

God of grace and glory, you create and sustain the universe in majesty and beauty: We thank you for all whom you have planted the desire to know your creation and to explore your work and wisdom. Lead us, like them, to understand better the wonder and mystery of creation; through Christ your eternal Word, through whom all things were made. *Amen.*

This week after the tragic death of Philip Seymour Hoffman and the reminder that our family and friends who deal with addiction live with a constant battle to stay sober, through the days of snow, and the excitement of the opening of the Olympics in Sochi, there was a debate Tuesday night. Anyone watch it?

The debate was billed as Creationism vs Evolution between scientist Bill Nye and creationist Ken Ham. I will admit I never heard of Ken Ham, so I googled him. He is a young-Earth creationist who advocates a literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis and believes the Earth is only 6,000 years old. He is the founder of the Creation Museum in Kentucky. I know Bill Nye. My kids watched his videos, "Bill Nye the Science Guy." He made science fun for them and me.

I did not see the debate live. I have watched only a small piece of it. What I watched, I found tedious and boring and unconvincing. I have no problem reconciling my faith with science. In fact, I have more problems with those who try to use a literal understanding of the bible to explain everything. I believe in theistic evolution, the idea that our religious teachings about God (in the Episcopal Church) are compatible with modern scientific understanding about biological evolution. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-jones/creationism-vs-scientism-_b_4725340.html and <https://www.facebook.com/episcopalscience> and * <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/cultivare/2014/02/the-battle-rages-can-we-move-beyond-the-conflict-model/>)

For me, there is no conflict. If polls are correct, 66% of the nation believes in Evolution while 33% believe in Creationism. What bothered me about the debate, wasn't so much the content, each offered his beliefs on creation. But what struck me most, was how open to change and development Bill Nye's ideas were and how closed were Ken Ham's ideas, who said at one point there was nothing going to ever change his mind about his understanding of creation.

As faithful Christians who follow Jesus on the way, our hearts and minds should always be open to new understandings. We should not be a closed book.

One science commentator following the debate said, "'I don't know' is an acceptable answer in science. It leads to asking more questions, which leads to more exploration, which leads to more understanding..." (http://www.slate.com/blogs/bad_astronomy/2014/02/06/religion_and_science_answering_creationists_questions.html)

I am struck by the willingness to ask questions, to explore, to say, I don't know. That is what we should be doing as Christians too. I have a poster that hangs in my office: "He died to take away your sins, not your mind." By the grace of God we are saved in Jesus Christ. God does not expect us to stop our thinking, our growing, or our questions, because those are important parts of our faith!

So what does Jesus expect?

Jesus said in today's Gospel reading, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Jesus expects us to live our lives, to be ourselves (the salt that is already inside us), to let our light shine in the darkness, so that the good works we do, can be seen, not for our praise, but praise to God, for the kingdom of heaven hinges not on our pedigrees or our beliefs, but on righteousness.

Think of what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God...But we have the mind of Christ.”

It is the Holy Spirit that guides us into belief, into knowing God, to have the mind of Christ. The meaning of life for us is what the Spirit helps us find in our life and our world through God.

As another commentator put it, “Science is more about seeking answers, while faith is about asking questions. Science dwells in the "how" while faith explores the "why." We accept the likelihood that much we think we understand about the world, the universe and about our faith can (and should) change as we learn new things. We understand that faith is more about questions than answers, and that the prime mover in our faith practice is to be more like Jesus in our own daily walk, rather than focusing so much on making others more like us.” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/ken-ham-bill-nye-debate_b_4731944.html)

Which leads me back to what God is asking of us! The prophet Isaiah, our first reading, God was upset with what the chosen people were doing, whose lives were too closed to others and to God...

“Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God... Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.”

Those words also hit close to home for us, of serving our own interests, of quarreling, of no love toward others and not understanding what God has and continues to ask of us.

(Isaiah) “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...”

Sure sounds like Jesus telling us to be the light of the world...

(Isaiah) “If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness...you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”

Our faith in Jesus as we follow his way calls us through our homes & out into the streets, to be the repairer of the breaches in our own lives & the world, through forgiveness, love, and hope. It is time for us “to move beyond the “conflict model” with science and to figure out how to relate our faith in an integrative & imaginative way with science.”* Science is not our enemy but a useful tool for us on our journey in understanding how things work, not the why we do it, or the meaning behind it.

In the words of a science commentator, “Meaning in life is what you make of it. For me that’s love, beauty, art, science, and learning.” Which is a fine list, but as faithful Christians, our meaning must go beyond that, to fulfill what Jesus asks of us, to Love our God, to Love all our neighbors (as ourselves) and to serve the world. Let us be that salt, that light, that righteousness, through our love, today. Amen.