

*Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet*

## **“Galileo and the Bible”**

Based upon a sermon series by the Rev. Adam Hamilton  
January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at First United Methodist Church – Durango

Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:19-20

- 1     *The heavens proclaim the glory of God.  
      The skies display his craftsmanship.*
- 2     *Day after day they continue to speak;  
      night after night they make him known.*
- 3     *They speak without a sound or word;  
      their voice is never heard.*
- 4     *Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,  
      and their words to all the world.  
      God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.*
- 5     *It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.  
      It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.*
- 6     *The sun rises at one end of the heavens  
      and follows its course to the other end.  
      Nothing can hide from its heat.*

*19 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

### **SLIDE     Galileo and the Bible**

Please take out of your bulletin your sermon notes and your study guide. The sermon notes are a chance for you to follow along and write down things you might like to remember from today's message. On the backside is a study guide with Scriptures and questions that you might reflect upon each day. It only takes about five minutes a day but I think you'll find these passages tieback in today's message and they will speak to you throughout the week.

We begin a series of sermons today on science and religion. Religion asks the question, "Is all there is what we see and feel and touch, or does all that point us towards something greater still?"

What do you see when you look at the stars in the sky? What do you see when you see the ice formed on the trees? What do you see in the snowcapped mountains around us?

Do you simply see the physical processes or do you see something more than that? What do you see when you hold a baby in your arms? What do you see when you say goodbye to a loved one at the grave?

Is it just what we see and feel and touch, or is there something more?

Over the next six weeks we will be exploring the relationship between science and religion—how we as Christians and people of faith might look at the great discoveries in science and might integrate them into our faith and help us understand more who we are and who God calls us to be—and who the God is who created the cosmos by understanding the discoveries and theories in science.

Likewise, we are going to be looking at how our faith helps inform what we understand about the sciences. What is the nature of ultimate reality? What is really out there? Is there something more beyond what we can experience with our senses? There is something that we have to say about that as people of faith.

Over the next few weeks we will explore physics and biology and genetics. We will be talking about medicine and psychology. We will be looking at the brave new world in which we live in which there are interesting and perplexing new problems with what we do with technology and how we apply discoveries.

We will be exploring all of these things as we, in the words of that great television show *Star Trek*, seek to go as a church boldly where few churches have gone before. That will be our aim in the next few weeks.

### **SLIDE      Star Trek**

We must begin by acknowledging there is somewhat of a tension between science and religion.

### **SLIDE      Tensions in Science and Religion**

We experience this in our popular culture and many of you who work in the sciences have experienced this as well. This is tragic because it did not used to be that way. For the first 1500 years of the Christian faith science and religion were seen as partners in a quest for knowledge. Science had its role to play in helping us to understand the cosmos and

ultimately understand God. Religion had its role which encompassed science but moved far beyond that.

Most of the great scientific discoveries that were made in the West were made by church people—those who believed in God and they did not see a conflict between science and religion. Instead, they saw science as a way of working out their religion and working out their faith and working out their salvation in pursuing God.

There came a time when science and religion began to move in opposite directions. For the last 500 years we have experienced something of this.

One of the incidents that is often pointed to as typical of the divide that began to form between science and religion, maybe even one of the tipping points of the tension, is what is known as the, "Galileo Affair."

### **SLIDE      Galileo and the Church**

Galileo was one of the greatest scientists, astronomers, inventors, philosophers in the history of the world. He was an amazing man and a church man. He believed in God. He was friends with the Pope and with Cardinals. He was very involved in his faith and his church.

He also loved to study the cosmos and to understand how things worked. As he looked at the earth and the sun and the stars, he began to think that perhaps the dominant worldview of his day about how things operate in our solar system was not accurate.

The dominant view at the time was that the earth stands still and was at the center of the universe, and the sun moves around the Earth and so did all the other stars. That was plain for everyone to see and anyone could stand on earth and realize that we are not moving. The earth is standing still. They could look up at the stars and see the sun move across the sky during the daytime. They could see the constellations move across the sky at night. And so the entire universe must of course revolve around planet Earth.

But Galileo with his telescope began to suspect that it was not so. He read the writings of Copernicus who died 20 years before Galileo was born and he began to think, "Perhaps there is something to this?" He began to explore this and hypothesize about a new way of looking at the earth and the sun and the moon and the stars. He began to test his theories and

publish them for the first time in 1615.

