

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, March 1, 2020
First Sunday of Lent

“Lenten Apologies to Women”

**First sermon in our series entitled:
“Lenten Apologies to Galileo Galilei”**

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

**Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7
Christian Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11**

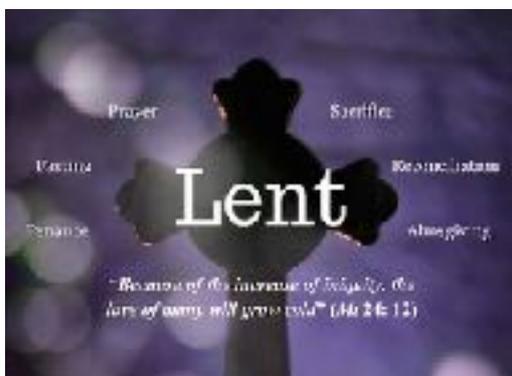


For those of us who gathered this past Tuesday (Shrove) and Wednesday (Ash) in the chapel, we learned that we are in the midst of the Christian season of Lent.



At our Council meeting this earlier this month, I proposed the great idea that we put a huge neon sign-up on our front lawn that reads “Lent is here! Get you *ASH* in church!” Disappointingly, one

member of Council then proposed that the minister give-up proposing 'great' ideas for Lent. Now, some of you are under the wrong impression of what is to be given-up during Lent. I have taken a short informal poll in our church about what some of you are giving-up. Two of you indicated that you are giving-up your dignity and self-respect. And one of you indicated that you were, well, 'just plain giving-up'.

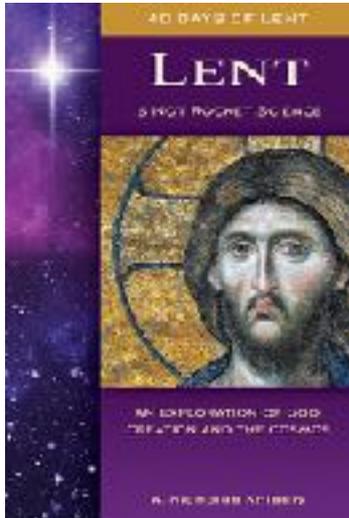


Lent is a season of forty days during which we are to be more self-reflective and self-confessing. It is a season to 'take-stock', to determine what is unnecessary or even harmful and on what might we wish to prioritize in the future. This season prepares our hearts and minds for Easter, for a new resurrected life.



Our church proposes that we embark upon a Lenten carbon fast. For forty days, we are encouraged to give-up overconsumption, harmful

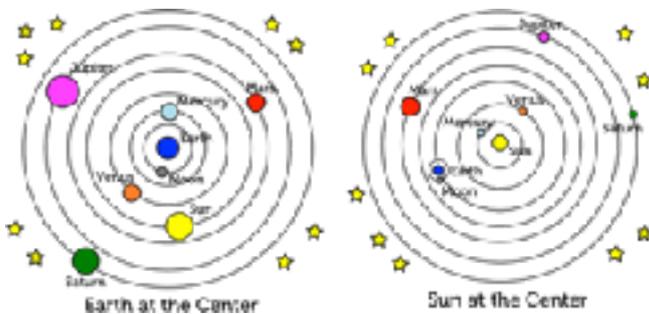
practices, and needless waste as it pertains to God's Creation. I encourage you to obtain a Lenten carbon fast calendar and begin this journey with us.



Accompanying our theme of protecting the environment, we will begin on Tuesday, March 10, a Bible study entitled “Lent Is Not Rocket Science” that will examine the intersection of faith and science. Last but not least, today we begin this Lenten sermon series entitled “Lenten Apologies to Galileo Galilei” that examines the false and harmful conflict between faith and science. During Lent, it is my prayer that we will be more reflective about our faith as it relates to the cosmos and that we will repent of our old prejudices and thus arrive at Easter with a renewed understanding of God's will for us.



