

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Sunday, March 8, 2020  
Second Sunday of Lent**

**“Lenten Apologies to Charles Darwin”**

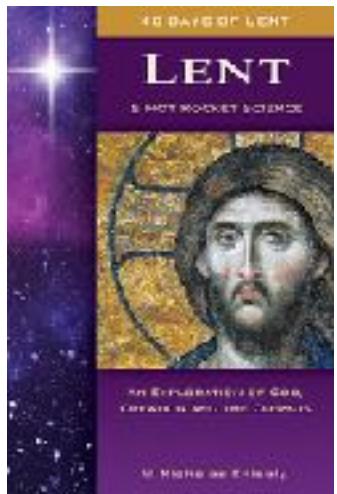
**Second sermon in our series entitled:  
“Lenten Apologies to Galileo Galilei”**

**The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper**

**Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 4:1-2, 17-25  
Christian Scripture: John 3:1-17**



Friends, we are on a journey to Holy Week that culminates during Easter when we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In order to get there, we must prepare ourselves during this season of Lent. I pray that you will join us every Tuesday until Easter for our Lenten Bible Study.



I also encourage you to follow the Lenten Carbon Fast calendar and use it as a spiritual discipline to sensitize your soul to God's Creation and God's will for you in it.

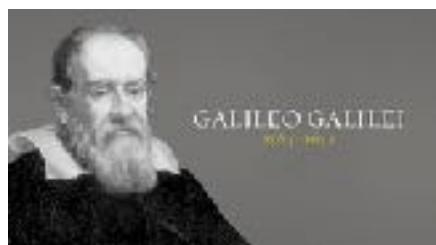


Last but not least, this morning, 'tuck-in' and listen to this message, the second of six, about the intersection of faith and science.

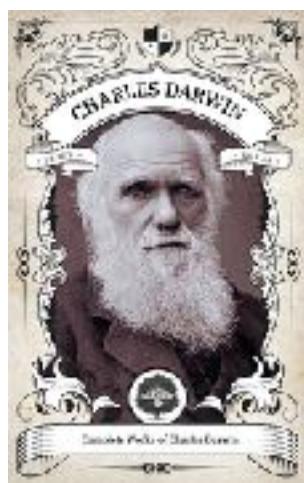


Last week, in the Lenten spirit of introspection and repentance, we as people of faith apologized to women, who for too long have

been viewed to be inferior to men by society and religion. Men have for centuries and millennia, justified the marginalization and oppression of women by interpreting the scriptures too literally.



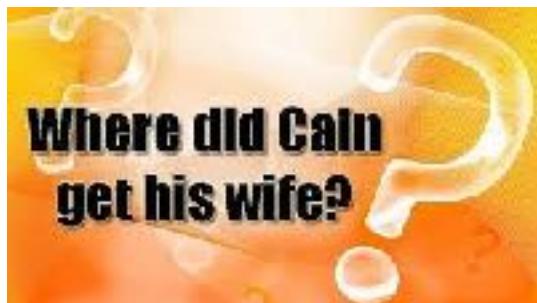
We also collectively apologized for the condemnation of Galileo Galilei who contradicted the literal word of God that understood that the Sun revolved around the Earth (Joshua 10:12). This week, in the same spirit, we apologize to Charles Darwin who became estranged from the faith because of a too literal interpretation of the Bible.



Before we begin with the scriptures, and in the spirit of Charles Darwin, let us hear some humor concerning the unnecessary conflict between evolution and faith: An atheist was taking a walk through the

woods, admiring all that the ‘accident of evolution’ had created. As he walked alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to see a seven-foot tall grizzly bear charging right at him! He ran back-up the path, with the bear close behind. His heart was pumping frantically as he tried to run faster. He looked over his shoulder as the bear closed-in. He suddenly tripped and fell to the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up, but he saw the bear, right on top of him, raising his paw above him to strike. At that instant, the atheist, without thinking, cried out, "Oh, my God!" Time stopped. The bear was frozen in place. The forest was silent. Even the river stopped moving. All of a sudden, a bright light shined down from heaven. A voice thundered, "You deny my existence for all these years, teach others I don't exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you now? Am I to count you as a believer?" The atheist thought for a second, then answered. "It would be hypocritical of me to proclaim myself as a believer after all these years; but, perhaps you could spare my life by making the bear a believer in your laws. "Very well", said the voice. "I'll try". The light vanished. The river started moving again. And then the bear put his paws together, bowed his head, and prayed: "Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful. Amen."

Now, let us look closely at our Hebrew scripture this morning. For sure the scripture seemed a bit obscure, no? Yet, there are a few things about our reading from Genesis in which I am interested this morning. Please hold out your hands, let's count: Adam and Eve. That's two. Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. That's four. Then in Genesis 4:17, seemingly out of nowhere it reads, "Cain lay with his wife" [five, minus one because Cain killed Abel] to produce a son, 'Enoch' [five]. Wait a minute. What wife? From where did she come?



The next sentence is even more astounding. "Cain was then building a city". A city!? For five people? One, why build a city for five people?



Two, where did Cain (who, by the way, was a farmer) get his degree in civil engineering? Well, we hear later that Adam and Eve also gave birth to Seth [six], to make-up for Abel's death. And we read next that

Seth has a son, presumably after he married. But, wait a minute! From where did Seth's wife come?

What we can learn from these few questions is that the biblical story of human origins is not about science. And these stories should never be confused for science nor empirical history. Often stories in the Bible were meant to convey spiritual Truths (with a capital 'T'), not scientific truths (with a small 't').