When he did there were many people who were most unsettled by this new theory of his. Not just Christians were unsettled but even atheists who believed that the world was stationary and everything else revolved around it. Many people were unhappy with what they thought was the foolishness of Galileo.

The church was also displeased. Christians were displeased because Galileo's theory not only seemed to fly in the face of common sense and accepted worldviews but of Scripture. There were places in the Scripture like the Psalm we just read a moment ago which speak about the sun moving across the sky. If Galileo was correct then the Scriptures must be wrong and this certainly could not be.

So the church brought Galileo before a council and said to him, "You are not to teach this anymore. This is dangerous and you could mislead people. You are not to suggest these things anymore. You're not to lecture on them or write on them anymore."

At first, Galileo agreed not to do this. But once you have a sense that the truth is not being recognized then it is hard to set that aside as a scientist. So Galileo continued to explore and do research. Then he began to write again but this time in the third person, suggesting that other people had these ideas but they were not necessarily his. After a time he could not keep quiet about them anymore.

1633 is the date that Galileo was brought before the grand Inquisition of the church. This was the sentence that was pronounced upon him on June 22 of that year as he stood before the Cardinals.

**SLIDE**      **"We say, pronounce, sentence and declare, that thou, the said Galileo, by the things deduced during this trial, and by thee confessed as above, hast rendered thyself vehemently suspected of heresy by this holy office. That is of having believed and held a doctrine which is false and contrary to the Holy Scriptures, to wit the sun is the center of the universe that does not move from east to west and that the earth moves and is not the center of the universe, and that an opinion may be held and defended as probable after having been declared and defined as contrary to Holy Scripture. And in consequence thou hast incurred all the censures and penalties of the sacred canons and of the decrees both general and particular against**

## **such offenders imposed and promulgated."**

The Inquisition did go on to show some degree of mercy to Galileo. They said that if Galileo was willing to repent of his heresy and admit that he was wrong and if he promised not to speak of these things or publish them again, then they would show mercy and he would only be confined to house arrest for the remainder of his life. Galileo was almost 70 years old at this point and being confined to house arrest would be in an estate overlooking Florence, Italy. It was not an awful place to live but he would be confined and not be allowed to speak of these things.

One of his penalties was to pray the seven penitential Psalms every week as an act of penance, repenting of the crime he had committed by suggesting that the earth moves.

Galileo was a smart man and so he got his knees and he admitted and spoke the words that he was wrong. He repented of the things he had said and admitted to the error of his ways. He agreed that he would not preach or teach or write about these things again.

It is thought that his hands were crossed behind his back and that his fingers were crossed as well. It has been suggested that after he said these things he muttered under his breath, "But it still moves."

We don't know for sure what he said at that moment but certainly we know that he did not stop thinking that the earth moved around the sun just because the church demanded that he do so.

This was not one of the church's finest hours. It has been pointed to ever since as the beginning of the conflict between science and religion—that what religion wants to do is limit science to what we find in the Bible and it least limit science to truths that are not in contradiction with the Scriptures.

For scientists this is unacceptable. They are looking for truth wherever it is, trying to explain how the universe operates. And so we have had this great divide that continues to grow even today.

I believe the great mistake of the Inquisition with Galileo was not the fact that the church believed that the sun was moving around the planet Earth. The mistake was not belief that the earth was the center of the universe. Almost everyone from the beginning of human history believed this up to the time of Galileo. While it was incorrect, this was not the big

mistake of the Inquisition however.

The big mistake of the Inquisition was a misunderstanding of what the Bible is meant to be—then based on that belief saying that science must be limited by the Scriptures. It was a gross misunderstanding of what the Holy Scriptures is meant to be. Let's talk about what the Bible is meant to be for a few moments.

## **SLIDE      What is the Bible meant to be?**

We will talk about this several times during this series of sermons.

For some the Bible is absolute truth in everything that it speaks about. When the Bible makes passing reference to the fact that the sun moves throughout the sky then the Bible must be correct because it is the Word of God. It cannot tell a lie. This is an interesting way of looking at the Scripture and that is certainly how the church looked at it in Galileo's day, and how segments of the Christian Church still look at it today.

We look at this book and we say it is the inspired word of God. We look at this as Christians and we say that God is the primary subject matter of this book, and that God is also the one who whispered to the writers of Holy Scripture throughout the course of 1200 years. God was inspiring these words.

