

At Play with Wisdom
UCC Science and Technology Sunday
Service of Holy Communion
February 7, 2016 |

Psalm 8, Proverbs 8:22-31, Colossians 1:15-20

Contemplative Thoughts

“When I went to the moon I was a pragmatic test pilot. But when I saw the planet Earth floating in the vastness of space the presence of divinity became almost palpable and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident.” - Edgar Mitchell (Apollo 14 Astronaut)

“We go about our daily lives understanding almost nothing of the world. We give little thought to the machinery that generates the sunlight that makes life possible, to the gravity that glues us to an Earth that would otherwise send us spinning off into space, or to the atoms of which we are made and on whose stability we fundamentally depend. Except for children (who don't know enough not to ask the important questions), few of us spend much time wondering why nature is the way it is; where the cosmos came from, or whether it was always here; if time will one day flow backward and effects precede causes; or whether there are ultimate limits to what humans can know.” - Carl Sagan (From an introduction to “A Brief History of Time” by Stephen Hawking)

"Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual...The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both." - Carl Sagan

“From religion comes a man's purpose; from science, his power to achieve it. Sometimes people ask if religion and science are not opposed to one another. They are: in the sense that the thumb and fingers of my hands are opposed to one another. It is an opposition by means of which anything can be grasped.” - William H. Bragg, British physicist, chemist, and mathematician. Awarded Nobel Prize in 1915

“We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many different languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent being toward God. We see a universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws, but only dimly understand those laws. Our limited minds cannot grasp the mysterious force that moves the constellations.” - Albert Einstein, in a 1929 interview, in Denis Brian, Einstein: A Life (NY: J. Wiley, 1996), p. 186

Call to Worship (Inspired by Psalm 8)

- One: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.
- All: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.
- One: Your glory is woven through the fabric of the heavens.
Everywhere we turn, below us, beside us, above us,
all that we experience is evidence of your presence.
Soil, grass, water, sun, moon, and stars,
all of them proof of your work in the universe.
- All: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.
- One: We wonder: why do you care about us?
What are we compared to the galaxies spread across time and space,
or to the amazing worlds of life too small for us to see
or to the great animals of land and sea?
- All: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.
- One: You have called us to be caretakers,
giving us curiosity and wonder that drive us to explore
the entirety of creation
from the microscopic worlds of bacteria and atoms
to the telescopic worlds orbiting stars billions of miles away.
- All: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.
- One: We are called to care for every life here on earth,
and to seek out life that may exist out there in your universe,
all life everywhere a part of your sacred work of creation.
- All: Wonderful God! Awesome God!
How majestic is your name in all the universe.

Prayer of Confession (Inspired by the UCC Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology, 1981 and Proverbs 8)

- One: You, the God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, call us into being.
- All: You have given us the choice between life and death.
- One: Forgive us, God of Creation, for the times we have chosen death over life.
We have caused death to plants and animals as we have abused technology.
We take more than we need of the resources made so abundant in creation.
We have caused death, actively or passively, among our brothers and sisters.
We have chosen to fight for oil and water, for minerals,
and for land we think we need as our hunger for more things grows.
- All: You seek to save us from aimlessness and sin.
- One: Forgive us, God of curiosity and wonder,
for the ways we have wasted our time, our talents, and our treasure.
We have valued entertainment more than knowledge and opinion more than wisdom.

We have taken away the tools of those you called to be explorers of the world.
We have made ourselves slaves to technology
instead of using technology to improve the world for all life.

All: Wisdom calls to us.

One: God of atoms and evolution, you reveal yourself in all that is created.
And yet, we often disregard science, the close study of creation,
because we are afraid of what it will tell us.
We experience the world not as it is but as it appears,
and so we sometimes refuse to believe the truth,
and declare your laws of physics to be nonsense.

