

## **I'm Not That Kind of Christian: *Anti-Science***

Last week we started on this series, “I’m not that kind of Christian.” There are so many stereotypes and caricatures of “Good Christian People” that it’s sometimes difficult to even admit to being a Christian. All we have to do is mention things like Jerry Falwell declaring that Hurricane Katrina was a well-deserved punishment for the moral failings of the people of New Orleans. Or the Westboro Baptist Church and their leader Fred Phelps protesting outside military funerals with their signs: God Hates Fags. Or hearing someone stridently defend their “correct Christian” view that women are not supposed to be pastors....or hold leadership positions in the church....or teach men....or even wear pretty ornaments in their hair. Or church pastors telling their parishioners how to vote, and even threatening to kick them out of the church if they refuse to vote properly!

There are times when I see and hear these kinds of things, and I want to loudly declare: “I’m not that kind of Christian!” It seems that we progressive Christians are much fewer in number than the fundamentalist, evangelical, conservative, strident people who say they are Christian, then completely fail to follow Jesus Christ’s teachings and example. It really is amazing sometimes.

I hear these stories about so-called “Christians” and I want to shout out for everyone to hear: ***“I’M NOT THAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN!”***  
Judgmental—Intolerant—Fear-focused—Abusive—Violent—Self-Righteous—Angry—Anti-Science—non-reality-based—  
I REALLY, REALLY AM NOT THAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN...and neither, I suspect, are you.

Negative stories and negative stereotypes of Christians have become so prevalent that most days I don't even want to call myself a Christian. I've started calling myself a "Follower of Jesus," because it changes the context and the content of the conversation, and hopefully frees me of some of the disturbing connotations that the label "Christian" has developed.

Last week I told you about a recent Barna poll of non-church-related young adults ages 16-29, and their top three impressions of Christians: Anti-homosexual, judgmental and hypocritical. In fact, out of the top 12 impressions of Christianity only 3 were favorable—9 unfavorable. So I have a sneaking suspicion that there are times when you feel as I do, and prefer not to be associated with the negative impressions of Christianity.

Last week I declared that I am not a "My Way or the Highway" kind of Christian or pastor. I do not ascribe to the authoritarian model of church leadership where I tell you what to do, what to think, what to believe---and you simply do it. I'm sure there are times when that approach would make my life easier! But we could never create a community of faith with give-and-take, with everyone knowing they are needed and important---a community of disciples of Jesus, finding their way through faith TOGETHER. I'm not the Authoritarian Kind of Christian. There is no one that I want to do my thinking for me, and I hope you feel the same way. We're the kind of Christians who are in it together, no matter what!

Today the topic is "I'm Not That Kind of Christian: *Anti-Science.*" I know that many of you in this congregation are educated and skilled in one form or another of science. Everyone who has ever taken a science class, raise your hand. (elementary, high school, college, graduate school) How many of you use some form of science in your daily work? We all use science in our daily lives---whether it's Newton's third law of physics (Newton's cradle), or the nurturing of plants in the garden, or trying to restore balance in a human body---we are all scientists. Or are we???

First, a little science humor:

*One day the zoo-keeper noticed that the monkey was reading two books - the Bible and Darwin's The Origin of Species. In surprise he asked the ape, "Why are you reading both those books"?*

*"Well," said the monkey, "I'm just trying to figure out if I am my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother."*

#### The Oldest Profession



doctor, a civil engineer, and a computer scientist were arguing about what was the oldest profession in the world. The doctor remarked, 'Well, in the Bible it says that God created Eve from a rib taken from Adam. This clearly required surgery, so I can rightly claim that mine is the oldest profession in the world.'

The civil engineer interrupted and said, 'But even earlier in the book of Genesis, it states that God created the order of the heavens and the earth from out of the chaos. This was the first and certainly the most spectacular application of civil engineering. Therefore, fair doctor, you are wrong; mine is the oldest profession in the world.'

The computer scientist leaned back in his chair, smiled and said confidently, 'Ah, but who do you think created the chaos?'

OK. It's election season and a lot of things get blown out of proportion in the never-ending news cycle of politics. But have you been listening to some of the crazy claims politicians are making about science or scientific fact?

First there was U.S. Representative Todd Akin of Missouri claiming that the female reproductive system has a defense mechanism to prevent becoming pregnant from an act of "legitimate" rape. Besides being offensive, the comment showed a serious lack of understanding of basic biology and anatomy. We might be able to set aside an inappropriate comment like that, except for one thing: Todd Akin sits on the Congressional Committee on Science, Space and Technology. Rep. Akin's biography on his website claims that he continues to be a leader in his local church, and he received a Master of Divinity degree in 1984 in the Presbyterian Church of America, a more conservative denomination than the PC-USA. So here is a "good Christian man", well-educated—an engineer, even. He makes no bones about being a Christian, even while he shows ignorance of basic science.

My favorite story, though, of this year's political/religious/scientific circus has got to be U.S. Representative Paul Broun, M.D. (R-GA). The man is a medical doctor—a scientist!!! He, too, sits on the Congressional Committee on Science and Technology. But he fervently believes that "Evolution, embryology and the Big Bang Theory are lies straight from the pit of hell." Such evil scientific lies are intended to prevent us from knowing that we need a Savior. Rep. Broun claims his Bible is the only information he needs to form public policy. He also claims that there is scientific evidence proving that the world came into being in six days, just as we know them. And he's on the Science & Technology Committee! OMG!!!