But here is where we differ from our friends who were leading the Inquisition and even some of our other Christian friends today. When we look at the Bible we understand that God's primary objective with the Scriptures is not to teach science. It is not to correct the misunderstandings of science in times past.

People have had certain worldviews about how things must've come into existence at different times in our history. God could've said, "What I really want to do is make sure they get the science right. That is most important to me."

But I think God enjoys allowing us to discover and unveil the scientific truths of how the universe operates over a series of hundreds of years. God knew that someday we would figure out that the earth moves around the sun and not the other way around. It was not so important to God to correct our cosmology when the Scriptures were written.

What God wanted to correct was our theology. God wanted to make sure that people understood who he is, his nature and his character. And

to understand who we are as human beings. God wanted to correct our morality and our understanding of our humanity—our understanding of who God is and ultimate reality. This is what the Scriptures are meant to address. It is meant to teach us these truths which are the big truths and the most important truths of all.

God allowed for the people of Scripture to understand the world in the way in which it was understood in their day and time. Over time we are able to go back and look and say, "Ah, now we see it slightly differently and we understand things better."

You know that 50 years from now the people who live in that time we'll look back on us and say, "How did you ever believe that back in 2007?" But we couldn't help ourselves. It is just the world in which we live and we are limited by our discoveries.

So it was for the writers of Scripture and God was not concerned to correct those errors. God was most concerned that we understand the important truths of theology, of who we are as human beings, and of truth itself. This is how we look at the sacred writings.

I do believe that if science was the most important thing to God to explain to us, and God did not want to allow us to figure out things on our own, God could've included multiple books in the Bible about science. There could be an entire book on physics. There could be another one on astronomy and one on biology and another one on chemistry. But God did not give us those books in the Bible. Instead God focused on a different kind of truth, the ultimate truths.

I believe this was the mistake of the Inquisition and a mistake we have often repeated in the last 400 years of church history. Again and again we have pushed away thinking people many times, by helping them see that religion and science are incompatible.

That is not how it is meant to be. That is what we hope to talk about in this series of sermons—how religion and science are meant to work together and not be at odds with one another.

## **SLIDE      Sources of Tension Between Science and Religion**

That brings up the tensions then between religion and science and what the sources of this tension might be. We have talked a bit about the source of those tensions for Christians throughout the years in terms of how

we have often looked at the Bible.

**SLIDE Sources of tensions for Christians:**

We get afraid of any theories that might contradict what we see in passing reference in the Scripture relative to science. So as Christians we sometimes create the tensions and contradictions.

But sometimes the tensions are created by scientists.

**SLIDE Sources of tensions for Scientists:**

Science is focused on the domain of how things operate. Science tries to tell us about the physical processes and how things work in our world and how our universe operates. That is very important information for us to have.

But sometimes a scientist begins to think that because he knows a certain physical law or truth that he or she really knows what ultimate truth and ultimate reality is. He or she begins to believe that they can cast judgment on where the universe came from before we can even begin to imagine it or before the Big Bang.

Sometimes a scientist can fall into the trap of saying, "Now here are all the laws of science but they really came from nowhere. There is nothing behind them and all your experiences of God, well we can explain them some other way."

On occasion there are scientists who in their hubris begin to do what we find throughout the Scriptures. They begin to say, "You know this is it. This is all there is what you can see and feel and touch. You people who believe in something more are just foolish and you're all wet."

They create and add to the tension between science and religion. This is a story that has been repeated throughout the Scriptures. You go to the very beginning of the Bible and the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and you find this. The serpent comes to the woman and says, "You know that tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The fruit is really delicious. Why don't you eat from it? When you eat from it you won't have the need for God anymore?"

Then there is the story of the Tower of Babel that the people began to construct in what is modern-day Iraq. They thought if they could build a skyscraper and a temple up into the heavens then, "I can be like the gods. I can reside in the heavens and I will have no more need for the gods or



God anymore."

Today I fear that some of our scientists—granted a small minority—are building their own towers of Babel. They dismiss a much broader and wider truth and they leave us impoverished for it.

So I think the tensions come from both sides and are not limited to just those in the area of religion and faith or those in the scientific realm.

Each week during the series of sermons we will try to interview a specialist in the field in which we are studying. Next week we will be looking at physics and we will hear some physicists and hopefully an astronomer. When we get to the sermon on the origins of humanity we will talk to an anthropologist and hopefully a molecular biologist. We will talk to doctors and psychologists as we look at the areas of health and the mind.

