

What's With Evolution Sunday? Genesis 1:1-5

Everybody loves dinosaurs, especially young kids. From Barney the purple T-Rex to Little Foot and his friends, dinosaurs tickle their fancy. Discovery Channel, PBS, the History Channel, all air programs that tell dinosaur stories. Then there is the Jurassic Park franchise, which was a mega-hit.

I remember my visit to Dinosaur National Monument when I was about seven. I can still remember the great wall of fossils being excavated. Brett loved the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas. It didn't have a T-Rex, but it did have a big reptilian-like fish that swam the sea covering Kansas millions of years ago. With so much interest in prehistoric life, it seems odd that nearly half of Americans reject the science that explains the very things that fascinate us. For many people, science is either the enemy of faith or it is redefined in a way that fits a so-called biblical time-line.

Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species, appeared a century-and-a-half ago, offering natural selection as the theory to explain how things came to be. Theories of evolution have been around for centuries, but Darwin's theory revolutionized the study of human origins and development. He helped explain why there is so much diversity in earth's flora and fauna, and we're still discovering new species deep within jungles, caves and oceans.

Now, not everyone liked Darwin's solution, mainly because it seemed to conflict with the Bible. The choice was simple, Darwin or God. Of course, this wasn't the first time that science and the Bible had come into conflict. St. Augustine turned to allegory to explain Genesis because it seemed to conflict with the science of his day. Galileo's telescope proved controversial, because his discoveries seemed to contradict the Bible. Despite the objections of some Christians, many other Christians have found ways of "adapting" to Darwin.

1. So, What's Evolution Sunday?

You won't find Evolution Sunday in the church's annual planning guide, but with the ongoing debate about intelligent design, creationism, and evolution, it seemed like an appropriate topic to consider. While it's not an official religious event, more than 400

congregations from around the country are observing it, and we're one of them. Evolution Sunday is an expression of the Clergy Letter Project started by a biology professor from Wisconsin. After becoming involved in this debate, he decided to work on building a bridge between science and Christians. More than 10,000 clergy from across the country have signed his "Open Letter on Religion and Science," and I'm one of them. You will find a copy of this letter in your bulletin today and there is more information on the web.

We're observing this event today because I'm concerned about the growing debate over science and religion. The divide between the two communities is widening every day, and we live at a time when we need science to help solve a whole host of questions and problems. We also need the moral and ethical input of faith to help guide our use of new technology. As this debate grows louder, fewer young people are entering the sciences. I think there is a correlation between the growing rejection of evolution and these trends. There is another problem. By rejecting mainstream science, many Christians have made Christianity seem unreasonable and anti-intellectual. That's too bad, because it puts an unnecessary barrier to the hearing of the gospel.

2. What Does Science Say?

I'm not a scientist, but I do read and I'm the curious sort, so I've looked into the issue. I may not understand all the details, but I get the gist of it. Science says that the universe is very old. Some say it started with a bang and others say it's always been there, only it's changed a bit over time. When it comes to humans, science says that we developed over millions of years from a very primitive ancestor. Some people don't like this. I guess they don't like having an ape in the family tree, plus it seems to conflict with Genesis.

The problem is, there is overwhelming evidence to support evolution's claims. There have been many challenges to aspects of the theory, but none have replaced it. The piece of evidence that I find most convincing is one that affects our daily lives. Evolution lets medical researchers use animals, like mice and chimps to test medicines that save human lives. These tests wouldn't work if we didn't all share some common DNA. Darwin didn't know about DNA, but it supports his theory. So, if you like modern medicine, you've got to like evolution.

3. What Does the Bible Say?

How do we reconcile the facts of science with our faith and our reading of Scripture? Do we have to choose between God and science? Genesis says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and it uses a six-day pattern to describe the creative acts. Finally, on the seventh day God rested. There is a constant refrain in Genesis 1 that seems important. That refrain is: "It is good." This passage suggests that human beings are created in the image of God, but what does this mean? Does it mean that we look like God? Does it mean that we share God's intellect? Or does it mean that we serve as God's icons or representatives in creation? These are good questions.

Then there is the question of how we read we read Genesis 1-2. Must we read Genesis as a scientifically and historically accurate narrative to be true to its intent? Or, should we read these creation stories as a theological statement? When I read the opening chapters of Genesis, I don't find answers to scientific questions. That's because the writers and the recipients weren't asking scientific questions. What Genesis does is challenge another creation story, the Babylonian one. In that story God isn't the creator, the creation is God. In fact, in this story, the sun, the moon, the earth, and the sea are different gods, and these gods aren't necessarily good. While the Babylonian story instills fear, Genesis calls for praise and adoration.

So, here we are on Evolution Sunday. We have a choice, we can build a wall between faith and science, or we can build a bridge. I think building a bridge would be more productive, because it will lead us to giving praise to God. I know I've raised a sticky issue, so I'd like to invite you to join the bible study Tuesday evening. For at least the next two sessions, we will explore this topic. In the mean time, let us rejoice because the "heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19;1).