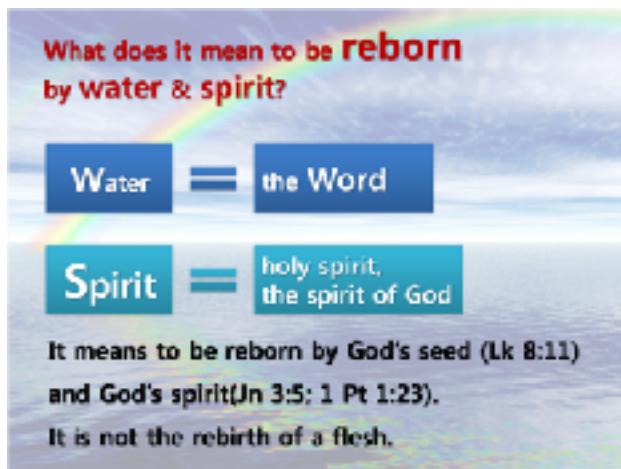
Our Christian reading is about a fascinating conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus.



Pharisees were experts in the law. That means they paid hyper-attention to the written word. They were rule-followers extraordinaire. That means they were legalistic. They were penultimate 'pedants'. They were, what one may call, 'literalists'.



During one of his lessons, Jesus told Nicodemus, “unless a man has been born over again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” to which Nicodemus replies, “But how is that possible for a man to be born when he is old? How can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?” You see, Nicodemus interpreted Jesus very literally, yet Jesus was not speaking literally. Jesus often spoke metaphorically. Jesus spoke symbolically. Jesus used a scientific concept, that of being born, to explain a spiritual truth.



But that spiritual truth was not meant to be interpreted scientifically, or literally. By doing so, one becomes completely confused and mystified, as was Nicodemus.

Jesus wished to teach Nicodemus that one must dispose of one's ego (oneself) and reawaken as a new person filled with the Spirit of God. Now, you see, I cannot even substitute the 'reborn' with 'reawaken', because 'to awake' is scientific concept that I am using spiritually.



Jesus explained that which we must encounter during Lent - death. On Ash Wednesday, we contemplated death ('From dust you came and to dust you shall return'). During Lent, we interrogate our ways. We acknowledge that which must die. We must repent. And come Easter, we must be reborn with Jesus and thus be filled with the Holy Spirit.



And couldn't the 'physical resurrection' not be a metaphor for 'eternal life' that Jesus of Nazareth first experienced after his own time of trial, death, and resurrection?

So, what does all of this have to do with Charles Darwin?



Darwin's formative years rendered him a baptised Episcopalian and a practicing Unitarian. In fact, his father intended him to study to be a local church pastor. After a spell studying medicine, Darwin increasingly gravitated toward the natural sciences.



During the 1830s, Darwin travelled on the HMS Beagle for almost five years making observations and conducting experiments on thousands of species throughout the world. In 1859, Darwin published a book entitled *The Origin of Species* [...].



This book remains one of the most controversial books of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet it is also one of the most seminal works in scientific history. In his book, Darwin presents a theory of evolution by which existing animals and plants developed by a process of gradual, continuous change from previously existing forms by natural selection.

## The Facts About the Theory of Evolution?

- EVOLUTION IS A FACT SUPPORTED BY VAST AMOUNTS OF EFFICIENT EVIDENCE!
- Even if evolution cannot explain how life began, it can explain how natural selection operates on life (evolution).
- Consider the information I have presented here today and decide for yourself.
- Don't be fooled by people who may have a hidden agenda.

## Scientific Fact

- NAS defined a "fact" as an observation that has been repeatedly confirmed and for all practical purposes is accepted as true.
- The fossil record shows change over time...evidence of evolution
- Indirect evidence is valid!
- No one has ever seen subatomic particles, but their existence can be indirectly observed and verified.

This theory is in most aspects identical to the theories/facts now accepted by scientists. Many people opposed Darwin's theories because they unnecessarily and blindly subscribed to the then-accepted viewpoint of 'Creationism'.

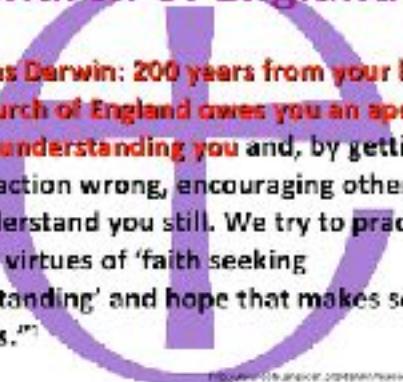
What is sad is that though Darwin never renounced his faith, he can best be considered to have died an agnostic. This is the case because during his lifetime, and arguably ours, the Bible was interpreted too literally. Hence Darwin was forced to choose between the Bible and observable experimentation as the basis for science.



[The above offers a false choice.]

When many are forced to interpret the Bible too literally as scientific truth, they either abandon science or they abandon faith. To be forced to choose an impossibility, renders one confused and mystified, perhaps like Nicodemus, perhaps like Darwin.

## Church of England



"Charles Darwin: 200 years from your birth, the Church of England owes you an apology for misunderstanding you and, by getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand you still. We try to practice the old virtues of 'faith seeking understanding' and hope that makes some amends."

We are sorry, Charles Darwin, that you did not have 'Miss Haley' as your Sunday school teacher. If you did, you could have learned all about dinosaurs *and* Jesus!

The Bible does not answer many questions about science. And science does not answer many questions about faith. What does science have to say about whether it is right or not to love you as my brother or sister in Christ? Nothing. Let us not ask the wrong thing from the right things. Science and faith often answer accurately for differing questions.

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