But today as we begin this sermon series and look at knowledge and how we know things in the areas of science and religion it seems appropriate that we might talk to a philosopher. So this week I went up to Fort Lewis College and interviewed two professors.

First I spent time with Dr. Dugald Owen who has a BA from Stanford and a PhD from the University of California Berkeley in Philosophy. I then spent time with Dr. Sarah Roberts-Cady who has a BA from Linfield College and a PhD from Purdue. They both are very bright and I thoroughly enjoyed our time together. Listen to how they describe science and religion in their different pursuits as different areas of study.

**VIDEO Galileo and the Bible 1**

**SLIDE The Role of Science and Religion.**

The primary focus of science is in understanding the “how” of creation. How do things operate? How do things work? The scientific focus is on the mechanics of creation.

**SLIDE The aim of science: Understanding the “how” of the creation.**

Religion on the other hand focuses not on the “how” of creation but on the deeper questions of “why?” Our interest is in questions like, "Why is their universe anyway? Why is there life on this planet? Why do we act in this way? Why are the laws of science written in this way? Why?"

**SLIDE The aim of religion: Understanding the “why” of the**

## **creation.**

We also are interested in the meaning of creation. "What about our soul? What is the purpose of our soul and what is the purpose of life?"

Science and religion are both very important types of knowledge and certainly theology and religion can look at the sciences and say, "We need your information to help us understand the questions we're asking." But there are broader and deeper ways of understanding the physical realm that go beyond what we can empirically see and that is what we are interested in when we look at religion.

You know that there is more to life than what we simply can explain with scientific formulas in mathematics.

Take this piano for instance.

### **SLIDE      Piano**

This is a magnificent instrument. The scientists can explain to us the molecular makeup of this piano. The scientist can explain the atomic structure of this piano and every part of it. The mechanical scientists can tell us how if I press this key it will strike a hammer which strikes certain strings in the piano which creates a vibration and a sound wave which will move throughout this room. When you strike those keys then noise is produced and the sound wave travels very quickly across this room and it finally arrives at your ears.

Now we are not done explaining music because the neuroscientist would continue to help us understand that the sound waves entered the outer ear and travel to the ear canal to the eardrum. The eardrum vibrates from the incoming sound wave and transmits these vibrations through three tiny bones-the malleus, the incus, and the stapes.

### **SLIDE      Ear Bones**

These are the bones of the middle ear. These tiny bones amplify the sound and send it to the inner ear and into the fluid filled organ called the cochlea. Here the vibrations create ripples in the fluid that bend projections from tiny hair cells in the cochlea causing electrical impulses that the auditory nerve, or eighth cranial nerve, sends to the brain.

The brain then translates these impulses into what we experience as sound and that is the explanation for music.

What you think? Does that really explain music? Does it really explain this?

**SLIDE Piano.**

How much poorer we would be if all we had were the scientific explanations for everything that happens? You see you were created with the capacity to create music. You were created with the capacity to hear it and to allow it to soothe your soul and to speak to you and to take you to heights that you would not go otherwise.

There is far more to what we need to know in this world than scientific formulas which explain how sound waves register in the brain. That is what we are interested in when we talk about the big questions and the ultimate questions in terms of religion and science.

I asked both Dr. Owen and Dr. Roberts-Cady if somehow science eliminates the need for religion and if they contradict each other and this is what they said.

**SLIDE Bible and Galileo 2.**

**SLIDE Where Do Science and Religion Meet?**

When it comes to knowing truth, the whole realm of knowledge, there is a term that philosophers use called, "epistemology." This is the study of how we know things.

There are a variety of ways that we know things about ultimate reality and about what is really true. You know of course that you can't just trust your senses. There are times that your senses mislead you. We have learned that from the area of quantum physics—that there is a whole lot out there that is in a miniscule scale that you can even find them yet. When you look at the Galileo incident and he realized that as you stand on the earth you see the sun moving but that is not how it is happening at all.

Certainly the observation of the physical world is one way that we know things. But there is more than that.

Throughout Christian history we have talked about two books by which we explore knowledge—two books by which we know things.

**SLIDE Christian Theology's Two Books:**

The first book is the creation. It is what we can see and feel in touch. Christians have always embraced this idea which we find in Psalm 19 that

we read from this morning.