While events are always more complicated than I can articulate in these short sermons, this Lenten sermon series is contextualized by remembering that in 1984 Pope John Paul II retracted the church's 1633 inquisition and unfortunate condemnation of the Italian scientist Galileo Galilei for his observations and resultant conclusion that the planets revolve around the sun (heliocentric) and not the sun and planets around the Earth (geocentric).



For eight years before his death in 1642, Galileo was put under house arrest. We see in our sermon series banner an artist's depiction of Galileo's trial. In 1992, after a thirteen-year study, Pope John Paul officially acknowledged that Galileo was correct.

Pope John Paul II's Apology for Errors of the Church Over 2,000 Years

BY MICHAEL CROTT, 10/11/2000

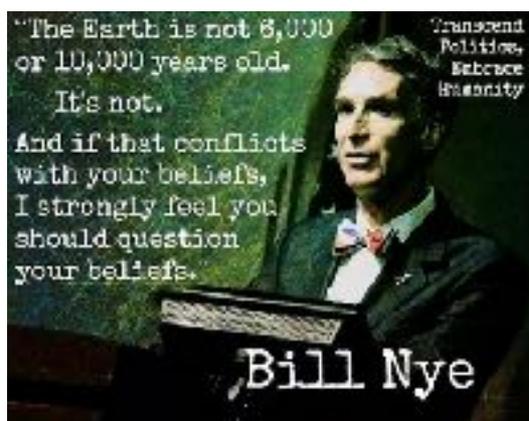
During his homily with scientists, John Paul II was very respectful for them, recognizing their achievements regarding further areas of the church's work that still is necessary.

"We cannot not recognize the heritage of the thought and research of science of our forefathers, especially in the natural sciences," the pope, dressed in purple robes for Lent, said before leaving. "Integrating the domains of the past opens us to wisdom and knowledge in our contemporary of the present."

The pope's act of repentance, according to some, was the strategy of human. Many think that Pope's homily was an important step towards the restoration of the Roman Catholic Church's unity that has been the way of some people's demand over the decades of even many of the most distinguished leaders. He has not forgotten that the new evangelization is a calling that is directed towards those who have given their lives for the church's mission and its universal "mission of humanity."

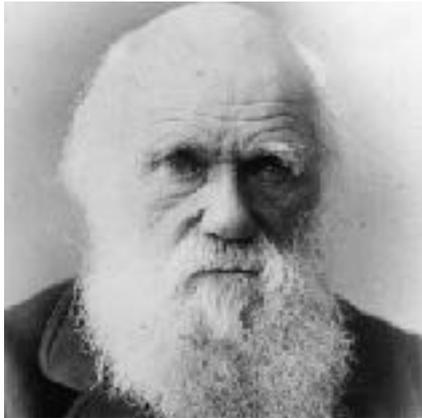
In 2000, the Vatican issued a formal apology. In his 2000 address on the Jubilee of Scientists the Pope wrote: "It can be said, in fact, that research, by exploring the greatest and the smallest, contributes to the glory of God which is reflected in every part of the universe."

Now, before we get on our Protestant high-horses, before we become all self-righteous in our condemnation of the Catholic Church, we must be reminded that historically, before the Reformation, the Catholic Church was *the* western church and therefore Catholic history is synonymous with our history as Christian Congregationalists.

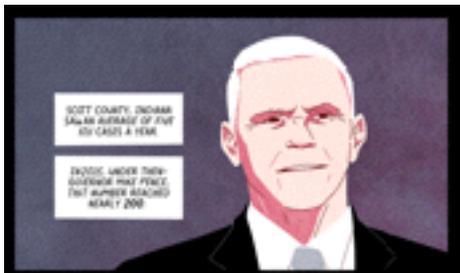


Our spiritual ancestors participated in ridiculous faith claims related to God's Creation, such as 'the Earth is only 6,000 years old', and

therefore we are as complicit as our Catholic brothers and sisters at St Michael's. Second, since the Reformation Protestants have arguably been MORE complicit than Catholics in falsely contesting science with matters of faith.

