

The Reverend William Graham
Grace Episcopal Church
Norwood, MA
14 February 2021

2 Kings 2:1-12

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 Mark 9:2-9

"For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." - the 6th verse of the 4th Chapter of the letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

The light which shone out of darkness refers to the creation story in Genesis. The light of knowledge refers to the conversion of Paul which is recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts.

"Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"

When we read scripture, when we study a variety of Christian writing, and when we spend time in prayer, we are often seeking to gain a kind of knowledge which answers questions of faith and religion.

This is certainly not the only knowledge sought by human beings for there is a different kind of kind of knowledge which deals with an entirely different set of questions. Those are the questions that arise when we seek to understand how things function in the world around us. Those are the questions which we explore and try to answer via the discipline of science.

As long as people have existed there have been persons of science who have wanted to dismiss persons of faith and persons of faith who wanted to dismiss persons of science. A so called war between these groups has arisen when people have failed to recognize that the tools of science do a rather poor job of answering question of faith and the tools of faith do a rather poor job of answering questions of science.

This conflict has been very apparent as the world has faced the Covid-19 crisis during the past year. According to the book Fr. John mentioned in his sermon last Sunday, the United States, one of the richest countries in the world, has had about a quarter of all cases and the most deaths of all countries. Certainly a contributing reason for this has been the denying of the findings of science by many of our country's leaders, often in order to maintain the political support of persons of faith. I'll return to discussing the Covid issue, but first let me share some history of a positive discussion between persons of faith and persons of science. We now have 17,308 members, including myself and TSSF member Jeff Goliher.

The original goals are threefold:

- To demonstrate that religion and evolutionary biology are compatible;

- To demonstrate that Fundamentalist ministers who demand that people choose between religion and modern science are not speaking for all religious leaders; and
- To raise the quality of the discourse on this important topic."

(- See more at: <http://uuhumanist.org/blog/201502/clergy-letter-project-demonstrating-compatibility-religion-and-science#sthash.pmfpeoXR.dpuf>)

I've delivered several sermons on the relationship between religion and science and four of them (along with many others) are posted on the Clergy Letter website.

Before returning to our text, let me say a bit more of a personal note regarding the relationship between science and religion. Some of you have heard me say we are each on a journey to grow in our faith, to grow closer to God.

Science has been an important part of that path for me. In my junior year of high school, we had a career day in which we were able to pick three careers and meet with persons working in each one. My three were science, teaching, and religious vocations. Now in my retirement years, I can easily say that I've worked in all three.

My undergraduate degree was in Chemical engineering and I spent seven years in that field before entering seminary. After moving to Nebraska, I also became a teacher, certified in special education for both mentally handicapped and gifted students. The very week I moved from NE to MA, I taught (mostly math and science) for two days at an Alternative School and conducted Sunday services.

Science has always been my favorite subject and some of what I've learned from that discipline I've applied to my study of the Holy Scriptures.

That means I study scripture looking for the truths which answer questions of faith, not questions of science. I take a historical, critical approach to understanding the Bible. I understand the creation account in Genesis to which Paul refers in our text about the light as expressing the scientific knowledge of several thousand years ago, not that of our age.

One example I like to use in this regard has to do with the waters above the firmament and the waters below the firmament. People at that time could dig down into the earth and find water. They could also look up at the sky and see that it was blue. They also experienced some of waters above them as falling down from time to time. To me, that's pretty good science.

I also find in the first chapter of Genesis an order of creation which still fits our scientific knowledge. The things created in successive days, are somewhat consistent with the order in which they came to be as was recorded by Darwin in the "Voyage of the Beagle."

I've never felt I had to make a choice between my scientific knowledge and my faith; I've only had to figure out how the two fit together.

For almost a year now as we've dealt with the Covid crisis, science has been especially important. Too many people have refused to listen to what sound research has told us

about how to minimize the spread of the virus. We know all too well how wearing masks and keeping social distance does precisely that.

For the last two months several vaccines have been becoming available, first to front-line workers and now to old geezers such as myself. After quite a struggle to get scheduled, I was able to get my first inoculation last Thursday at a pharmacy in Danvers. My second shot will be in a month. My daughter Beth, was in the first group and has already had both shots. She had a minor reaction, mainly running a fever the next day after the second dose - nothing to be concerned about. I especially want to encourage each of you to get the vaccine as soon as you can. We are fortunate enough in our area that the two vaccines which require extremely cold storage facilities are available. The sooner we are all vaccinated, the sooner we can return to much of what used to be normal for us.

Since most of what I've been saying has been dealing with the questions of science, I'd like to return to the questions of faith and make a brief inquiry into the meaning of the text from 2nd Corinthians, into the knowledge we obtain by faith.

Acts told of a light that could be explained in a scientific manner, but when Paul wrote of a light shining in his heart, he was speaking of a faith experience. He had experienced a spiritual presence of God, a presence he had suddenly connected to Jesus Christ. It was that presence which led Paul to proclaim Jesus as Lord to all those with whom he was to have contact from that day forward.

We may not have had, or ever will have an experience like that of Paul, but we do have God present in ways impossible to describe by science, we too have God shining in our hearts. Becoming more knowledgeable of that presence is what it means to move along on our journey of faith. It is a knowledge which neither contradicts the knowledge we obtain through science, nor can it be explained by scientific knowledge.

I'd like to conclude with a prayer "For Knowledge of God's Creation" which I think does an excellent job of expressing a healthy relationship between science and religion.

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.