**SLIDE     Earth.**

We study the creation to understand the Creator. We study the world as it is to understand the reality of what we experience with our senses. So we believe in the scientific method. We believe in throwing out hypotheses and then testing them to see if they are true, and if they are not then coming up with a new hypothesis.

We believe that when we look at God's handiwork it can explain to us or help us see something about the nature of ultimate reality—about what the universe and even beyond the universe is like. We can see those things from studying the creation. That is the first book that we study.

This is part of what the psalmist said in the Scripture we read today. ***"When I consider the stars in the heavens, I see her Majesty all over."***

The apostle Paul also said this in Romans 1:20.

**SLIDE     20 *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.***

The early Christians believed that not only could we understand God, but we can understand something of the nature of ultimate reality by studying the physical universe. This is very, very important for us to do.

But that is only a tiny fraction of all knowledge that is out there. That is only a tiny portion of reality—what we can test and look at under a microscope, or we can hypothesize about using the scientific method.

Christians believe there is more to knowledge and God is the source of that knowledge. God understands the mystery of the cosmos because God created it all. Christians believe that if you look at all the scientific discoveries you will see that they point to an order in creation. If you examine your self and what you were like and how you reason it will point to something beyond yourself.

When you consider all the big questions of life, they all cry out for a Creator and Christians believe indeed there is One who created all things. This Creator is known not only through the creation but has revealed himself to us in special ways.

This is the second book that Christians talk about when it comes to knowledge. The first book is the creation and the second book is God's special revelation. God has revealed himself to us directly and in special ways.

The first of those special revelations are God's personal interactions with us.

**SLIDE      God is revealed through personal interactions with us.**

God interacts with us if we are willing and we are open to connecting with God and to be in a relationship with God, then we can experience God's presence. We can sense God's truth with our mind and with our reason. We are able to know God in certain ways with a personal relationship with him. Most of you in this room have experienced God in some way in your past.

The second way that we believe we can know ultimate reality and ultimate truth is the Scriptures.

**SLIDE      God is revealed through the Scriptures.**

We believe that God has spoken through this book. God is not only the subject of this book but also is the hidden author who speaks through the biblical authors. So we read this book and it tells us something about who God is. God has specifically given us this gift so we might understand truth.

Ultimately we believe that when God wanted to make sure that humanity understood who he is, and who we are supposed to be as human beings, he became flesh and walked among us in Jesus Christ.

**SLIDE      God is revealed through Jesus Christ.**

The Scriptures teach us that Jesus is the fullness of God in bodily form. He walked upon this earth to show us the way and the truth and the life. So we study the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus. We study the death and resurrection of Jesus to understand something of what ultimate reality is like.

We study Jesus Christ to understand what is beyond the outskirts of our universe and what happens to us after we die. We study Jesus Christ to understand how we are supposed to live as human beings and how we're supposed to act towards one another.

We need both the first book which teaches us about the universe as it is in the physical properties of the world in which we live, and the second book which is God's special revelation to us which comes in the forms of our experiences with God and the Scriptures and Jesus Christ.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest, captures the importance of this especially in terms of morals and ethics by putting it this way. She says...

**SLIDE** "I can believe in the Big Bang without losing one minute sleep about how much stuff I own. My acceptance of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle does not make any requirements in terms of how I treat you. Because science does not deal in ethics or morals it cannot tell me how to live or whom to love. It can tell me how the universe works or how it thinks it works, and nothing more."

For all of those other questions we turn to the second book—that book which gives us God's special revelation.

Once more let's hear from Dr. Owen and Dr. Roberts-Cady about how important science and religion are to one another. Take a listen.

**VIDEO** Galileo and the Bible 3.

**SLIDE** Science, Religion and the way the world works

I believe that when you look at science and really dig your hands and your mind into books and you begin to explore the universe, you will find that much of what you discover in the physical world and the sciences is begging for an answer to the question, "Isn't there something more?"

I want to wrap this up by looking at why we need science and religion in terms of the way the world works. Over the past few years we have seen things like a tsunami which killed over 100,000 people, a hurricane which killed thousands and left tens of thousands homeless, earthquakes which have killed thousands in the Bahamas and India, and many other natural disasters such as tornados and ice storms. We struggle with what to do with these events.

In the midst of these tragedies we ask this simple question. Why did this happen? Why do all these innocent people die in these natural disasters?

