

“Finding God in the Waves: Einstein’s God”
Romans 11:33-36

Last week I so enjoyed the local production of Godspell from our community youth. It was especially meaningful to have the philosophy prologue which often gets cut from most productions. Godspell is about presenting the message of Jesus into a modern context. The beginning or prologue to the show is about having different Western philosophers and thinkers present their ideas about God: Socrates, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Leonardo Da Vinci, Edward Gibbon, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Buckminster Fuller. Some of them believed in God while others didn’t. These same philosophers as presented in Godspell morph into disciples.

I think that is a brilliant way to tell the story of our faith: Grounding the stories in the historical context of Jesus’ life 2000 years ago, but also connecting them to different thoughts, and ultimately to our world today. If faith is to stay alive, it must continue to evolve and allow new knowledge to inform it. Much like science, faith needs to always be open to new revelations, contexts, and discoveries.

In his book *Do I Stay Christian*, Brian McLaren warns about the danger of the Christian faith getting stuck when we are not open to new knowledge and worldviews. He writes, “Think of it like this: our beliefs are like the tips of icebergs. When we affirm them, we unwittingly also affirm a much larger mass of hidden assumptions that uphold them from beneath the surface. Those unacknowledged assumptions often support an archaic view of the universe that further renders Christianity incapable of evolving into something better.”

One example he gives is that of our understanding of the universe. In biblical times, people understood the world to be divided into physical and spiritual; one being temporal and the other eternal. So all the physical world we have is part of the physical and is always evolving but God’s realm is eternal and is never changing. Therefore, when we think of faith as coming from the eternal realm, it is presented as static and always staying the same.

McLaren writes, “My parents and grandparents lived in the old familiar universe of...temporal/eternal...changing/unchangeable. Just over a hundred years ago, a fellow named Einstein rudely interrupted their dualistic universe. He proposed that energy and matter were less like oil and water (two things that normally don’t mix) and more like water and ice (two manifestations of the same thing). One could, in fact, be turned into the other.”

McLaren asserts that our understanding of the universe is vastly different today where we see everything being interconnected and that the divine is not separate from this world. In fact, God is seen as the primary energy of this universe.

I have a feeling that the new discoveries which will be made through the images from the Webb telescope will also change our understanding of the universe. My hope is that instead of clinging to our old worldviews, we, as Christians, can embrace the new scientific discoveries as further evidence of God's presence in the world and as ways to help our images and experiences of God evolve.

The Apostle Paul found himself at a crossroads moment for his religion and his people. There was conflict and tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul was trying to deal with the root causes of the problems in their midst which would have required their old worldviews be changed. Even though the Apostle Paul had never visited the church in Rome, he felt an obligation to write to them because he heard about the conflict they had among them. Earlier on, the Emperor Claudius expelled most of the Jews out of Rome including the Jews who were followers of Jesus. After his death, the Jews were permitted to return to Rome. The problem arose when the Gentile Christians did not want to share leadership with their Jewish brothers and sisters. They also had disagreements about the types of food they should eat. Many of the Gentile Christians believed that they had replaced the Jewish people in terms of their covenant relationship with God. They thought that the coming of Christ had replaced all the events of the past from Torah to covenant. Jesus, in their view, had replaced the teachings of Moses and the prophets. What was especially sad about this kind of theology was its clear prejudice against the Jews which was so closely aligned with the mentality of the Roman Empire. The Jews were seen as a threat in Rome because they refused to worship the emperor. They also refused the imperial cult mentality that declared the emperor as the son of God and the savior of the world. They saw that all of that kind of theology was a justification for the Roman systems of dominations and oppression. The Roman emperors had promoted an imperial theology that proclaimed divine approval and affirmation of their social and political structures. That is why Paul was reminding the followers of Jesus in Rome that their ultimate allegiance should be to God's love in the world and not to any political or taxation system. The people of the church in Rome needed to change their mindsets and goals from those of the popular culture around them. They also needed to be reminded that faith evolves and changes. The ways of exclusion and "us" vs. "them" attitudes were being transformed and people needed to open their hearts to a new way. Paul even tackled a very tough issue, namely, the redemption of the Jews who refused the way of Jesus. He called on the followers of Jesus to trust in God's redemption even when it contradicted what they had previously thought and believed. Let's listen to Romans 11:33-36:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ 'For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counsellor?'

³⁵ 'Or who has given a gift to him,
to receive a gift in return?'

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.
Amen.

Here is Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of these verses:

Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out.

Is there anyone around who can explain God?

Anyone smart enough to tell God what to do?

Anyone who has done God such a huge favor

that God has to ask God's advice?

Everything comes from God;

Everything happens through God;

Everything ends up in God.

Always glory! Always praise!

Yes. Yes. Yes.

What a powerful reminder for us that faith is about trusting God to guide us beyond where we are today to become more loving. Staying open to new revelations and wisdom is essential for our journey of faith to continue to grow in our love. Our world is always in need of God's higher wisdom. God is speaking to us today through the incredible discoveries in science about the origins and patterns of the universe. Are we willing to grow with it? Are we willing to let go of the old patterns and the dualistic language that goes with it? McLaren poses these questions this way, "In light of this new universe—the conceptual universe of process and evolution that more and more of our descendants will be born into—what can Christianity—and we Christians—become?" This kind of faith is what is needed for our moment in time right now. We are invited to be inspired by the words of Paul and to follow in the footsteps of our ancestor in faith by learning to stay open and allowing God's mystery to continue to help us grow and trust. By staying open we allow God to speak to our current experiences and levels of knowledge. Science and its new discoveries can become doorways to greater connection to God's world. The Apostle Paul gives us permission and encouragement to continue to evolve by recognizing that our knowledge is always limited and yet our relationship with God is always evolving.

Let's take a few moments to reflect on this together. What connected with you today? How do you see this shift from being stuck in an old worldview to an openness to new faith adventures and revelations helpful for our world today?

McLaren writes, "The world needs religions that teach us to love our neighbor as ourselves, remembering that our neighbor includes the refugee, the sick, the poor, the outsider, the outcast, the other, and even the enemy... The world needs religions that value love and interdependence, not money and competition. The world needs religions that are anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, gender-equal, and characterized by compassion and wisdom rather than greed, arrogance, and dogmatism."

May we have the wisdom, the courage, and openness of heart and mind to embrace God's new revelations of love in our world today! Amen.