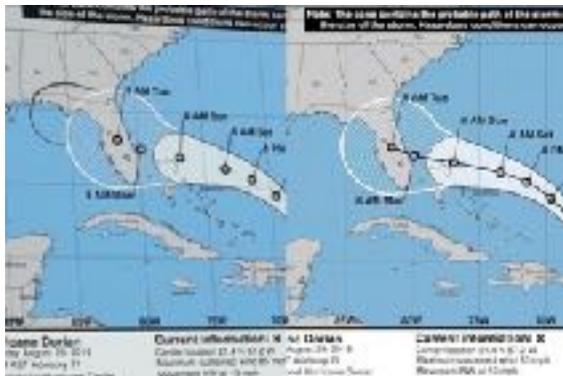


For example, it has been Protestants that have most notoriously denied evolution and thus Darwin (next week's sermon).



It is a Protestant former governor of Indiana, who due to religious sensibilities, rejected his own government's scientifically recommended action-plan to curb HIV and AIDS infection rates. This rejection of science led to a skyrocketing infection rate and corresponding mortality rate in his jurisdiction. Evangelical

Protestants, and not Pope Francis and the Catholic Church, that are the primary climate change denialists.



Indeed, even this week as we struggle to track hurricanes, science is being doubted by a Protestant leader.



As the Corona virus (COVID-19) is being combated, there is currently contestation between scientists and a Protestant leader and whether it will be a ‘miracle’ or scientific information and preventative measures that will stem the tide of the pandemic. Indeed, Protestants have no reason to gloating. Indeed, almost four hundred years after Galileo, fundamentalist evangelical Protestant Christians have most egregiously pitted science against faith.



With this brief preface, there are a few takeaways from this morning's two scripture readings. The first is the most obvious: our Lenten season is inspired by the forty days and nights that Jesus was tempted by Satan. The more subtle take-away is that Satan interpreted the scriptures literally, and that temptation to interpret scripture literally was sinful. Satan tempted Jesus with literal bread, literal political power, and the literal ability to defy gravity. Contrary to Satan, Jesus interpreted scripture metaphorically, that is spiritually. In fact, Jesus' entire theology is such a reinterpretation of the Pharisee's' literal interpretation of scripture, and a thus a spiritualization of scripture, that he was accused of heresy and executed.

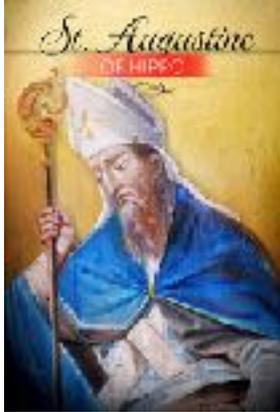


From our Hebrew scripture, we hear about the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Historically, this mythical narrative has been used to justify the superiority of men over women. Sadly, this narrative has been interpreted literally to claim that a woman came from a man when science evidences quite clearly that I, a man, came from my mother's uterus and vagina!



Men come from women! It is also very clear that women's reproductive abilities render them, I think, far more capable and wondrously made than I as a male. Sadly, the creation narrative has been used to understand that women are not just physically inferior, but also mentally and spiritually inferior. My experience of women's

psychological strength and faithfulness to the church understands precisely the opposite.



In our Lenten devotional booklet (*Lent Is Not Rocket Science*), Bishop Knisely rightly points-out that since the times of Saint Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Bible has been abused to justify society and the church’s ignorance and prejudices. Saint Augustine once said, “It is a disgrace for a Christian to talk nonsense to [scientists] about something scientists know about - because it causes them to doubt everything that is found in the books of the Bible” (p. 18). You see, the Bible is not about science, it is about God’s relationship with us. It is this table, at which we are about to commune, and it is this cross, under which we gaze, that teach us about that relationship. The importance of the scriptures is about relational Truth (with a capital ‘T’) and not about scientific truth (with a small ‘t’).



So this Lent, let us as people of faith apologize to women for Christians' inaccurate literal interpretation of the story of the Garden. In this 'Me Too' era and when we still do not have an Equal Rights Amendment for women, let us repent and correctly view women as equal partners with men in the Kingdom of God on Earth just as it is in heaven.

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".