There are lots of interesting answers they get proposed to these

questions. I have heard things like a man who believes that an alien came down to correct a wobble in the Earth's rotation which caused the tsunami in Indonesia two years ago. One group suggested that America was testing an electromagnetic wave weapon that was aimed at Muslim countries which caused that tsunami and so we were responsible for that disaster.

The answer I find most interesting whenever a natural disaster happens is one that I find some Christians giving and even some pastors preaching from their pulpits. Some use the moment of a natural disaster to claim that it is a fore ordained judgment of God upon the people who received the natural disaster. I actually read on one pastor's website that on December 26, 2005 God took the lives of 150,000 men, women and children in order to teach the people in those regions an important lesson—in order to demonstrate his wrath and offer his mercy to those who survived.

Whenever a natural disaster happens there are always those who take this tack. I went in my Google browser this last week and typed in "earthquake and judgment of God", and I came up with 106,000 websites that mention both of these things together. I read several of them and not all of them supported the idea and some even more writing against it.

Unfortunately, many of them were writing and claiming that whenever there is a natural disaster it is God's judgment on those who are the victims.

As I read through those arguments I couldn't help but think, "Are we reading from the same Bible?" When I read the Gospels what I find is that Jesus said he came to seek and to save lost people. I read that Jesus hung around with people the religious people didn't want to hang around with. I read that he told the story of a father with a son who ran away and one son who stay home. The father waited in long for the son who ran away even though the sun had done some not so good things. He waited at the edge the field every day and he did not say, "God may that one be damned and destroy him for walking away from me."

Instead the father waited for the son to come back home every day until finally the sun did return. Instead of chastising him he wrapped his arms around him and said, "My son who was dead is alive again. Let's have a party."

That is what Jesus told us about God and what God is like. Does God really wiped out people in natural disasters?

In a pre-scientific age that was the only explanation you can give—that God had done this terrible thing. People did not understand the nature of how the earth operated and so it must be that an earthquake opened up the ground and people were swallowed up or a huge wave came upon shore and swept people away that the gods were hungry for human souls or God was angry with his people. It was the judgment of God because the only way you can explain something like that was God's direct intervention in the world.

I thank God that we live in a time and age that geophysicists and climatologists and others can help us understand how the world operates. We know that tectonic plates shift and our world moves deep inside causing volcanoes and earthquakes and tsunamis and even hurricanes. We know that we helped to cause some of these things as humans because we are changing our world.

Those very movements which caused natural disasters also cause the beautiful cliffs around us in Animas Valley as well as the mountains that rise up and capture the snowfall. Sometimes we human beings get in the way as nature takes care of itself. It is interesting that animals have early warning systems and usually avoid things like earthquakes and tsunamis.

We can understand how almost every natural disaster occurs in today's world scientifically. But the reality is that does not bring healing to the people who have lost loved ones. It does not offer redemption or hope. It doesn't call people in response to do something to care and offer compassion for those who are in need. Science simply explains the details of how the world operates.

But Christian religion says this: there is a God in the heavens and he does not cause every one of those things to happen. He created a planet that does take care of itself and these things sometimes take place and sometimes we humans get in the way of that.

Our Christian religion tells us that God promises to be present in the darkest of moments with every one of us, even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need fear no evil.

God promises us that our lifespan here on earth is just a short fraction of what he has in store for us.

God touches the hearts of his people around the world and places in them a compassion that is extraordinary to reach out and offer help and



hope and to be his hands in his voice to people who are in need.

By his Holy Spirit God brings healing where there is brokenness so that people aren't bitter the rest of their lives, and one day they will rediscover joy as they experience the work that God does in their lives.

God brings meaning out of all this and he prompted our hearts to learn from it so that in the future this doesn't happen again and we learn to discover early warning systems which will be installed in the future. We learn to build our buildings to withstand earthquakes.

All of this is a part of the work that God does in our world in our lives in response to the tragedies that takes place, if we are willing to listen and follow. Science without religion is hollow and bankrupt. It offers no hope, no healing.

But religion without science gives us a picture of God that is simply inconsistent with the God we see revealed in the Scriptures. We need each other.

