

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

It was a world that was cold, and dark, and without welcome. The ancient writers of Genesis described the universe this way before creation, the universe without form. It did not have stars or skies, no living thing. But there was potential.

I don't know about you, but I'm a fan of a TV show called the "Big Bang Theory". It is about a bunch of nerds who work at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California and spend their lives steeped in cutting edge science about the origins of the universe and how it works. In it they also poke fun at religion, mostly because it cannot be proven or quantified, and those things that cannot be measured and replicated, in the eyes of science, aren't easily believed as universal truths.

And this is not to say that the characters in the show were not raised with religion. Sheldon, an astrophysicist,

was raised evangelical in Texas. And while his family still attends church and reminds him of Jesus on a regular basis, Sheldon has ordered his life empirically, in thought and deed. There's just no room for what he believes is a fantasy, all this God talk on how the universe's origin.

Now, at my own peril, I'm going to argue against a fictional character, this Sheldon. Because he represents what many in today's society believe: that there is no way that science and theology can stand together in explaining the origins and order of the universe. I don't think these two are mutually exclusive, and I'll try and explain it theologically, in 10 minutes or less. Here goes.

We like to have things in absolutes. Black or white, not shades of gray. We would like to know that the universe is either God-created or godless laws of physics. It simplifies our reality in a world where there are so many uncertainties. And yet, I think folks today hunger for an authentic spirituality that is both intellectually honest and at home in a scientific era. Folks search for a new kind of wisdom to live by, one that is scientifically sophisticated, technologically advanced, morally just, ecologically sustainable, and spiritually alive.

Having just attended my father's funeral and all that entails, I can tell you that origin stories are multi-layered, complex, nuanced, and involve many layers of truth, myth, and time-bound realities and relationships. And in the absence of narrative, we will try and fill in the gaps. Truth or fiction, stories are told to help explain uncertain times. It's in our nature to have a complete narrative.

The problem is, as Sheldon has found out, that there is no way to know with any certainty what happened all that many billions of years ago in creating the earth and the universe, so there's a bunch of theories. Ones that have been debated, advanced, and de-bunked since the time of Galileo. Science once believed that the earth was the center of the universe. Science also said there wasn't a possibility of life on other planets, nor ones like earth. The fact is, science keeps unfolding its understanding. At the same time, there's lots of science folks who continue to hold religion as arms' length.

The fact is, science does a great job at explaining God's works. However the universe got its start, there is still mystery needing understanding as much as we have discovered a lot of cool stuff to help our lives right now.

But what science cannot do is explain the meaning of all that is discovered. God's word gives us the context and reality of creation. At a fundamental level, the God of love gives us the framework that all is connected, all of it has a purpose, that is yet unfolding before us.

The universe itself is expanding, a finding that only a dozen years ago science reversed. While that may sound exciting only to astronomers, to theologians it was old news. It affirms that the God who spoke all into being was still creating. The God who breathed life into the stars is still doing it, and the maple tree is connected to the moon, the fish to the comets, the clouds in the sky are the same as the Cloud Nebula. At a fundamental level, God's own breath gives rise to it all.

Science deconstructs it. Animals have different properties than planets, for sure, and rocks different properties than birds. But God's breath of creation shares both life in its smallest form, and the elements of life in the galaxies and largest form. God shares the same breath of life with us as with the cosmos. It means that God does not act from a distance, but draws close to

all living things as when Genesis says the Spirit of God hovered over the deep.

And then God began to unfold the family of beings. The waters, the plants, the animals, and humans. God's breath became our breath. We still don't entirely know why babies who are born take that first breath. But we know that it's essential for life here on earth. How do we understand a God who shares breath? How do we feel the awesome nearness of such a God?

Our human story has unfolded crazily, in fits and starts, and most recently, with the advances of science, in ways which can foment peace or destruction. But the scripture helps us understand that we share a breath with one another that should cause us hope. For as much as we save a whale in the oceans, we save ourselves on the land. As much as we do not kill each other, we live to have friends who are both Russian and Ukrainian. As much as we clean the air, we honor the birds who see it all in its splendor and squalor.

I'll leave you with these final thoughts.

Our scripture ends with words that plagues may yet be our temporary or ultimate fate. But on this Sunday in

which we bless the animals, those created before our human arrival here on earth, we should see their lives with God. A life which is celebrated today, for what it is, without malice to destroy entire classes of fellow beings based on color, belief, origin, or form of social clan. When our lives reflect this sacred pattern of creation and breath of God that brought us into being, then perhaps we can recapture the awe, the reverence, the wholeness of existence as it unfolds.

It is my hope that we can both understand our origin as well as its meaning. We can honor the unfolding story as much as we find ever new mysteries. For the family of God's creation should be a feast to which all are welcome, for it is only in the sharing that we will find safety and survival. Thanks be to God,
Amen.