

Where is God?

Genesis 1: 1-20

Psalm 19

September 27, 2009

United Memorial Church

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

As I wrote my sermon, it went into a slightly different direction than I had planned... we have been celebrating creation over these past few weeks and today we are celebrating the sky, and I promise, I will bring my sermon around to that even if it doesn't seem like that initially.

I told you a couple of weeks ago on the first Sunday that we celebrated creation that I didn't believe that the world and everything in it was created in six days.

And I see no clash between religion and science; in fact for centuries, there was so separation between them, and I think they are complementary disciplines.

As I once read, science asks what happens, religion asks why it happens.

But all that aside, I am sometimes struck at how some of the ancient people who wrote the earliest book in the Bible describes so closely what we now know as scientific reality.

Take our reading from Genesis... and yes, we have been hearing part of that reading over the past three weeks.

Listen to these words again from verses 6 -10

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

8 God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

These ancient writers, without benefit of fancy scientific instruments, wrote of the dry land appearing out of all the waters.

We now know that the earth was once a single mass of land and that slowly the continents drifted apart to their current places.

And we also know that they are still moving.

Our scriptures also speak of God separating the waters above from the waters below... and we now know that earth's atmosphere holds water.

However, their scientific knowledge breaks down when they write about the sky being a dome.

They believed in a three tiered world and they had no concept of the earth being round.

For the ancient writers of Genesis, there were the waters below, then the earth, then the dome of the sky and perhaps because the sky was so mysterious, they believed that that was where God lived.

Even now, when asked where heaven is, most people would refer to 'up.'

Many of our hymns refer to God being 'up' in heaven?

Is that still a valid premise?

What is up anyway, when earth is round and what is up to someone on one side of the world is down on another.

We have sent space ships into the vast atmosphere, and nowhere to my knowledge have they come back with images of God and heavenly angels, or streets of gold and so on.

And some would conclude that from this evidence that there is no God.

But... is that so?

Obviously there are still billions and billions of people who believe there is a God, otherwise why would people continue to gather each week to hear ancient stories, to sing and to pray and be renewed in the spirit.

And so many of us have had experiences of the sacred that can't be explained by anything other than the presence of God.

But if God is not 'up' in heaven, where does God live?

I remember a number of years ago watching a Star Trek Voyager show.

This was one of the spin-offs of the original show from the 60s.

'There continuing mission was to seek out new life and new civilization, to boldly go where no one has gone before.'

Of course, like all good movies, especially science fiction, there is some sort of problem, and rather than their 1 year mission, they are thrown off course, and are not sure when or if they will be able to get back home.

One of the characters in the show is a Native American.

His father had died the year before and on the anniversary of his death, he needs to perform some ritual at his grave.

Well, it become evident that they are not going to be back on earth to do this so he takes the things he needs for the ritual and gets into a shuttle craft and goes off on his own to do the ritual.

Picture this, they are millions, perhaps billions of miles away from earth, in another galaxy and he brings the shuttle craft to a stop and lays out the things he needs.

His first words are, “O Great Spirit...” as he begins his prayer.

My immediate, unconscious reaction is “God can’t hear you, you are too far away.”

Well, let me tell you, that thought surprised me...

And had me wondering, is there anywhere that we can go, that is too far away, where God can no longer reach us?

It is written in Psalm 139:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

I no longer believe that God is ‘up in heaven.’

I believe that God is in all things... and that God is in the sun and the moon and the swirling stars and the very air we breathe.

I even still believe in heaven... I just haven’t a clue what it might be.

I do believe that in some fashion, we will be reunited with those whom we love... but I don’t know how.

That perhaps is a topic for another sermon,

But do you know what is up in the heavens?

Junk and debris from space flights.

A 1999 study estimated there are some 4 million pounds of space junk in low-Earth orbit, just one part of a celestial sea of roughly 110,000 objects larger than 1 centimeter -- each big enough to damage a satellite or space-based telescope.

[/www.space.com/spacewatch/space_junk.html](http://www.space.com/spacewatch/space_junk.html)

We have made the heavens a dumping ground.

And I confess that I am not sure of the effect of these on the air we breathe, but since we know that everything connects with everything else, it must have some effect.

The air we breathe is the life giving force that God breathed into the first humans.

Without this precise mixture of oxygen and nitrogen and carbon dioxide and a whole host of other trace elements is essential to life... human life, animal life, plant life... would simply not exist.

The composition of our air makes life possible.

And yet, we have treated it as a garbage pit... we emit far too many greenhouse gases; we burn things that wind up falling back to earth and poison us and the earth, we

We can't get away from the effects of what we do.

Admittedly, there have been huge improvements in the way we do some things.

Emissions on cars are way down from what they were 30 years ago, however, because there are so many more cars, the total has still increased.

We are far more conscious of environmental impacts and there is an increasingly vocal and strong voice for climate change.

On October 24th, in thousands of places around the world, people will engage in an International Day of Climate Action. This campaign, initiated by "350.org", calls for reducing Greenhouse Gas in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million.

There is a community, family-friendly get-together on Saturday, October 24th on the Halifax Common at 2.

There will be a collective action to show our support for strong government leadership and action on climate change.

We are called to sign a petition indicating our support for reducing greenhouse gasses.

Petitions will be taken en masse to Parliament to indicate the concerns of Canadians.

During the week of October 17 – 23: We invite you to visit your MP asking for his/her support for the Climate Change Bill C311 which comes up for 3rd reading this Fall, and asking for him/her to sign the Kyotoplus pledge for politicians. (email from Maritime Conference Office)

These are a few of the way in which we can protect this wonderful planet of ours... a planet that is dependent on the air that surrounds it.

Where is God?

God is in the sky... in the heavens...

God is in each growing thing...

God is in the very air we breathe.

Thanks be to God. Amen.