I'm going to challenge you today in two ways to respond to this sermon. First, I want to challenge you to be thinking Christians. It is hard sometimes to be thinking Christians. It is so much easier to fall back on the pat answers that we learned in second grade and not have to engage our brains. I have been reading dozens of books and articles and listening to debates over the past few weeks and I have to tell you that my brain hurts! I've been trying to figure out how my faith connects with these things I'm discovering and how to integrate them.

You can do one of two things. You can say, "I'm going to go back to my second grade Bible answers." Or you can attempt to be a thinking Christian and figure out how these things fit together because science has something important to say to us that can help inform our faith. And I'm going to be a courageous Christian who says, "I am a thinking person and I'm still a believer."

Those of you who are scientists in our congregation, I hope you will be courageous enough to let people know that you are a believer AND a scientist. Please do your science really, really well, but at the same time help us learn how to integrate these two things together. We need Christians who can bring together both of these things in a 21st-century and let people see that you can be a thinking Christian and someone who is deeply devoted to following God.

The second thing I'm going to invite you to do is to do what God actually calls us to do when people are hurting.

**SLIDE      Oklahoma Ice Storm**

You can give to help areas in Oklahoma and Kansas as they recover from the ice storms that hit just before Christmas. 100% of what you give through our United Methodist committee on relief will go to those places affected. Each time there is a natural disaster you're giving literally becomes the hands in the heart of Jesus in areas where people are hurting.

UMCOR responded with emergency grants to help restore basic services to several annual conferences affected by the fierce mid-December ice storm that struck the Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri states.

UMCOR is assisting the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Annual Conference, Oklahoma Annual Conference as well as the Kansas East Annual Conference with the immediate basic needs until electrical power is restored and a sense of normalcy is gained. The ice storm froze several structures and knocked out electrical power for some 640,000 people.

All 77 counties in Oklahoma were declared disaster areas and local officials have stated that this was the worst natural disaster to hit the state in years.

This last week I went outside with my son Thomas and we looked up and saw the most amazing arrangement of stars. The moon was not out and it was bright and clear with fresh snow on the ground. You could see Orion coming across the sky, who along with the Big Dipper and all of the other constellations. I looked up and I thought, "Wow!"

Thomas said something like, "Do you suppose God placed each one of them just right there?" It was awesome to see the stars twinkling on the snow. I understand how snow is made as moisture collects on dust particles but I still like to eat the snow and I looked at it and I just want to cry out and praise God. The earth called forth that praise. I understood what the psalmist was saying at that moment as he wrote these words in our Scripture passage from today.

**SLIDE      *The heavens are telling the glory of God in the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night tonight declares knowledge.***

I asked the two professors that I interviewed this week what they

thought of those words and here's what they said.

**SLIDE Galileo and the Bible 4.**

Here in the church we propose that the God who is known in Jesus Christ's, and known in the Scriptures, and known in our personal experience has been made known in the creation that he made. We have an opportunity not only to know him but to love and follow him, and when we do we become authentically human.

One important final thought is that today is Epiphany Sunday, the day we celebrate the wise men bringing gifts to the Christ child. It is powerful to know that some of the first to see God in the flesh and worship him were pagan scientists! As Christians, we believe the Jesus Christ came for scientists and shepherds, believers and non-believers, you and me. So it is very appropriate that we begin this sermon series about where science and religion meet on the Sunday we celebrate that Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, broke into our world to unite people and lives that seem far apart. With this in mind I invite you to bow with me for our closing prayer.

*For those of you who are here today with your heads bowed in your eyes closed, and you came and you said, "I am a skeptic. I am not sure I even believe in God." That's all right because the Methodist Church was started for people just like you. We want this to be a place where you can safely come and explore and ask questions and not check your brain at the door.*

*Maybe today, all that God would really ask of you is that you might say, "You know just perhaps there is more than what I can see and feel and touch." That's a beginning and that's something for you to say that.*

*For those of you who are longtime Christians, today might be a day in which you say, "You know there is something to science and I need to know more. I need to understand more and it might help me grow my faith."*

*For all of us there is an opportunity and a call by the God who created the heavens and he says, "Come to me, I will offer you life."*

*Oh God we give you thanks and praise, you who created the cosmos, you were there at the beginning of the creation, and the Big Bang—you who watched as life developed over the course of 4 billion years in this planet—you who are our end, our destiny—you who gave us the capacity to reason and to think, to love and to experience more than what we see*

*and feel and touch—help us to know you. Help us to know truth. Help us to be authentically human—the people if you long for us to be, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