I'm confident that you will want to say with me: *"I'm Not THAT Kind of Christian!"*

Creationism, Evolution---the battle's been going on ever since Darwin published "The Origin of Species." It came to a head once before in this country with the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial in Tennessee. The schoolteacher John Scopes was charged with illegally teaching the theory of evolution in public school. Oh horrors! We used to think we could laugh about it, but now it seems we've come back around---still arguing with people who seem to believe that being Christian and accepting a scientific world view are mutually exclusive.

You know, the Barna group (the ones that did the survey of non-church-related young adults to discover that their impressions are that Christians are anti-homosexual, judgmental and hypocritical) has also done a study on why young adults leave the church after high school. One of the primary factors? Because the church is anti-science.

**Reason #3 – Churches come across as antagonistic to science.**

One of the reasons young adults feel disconnected from church or from faith is the tension they feel between Christianity and science. The most common of the perceptions in this arena is "Christians are too confident they know all the answers" (35%). Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background feel that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in" (29%). Another one-quarter embrace the perception that "Christianity is anti-science" (25%). And nearly the same proportion (23%) said they have "been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate." Furthermore, the research shows that many science-minded young Christians are struggling to find ways of staying faithful to their beliefs and to their professional calling in science-related industries.

I hope that none of our young people ever think they have to choose between faith and science! I certainly do not see an inherent conflict between the two. Our earliest scientists were church people. Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler were all devout Christians. Galileo kept his Christian faith despite all of his arguments with the Church.

Sir Isaac Newton was a member of the Anglican Church—got in a bit of trouble for insisting that he did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity—but he was a church guy, nonetheless. For centuries, the only educated people were church leaders: priests, monks, nuns. They didn't seem to feel that they had to choose between pursuing science and pursuing God. They saw their scientific exploration as glorifying God because they were examining and admiring God's creation.

Even that evil Charles Darwin prefaced the '*Origin of Species*' with this quote from Francis Bacon: 'Let no man ... think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works.' Bacon was referring to God as the author of ...

- The Book of Scripture - the Book of God's Words
- The Book of Nature - the Book of God's Works.

Isn't it amazing how things can get so twisted up in the religious universe? What seemed obvious to so many early scientists—that science enhanced their faith—seems so obscured by too many modern Christians. My theory? God gave us brains, and we're supposed to put them to good use! We learn by asking questions of the world around us, by exploring and experimenting—that's what we're created to do!

To me, it's impossible to take the Bible literally and make any sense whatsoever of the world around us. The preponderance of scientific evidence about the billion-year history of our planet blows the Genesis account of Creation right out of the water.....BUT ONLY IF YOU TAKE IT LITERALLY. I believe that the stories of Creation (yes, there are 2) in Genesis weren't ever intended to be scientific fact stories. They are supposed to teach us about meaning and context and purpose and relationship to the Divine. These Creation stories ARE TRUE—but not because they are scientific fact. They are TRUE because they teach us about the mystery and meaning of being alive, and of belonging to a creative power greater than ourselves.

\*\*\*\*\*It's right about here in preparing this sermon where I got totally sidetracked by one little footnote about Quantum Physics and String Theory and Wave-Particle Duality. I don't claim to even come close to understanding quantum physics, however.....isn't it absolutely fascinating that everything we look at that appears to be still and stationary and solid is actually buzzing/humming with movement and activity? How cool is that? And once you're thinking about incredibly tiny little strings vibrating, and the way they vibrate determines what they become—electrons or protons or whatever—how can we not be impressed and overwhelmed by the wonders of Creation—and amazed by the power of the human mind to reason and search and discover and postulate and maybe someday even prove these incredible things!

There are many Christians who are threatened by scientific exploration and discovery. They feel that the more we can explain about the mysteries of the universe, the less we need God. God becomes a “God of the Gaps”, only allowed to be in those places we have yet to explain and understand. I think they've got it the wrong way around! The more we humans explore and question and discover about the universe—from the tiniest string to the hugest planet—the more we are in awe.

I believe that God lives in our awe—in our amazement—in our dumbfoundedness—in the face of each new scientific achievement. It is completely amazing that no matter how far we think we've gone in examining the world around us—there is still more to do, more to discover, more to celebrate. My God isn't a God of the Gaps. My God is the Spirit and the Power and the Glory that radiates through all of it.

And just in case you think that one day we will know all that there is to know about the physical world, try this on for size: We currently live in 4 dimensions (height, width, depth and time). Quantum physics/string theory says that there may be as many as 11 dimensions of space & time—and who knows? Someday we may be able to interact with all of them.....or maybe we already are interacting but just don't know it yet.

Christians against science? I'll never understand it. Each draws me deeper into the other.

"Science and religion are two windows that people look through, trying to understand the big universe outside, trying to understand why we are here. The two windows give different views, but both look out at the same universe. Both views are one-sided, neither is complete. Both leave out essential features of the real world. And both are worthy of respect." ( Physicist Freeman Dyson)

Science can purify religion from error and superstition;  
religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.  
Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish....

We need each other to be what we must be, what we are called to be."  
(-Pope John Paul II)

I'll go with the Pope on the one. Because he wasn't an anti-science kind of Christian, and neither am I. How about you?

Amen.