Still Speaking God, as our understanding of the world grows,
so does our wonder at your presence in ever-evolving creation,
leading to a way of life abundant on earth.
And yet, our limited understandings sometimes sets limits
on what we believe you can do.
We think, if evolution is true,
how can we who are human bear within us your image?

All: Wisdom is at play in the world.

One: At the same time, God of all time and all space,
We are tempted to make an idol of scientific understanding and modern technology.
Forgive us when we discount ancient wisdom as its own form of understanding
revealing truth that science has not yet discovered.

All: We seek to change our ways.

Help us, Holy One, to evolve and to change
and to seek you wherever you are to be found.
Grant us courage.
Grant us understanding.
Grant us wisdom.
Show us the path
so that we will no longer live aimlessly but with purpose,
called and prepared to give blessing and honor, glory and power unto you.

Words of Assurance

One: Hear these truths:

God creates us in love to be love.
God loves us even in our imperfections.
God forgives us through the life, death, and resurrection
of Jesus Christ, Love Incarnate.
We bear within us the image of God that empowers us
to choose life over death
to act wisely using the gifts given to us,
to live without fear,
to understand truth.

Let us claim that image of God within us,
that we might show God's unchanging love, mercy, and
grace to the world as we have seen and experienced it ourselves.

Thanks be to God, Creator, Wisdom, Spirit!

Sermon Provoker

What if the vision that Lady Wisdom shares in Proverb 8:22-31 is still being cast? How might we, who know that God is still speaking through scientific understanding and exploration, write that vision down today? What does it mean that Lady Wisdom “delights” in playing with humankind? If, as the author of Colossians says, all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, are created “in” or “by” Jesus Christ and Christ is that which holds all things together, can we then understand scientific exploration and experimentation as expressions of faith?

Communion Liturgy using the chorus and part of verse four of “In Chaos and Nothingness” by David Lee, (c) 2012, found at <http://www.servicemusic.org.uk/hymn/creation.htm>.

Invitation

One: We gather this morning at the invitation of our God,
who has been saving us since we first cried out in awe, aware for the first time of God,
who has existed since before time began.
This is the table of all God’s people, young and old and in between,
all gender identities, married and partnered and dating and single,
confident and questioning and confused,
cynical and naive, sated and famished.
There is a place card for you at this table which reads,
“My Beloved Child.”
Come, let us feast in fellowship with Jesus Christ and all the saints.

Thanksgiving

One: God be with you.
All: And also with you.
One: Lift up your hearts.
All: We lift them up to God.
One: Let us give thanks to our God.
All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.
One: It is always right to give thanks and praise to you, our God,
who creates the universe
while Holy Wisdom delights in all that is within it.

Creative Wisdom, we stand in awe of your imagination.
out of which came the laws of physics that define the behavior of all matter.
We laugh with joy to see all that chemistry does for us,
from baking soda and vinegar explosions
to medications that save the lives of our loved ones.
Mountains and valleys, forests and beaches, lakes and oceans
all exist because of the geological processes that shape and form the Earth.
We rejoice in DNA, which unites every living thing on Earth
from the smallest bacteria to the great humpback whales and marks us all as yours.
The vastness of space amazes us.
From the moment you created matter
out of nothing at the beginning of the universe,
you have sought the unity of all things in you.

Through millions and billions of years,
you have loved into existence galaxies, stars, and planets
and perhaps life on those other planets, as well.

And yet you, Holy God, Creator, Wisdom, and Spirit,
have so much love to share that you seek relationship with each one of us.
You care enough to love each of us and to know us by name.
You save us with your love as you saved the Israelites before us.
Through teachers and prophets, you have called us to relationship,
keeping the covenant promises through the ages on Earth.
And so, with your people on Earth and all the company of heaven,
we praise your name and join the unending hymn,

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and Earth are full of your glory! Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

One: Christ, Holy Wisdom, who holds all things together,
from the smallest quantum divisions of matter and energy
to the entire universe,
from each individual human heart, mind, and spirit
to the Church Universal,
is the One in whom and by whom all creation has come to be.
What a marvel it is for us to know that
the One who is before all things
was pleased to dwell in human form
in the person of Jesus of Nazareth,
to reconcile all creation to you, our Creator,
through the power of the cross and the empty tomb.
Jesus taught and preached your love for us,
inviting people to experience your love
in tangible, hopeful ways.

