

Creation: God speaks "Light!"

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

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Genesis 1:1-19

Matthew 5:14-16

Who are we? What are we? How did we get here?

Last Sunday, I began a series on creation. After the service, a visitor from Europe, a scientist and engineer, told me at the door that my understanding of physics was "quite good for a preacher." Of course he didn't know that Walt Shropshire has been feeding me information and all sorts of materials. But I am encouraged to continue on this series on creation, based on Genesis Chapter 1.

During my years as a pastor, I have done this every several years to spend some time looking at the questions of who are we, what are we, and how did we get here.

Let us pray -- Open our minds and our hearts, our eyes and our ears, so that we may see you, God, in this universe in which we live ... so that we may love you by loving this place that you have given to be our home and through which you have granted us the great gift of life itself. Amen

Light.

Apparently 15 billion years ago, or it may have been 10, or it may have been 60, at the very beginning of time, all that is today was born out of a vacuum.

It was born very quickly. In the first one-billionth of a second, the universe was about one-hundredth of a centimeter in size -- millions of times more dense than a stone, millions of times hotter than the core of the sun.

And, then within that first second of time, this speck of being swelled. It rose like a loaf of bread and filled the size of what, today, would be our solar system. What was to eventually become 125 billion galaxies within a second of time rose like bread and filled the space of what is now our solar system, and it was still very hot.

For the first three hundred thousand years of time -- seven hundred thousand years before the galaxies and the stars would be born -- all that is today existed as a thick soup of energy. It existed as something called photons, which are little particles that sometimes act like waves and that are the source of what we call, today, light. For the first three hundred thousand years of being, all that is today existed as a thick soup -- some scientists call it "plasma" -- of energy in the form of light -- in the form of radiation.

After three hundred thousand years of growing -- of swelling and cooling -- expanding and cooling -- this thick soup of radiation expanded to the place where some of the photons were able to travel distances without crashing into another one, and that is when this soup of being began to give off light. Visible light was born.

Apparently our Israelite parents in the faith were not wrong when they said that the first thing that God created was light. On the first day of creation when there was nothing but an abyss, God said, "Let there be light" and there was light!

Apparently the intuitions of our spiritual ancestors were not wrong because all that is today began as light. Creation begins as light.

There are two observations I want to make in this meditation about light this morning.

First, I think that the significance of light being the first priority of creation says something about who we are and what we are and how we got here. I think it says that from the very beginning, our universe was meant to be seen. From the very beginning, our universe intended for us to perceive it.

Or, you might say that from the very beginning, God intended us to be able to study and to know the universe around us. One of the core values of creation appears to be transparency. The universe isn't hiding stuff from us. The universe intends for us to be able to see it and to learn it and to know it. The universe apparently is an open book.

Billions of years before there were eyes that were able to receive them, the universe was sending out photons of light. There are things that we are seeing today, through the Hubbell Space Telescope, that happened 13 or 14 billion light years away. You can go to the internet this afternoon, while it's snowing outside, and you can go to the Hubbell Space Telescope sight and you can see pictures of a galaxy being born 13 or 14 billion light years ago! And, when you are looking at that, what you are seeing is that galaxy as it was 14 billion years ago when that galaxy began sending out photons which have traveled through space for 14 billion years so that those photons can be picked up by the telescope today! Those photons have been traveling 14 billion years to get here so that we can see them through the Hubbell Space Telescope on the internet this afternoon.

We live in a universe that God apparently intended us to be able to see and to perceive and to know. There is no hidden agenda in God's creation.

The second thing I want to say about the priority of light is that apparently what we are is creatures who are meant to be able to see -- and I use the word "see" in its largest sense of to perceive, to apprehend and to comprehend and to know and to learn because seeing is not merely a matter of eye sight. People who have limitations in their visual abilities are still able to see in the fullest sense of the term because they can see through their mind's eye.

Sight is amazing. Apparently the sun and the stars and light bulbs send out photons -- these little tiny particles that sometimes act like waves -- and the photons bounce off of everything around us and then they bounce onto our eyeballs. Our eyeballs are able to take the impression of the photons that bounce off of them and relay those impressions to our retinas. Our retinas, which are the most nerve intensive parts of our bodies -- there are 70,000 nerve endings in our retinas -- are able to take the impression of the photons that are bouncing off of everything around us, and communicate them to our brain which translates them into an understanding of the world around us.

One physiologist said that the retina is really not a sense organ. The retina is bit of our brain that has literally journeyed out to have a look at the world.

Apparently, we are creatures who are created in order that we can receive knowledge about the world around us. If, for some reason, our eyes don't work as well as some other folk's do -- and that happens to all of us more and more as we get older -- then our brain is still able to see through other senses and through

the sight of others who communicate to us what they see.

We exist to receive knowledge and information. The universe apparently exists for us to know it. We apparently exist to be creatures who know.

It is critically important that we are never afraid of the light. The light is at the beginning of creation, the light is the beginning of all that is. The universe exists to be a place of light.

We can't be fully human and be afraid of the light.

We need to make sure that our children, our nieces and nephews, our children here at Foundry Church, our children in our Child Development Center, that all our children know that they must never be afraid of the light. They must never be afraid to learn. They must never be afraid to explore. They must never be afraid to study. They must never be afraid of science.

One of the fundamental truths of our Judeo-Christian faith is that the God we discover in our hearts -- the God that we discover at Exodus and at Sinai and the God that we discover in Jesus Christ -- is the same God who created all that is ... the same God who hung the stars in space ... the same God who brought this earth on which we live into being ... the same God who formed our genomes. Therefore, we never have anything to fear from learning about the universe around us. It is the Judeo-Christian faith that gives science permission to be.

The only thing that we need to fear is bad science. And, then, we shouldn't even be too afraid of that because bad science always leads to better science. The God that we discover in the world around us is the same God who dwells in our hearts and that we know through the love of Jesus Christ.

The universe exists to be seen, to be perceived, to be understood. The universe exists for us to stand in appreciation of it -- to stand in awe of it.

God created light so that the universe might show itself to us. God created light so that we might receive it. God said, "The light is good."

Let us never be afraid of the light. Let us be a people who choose to live in the light and to walk in the light.

Albert Einstein, after he made his greatest discoveries said, "For the rest of my life, I want to reflect on what light is." Light is a profound gift to us by the God who chooses for us to see and to know.