

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Observance of Darwin Day, February 10 2019
Job 38:1-7, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11
St. John's Episcopal Church, The Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer

Job has every reason to doubt. His participation in his inherited faith brought on disasters, poverty, unfaithful friends, and death. Job has every reason to doubt God, God's faithfulness, God's goodness, God's existence. But he refuses to give up on God, and he cries out for answers. Finally, God speaks, and God is not amused. We heard only seven verses this morning, but God goes on for four long chapters, listing everything that Job doesn't know, can't do, can't answer. Finally, in chapter 42 Job humbly despises himself and "repents in dust and ashes." In response God restores Job's fortune, doubles his family, his cattle, his land, and he lives a long, wonderful life. Or so the story goes. Modern scholars think the book of Job originally ended with a Job's questioning of God and the happy ending got tacked on later.

And thus is born the theology of a God of the Gaps. Those who doubt God are asked to explain things they can't and that is proof that God exists; God explains, fills in the gaps we can't. This kind of faith lasts for thousands of years, and still exists today. Then modern science developed and suddenly we humans had answers for Job's God. We can measure time, and space! We can predict the weather, protect ourselves from natural disasters. We can treat disease and prolong life. We can protect animals, plants, the earth itself, or drive it all to extinction. We can travel through space and split atoms. There is no God! Science can explain it all. "God is dead" declared a mid-twentieth century philosopher. So, what are we doing here today? Looking for gaps?

We are relatively well-educated people. We took science in school. Most of us also went to church as children. Perhaps we have put our beliefs and theories into boxes, separated them in our minds. This is the part of me that thinks about science and uses it in my everyday life. We trust medicine and gravity. We ride in cars and planes and elevators and are grateful for those who make those things work. We admire those who *understand* how they work. We have another box, called faith. We open it when we talk about religion or go to church. Maybe we have a practice of prayer or meditation. We may believe in miracles, though certainly they don't happen very often, if at all. We try to be better, do better; we argue about what that means and how best to do it. Science and faith ask different questions. Faith and science give different answers. But they rarely talk to each other. Two boxes. Separate.

The apostle Paul, who never met Jesus before his crucifixion or afterwards, testifies today about his belief in Jesus Christ; which he calls good news. He proclaims that Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day. And then Christ appeared – to the other disciples, then to many more. And last of all to Paul. In one sentence, the clash of science and faith.

Can a person be raised from the dead? Science says no. Faith says yes. Can a metaphor change lives? How could Paul have seen Jesus in the same way as the disciples but years afterwards? Can we see the risen Christ? If we did would we believe? Would it change our life? Paul, who had been stoning the followers of Jesus because he thought they were corrupting the Jewish faith, becomes the evangelist to spread the teachings of Jesus. A tiny Jewish sect becomes a world religion. How can the change and movement of human hearts be explained?

Today we are standing by a lake, so many people have gathered to hear Jesus he has to get into a boat and use the natural acoustics of water to project his voice to the crowd. He had taken use of Simon's boat so he does him a favor. "Put your nets out." Like Job, Simon doubts, "We tried that all night, it was useless, but if you say so..." They catch so many fish their nets begin to break, the boats sink with abundance. Simon, now referred to as Simon Peter, as his life is changing from old to new, kneels before Jesus, humbling himself, calling himself a sinner for his doubts. Jesus doesn't call him a sinner, doesn't judge him, doesn't scold.

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." And just after making a catch which surely would have cemented his reputation as a fishman, Peter leaves everything and follows Jesus. Do you believe in miracles? Or metaphors? What made Peter leave everything?

David DeSteno, a psychologist, in his recent New York Times opinion piece entitled "What Science Can Learn From Religion," sites religious practices, "technologies," if you will, that science have studied and discovered to be effective. Meditation helps people endure suffering and difficulties. Rituals do change people's views and move people to action. Can religion and science work together?

Consider the stain of blackface on our country. Science can prove to us that genetically there is no such thing as racial groups. The concept of race is literally skin deep. But how does one know that blackface demeans our humanity? What makes an apology real? If and when should we forgive? How do we measure what reparations can be made for centuries of evil? Who can restore the goodness of creation? "Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?"

Science and Faith need to ask each other questions. Faith and science need to be accountable to each other. Like a good marriage, science and faith need to respect each other's differences, work together, argue, agree to disagree, balance each other, love each other. The relationship of faith and science make us fully human. Science gives us the power to explore the depths of the ocean, the expanse of space, and the complexities of the human brain. Faith says, "Do not be afraid." Like Jesus' miracle for Peter, science shows us ourselves. Faith gives us the courage to change.