blind faith. Rather a faith based on the widest possible vision supplied by our scientists, our poets, our artists and our theologians. At some point when confronted with the awesome universe the evidence, for me tips toward a rational belief in something behind it all. For me this amazing awesome universe is evidence for faith in a power greater than what we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch.

In the end the argument I am making is I suppose the oldest argument for the existence of God. The cosmological argument or the argument for a first cause.

Given that I am resigned to the fact it is now, and always will be, impossible to prove the existence of God it is no admission of defeat to say that I base my faith on the oldest arguments for God's existence. What I am thrilled by is the fact that our scientific discoveries provide

more and more evidence for the awesome nature of creation and thereby for me, more evidence for God.

And a belief in God, really does change everything.

Amen