## ***Theme: Where Science and Religion Meet***

# **“Galileo and the Bible”**

Psalm 19:1-6

*1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. 2 Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. 3 They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. 4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. 5 It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. 6 The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat.*

Romans 1:19-20

*19 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

## **Introduction: Tensions in Science and Religion**

### **Galileo and the Church**

#### **I. Sources of Tension between Science and Religion**

A. For Christians:

B. For Scientists:

#### **II. The Role of Science and Religion**

A. The aim of science: Understanding the “how” of the creation

Science deals with the \_\_\_\_\_ of the creation

B. The aim of religion: Understanding the “why” of the creation

Religion deals with the \_\_\_\_\_ of the creation

An analogy from music and sound

### III. Where Do Science and Religion Meet?

A. 3 Possibilities:

B. Christian Theology's Two Books: Psalm 19:1-6 and Psalm 119:105

### Conclusion: Science, Religion and the World in which we live

#### *Study Guide*

**Monday, January 7** – Yesterday we learned that there are different ways that we see, perceive or know truth or ultimate reality. This week we'll study scriptures related to the different ways we come to know or see God. Among the ways human beings are meant to "see" and know God is by studying the creation. Read Romans 1:18-23 where Paul makes the case that all human beings are held accountable for at least some knowledge of God since, as Paul claims, certain things about God, including his very existence, should be obvious by studying creation. Read Psalm 19:1-6. What do you perceive about the character of God when you look at the beauty of creation? Do you ever look up at the stars at night and feel what the Psalmist has expressed?

**Tuesday, January 8** – Today we'll look at another of what are called the "hymns of creation" -- Psalms which offer praise to God by examining God's works in creation. You can imagine these Psalms having been written after the Psalmist took a walk through the woods, or while sitting outside looking up at the stars. Read Psalm 104. What is the tone of this Psalm? What does the Psalmist conclude about God by looking at the creation? Look over your notes on the conclusion of last weekend's sermon – related to the world in which we live, science and religion. How does science help us understand terrible tragedies like this? What role does religion play in such events?

**Wednesday, January 9** – In Sunday's sermon we spoke of the "two books" by which Christians believe they come to know ultimate truth – the first book is the natural world, which is God's handiwork, and the second are God's direct or special ways of revealing himself to us. Among these are our personal experiences of God – moments when God's Spirit touches our hearts, when we receive insights from God, or when God acts in our lives in providential ways. Can you think of any times when you either felt God's presence, perceived that you saw God working in your life, or felt God speaking to you? What was this like? Read Psalm 23. How did David experience God in his life? What did his experience lead him to believe about God as expressed in this Psalm? Remember that our subjective experiences of God must always be understood in the light of the scriptures – at times our experiences can be misunderstood or even misleading, as when some have believed God was telling them to do terrible things in his name. Nevertheless, our personal experience is one way God reveals himself to us

**Thursday, January 10** – Picking up on yesterday's theme, let's continue to consider

the “second book” by which God reveals himself – his direct or special revelation to us. In addition to God’s direct work in our lives which we perceive through personal experience, God has given us the gift of scripture. Read Psalm 119:105 and II Timothy 3:14-16. What do these two passages say about the Bible? Read I Peter 1:20-21. What does this teach us about prophetic words in the Bible? Finally, read Hebrews 4:12-13. What does this teach us about God’s word? Christians thus believe that God can be known in some ways through nature, and through our personal experience of God, but more directly, and more perfectly, through the inspired writings we call the Bible. These provide a more objective basis for our knowledge of God against which we measure our more subjective experiences of God.

**Friday, January 11** – We’ve been studying the “two books” by which truth and ultimate reality are made known – the first “book” is creation itself, and it is studied by scientists and lay persons alike, and from the study we learn about our universe, and from the scientific insights, and our experience of creation’s beauty, we learn something about God. But that is only one form of knowledge about ultimate reality. God has taken the initiative to reveal more to us – because God longs to be made known to us, and longs for us to know his will. This leads to the second “book” – God’s special acts of revelation in which God more directly makes himself known. We’ve learned that these include our personal experience of God, and the Bible. But even these are subject to misinterpretation. God’s supreme act of revealing himself and his will was by becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. Jesus – both his words and his actions, is the Word of God by which we measure and interpret all other words and experiences of God. Read John 1:1-18. What does this teach you about Jesus? How does this passage relate to you personally?