When Jesus gathered with his disciples for the last time,
they told another story of how you, our God, sought to save us,
and then Jesus gave us a new way to remember your salvation.
He broke bread for his disciples and said,
“Take and eat, for this is my body, broken for you.
Do this to remember me and all that I have taught you.”
At the end of the meal, he poured out the last cup of wine, the cup of blessing, for them,
saying, “Take and drink, for this is my blood of God’s new covenant with you
for the forgiveness of sins. Do this to remember me and all that I have taught you.”
We do this today in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
and we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

All: Christ has died. Christ is risen! Christ will come again.

One: Transcendent and immanent, God ever three, ever one:

We praise you and worship you, Father and Spirit and Son.

All: We praise you and worship you, Mother and Spirit and Son.
Invisible God, given visible image, you came,
Breathed order and life:
Jesus Christ, Name above every name.
All honor and glory is yours,
Almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer after Communion

One: Let us pray:

All: Holy God, Creator, Wisdom, Spirit, we have been nourished
in this meal at the table you set for us.
As we go from this place, may our encounter with holiness
inspire us to explore creation in new ways.
May we be unafraid to experience the joy of discovery,
the wonder of unexpected outcomes,
and the peace of knowing that
all creation belongs to you.
Amen.

Hymn Suggestions:

—“In Chaos and Nothingness,” lyrics and tune by David Lee, (C) 2012. For the main page of the hymn, visit <http://www.servicemusic.org.uk/hymn/creation.htm>, from which a .pdf of the hymn set to the tune and commentary on the hymn are both accessible. Mr. Lee is generous with copyright permissions, as outlined on his site.

—“Earth and All Stars” verses 1, 2, 5, and 6 by Herbert Brokering, to the tune “Earth and All Stars” by David Johnson; for a list of hymnals including this hymn, visit http://www.hymnary.org/text/earth_and_all_stars.

—“God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens,” lyrics by Catherine Cameron, tune traditionally “Holy Manna” by William Moore; The New Century Hymnal 556.

A Service with Communion for Faith, Science and Technology Sunday was created by Rev. Ruth E. Shaver, Pastor and Teacher, The United Church of Schellsburg United Church of Christ, Schellsburg, Pennsylvania. Shaver is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry Degree at Lancaster Theological Seminary; her project is designed to encourage people of faith to engage in scientific exploration and experimentation as a practice of faith.

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UCC Faith, Science and Technology Sunday

It is with collaboration and theological imagination that many UCC churches are joining with ecumenical and interfaith partners who celebrate “Evolution Weekend” in the month of February connected to the Clergy Letter Project. The UCC formally designated Faith, Science and

Technology Sunday in February ‘closest to Darwin’s birth date on the 12th that does not conflict with another named Sunday.’ Taking a broad view that celebrates all the sciences, this particular Sunday is designated broadly for all the sciences: including evolutionary biology, and those who study and teach them.

The United Church of Christ’s decades-long advocacy for engaging faith, science and technology inspired a full year of church wide study with the pastoral letter *A New Dawn Arising: Faith Engaging Science* <http://www.ucc.org/not-mutually-exclusive/pdfs/pastoral-letter.pdf> which may be used as a follow up to a science & tech themed worship as an education and formation study piece.

Connections between spirituality, science and technology continue to be sparked by the work of the late UCC physicist, Nobel laureate, and Templeton award winner: Charles Townes. Also by the groundbreaking work of the UCC’s late Ian Barbour, and all those who are passionate about the intersections of science in medicine, technology, ethics, astronomy, geology, climate, to name a few - and the religious imagination.