

SERMON 10 SEPTEMBER 2017  
TWO WORLD VIEWS - ONE GOD

For several weeks Lorraine has been taking us through a series of services based on Genesis and then more recently on Exodus. This has reminded us of the foundation of the Jewish nation, starting with just one family, Abraham, then Isaac then Jacob (renamed Israel) and his many sons, notably Joseph who led the family into Egypt. The family of Israel remained in Egypt for 430 years, 430 years! and in that time grew into a nation. Then after being oppressed by the Egyptians, Moses led them out on a journey to their promised land. This journey took 40 years and during this time tradition says that Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible - Genesis, Exodus etc.

The latest in this series of studies, for today September 10<sup>th</sup> is titled "Land Sunday" and asks us to reflect on our understanding of our world and our stewardship of the land as a gift from God.

Today I want to talk about two World-views. A world view is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "A particular philosophy of life or conception of the world"

First, the Jewish world view which was based on the writings of Moses.

Screen One -Image - ancient world view

The ancients divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea and the Underworld.

They saw a flat earth with the sky as a vault like the roof of a stadium, resting on foundations, with doors and windows that let in the rain. The sun, moon and stars were attached to the sky. God dwelt above the sky in majesty.

The earth was a disc floating on the waters and supported by pillars.

The underworld was called Sheol.

Importantly, in the Old Testament God was not remote, up above the sky, but was active and interested in His creation. The central message of Genesis and Exodus is that God cares

about mankind and wants to know us, and wants us to know Him and how to live in accord with His will. Hence the Ten Commandments and the whole structure of the Jewish Law.

Our Old Testament reading from Psalm 139 says that there is nowhere in the world that God is not present. "If I go up to the heavens- if I make my bed in the depths- if I settle on the far side of the sea- even there your hand will guide me, your right hand hold me fast" This Psalm assures us that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

Now I want to talk about a modern world-view. To start can I recount to you the sort of conversation I used to have with my children and which I now find myself having with a grandchild.

" Daniel, we are going for a walk, put on your coat"  
Why do I have to put on my coat? - It's cold outside.

Why is it cold? -Because the wind is blowing.

Why is the wind blowing? Um -Because air moves from areas of high pressure to areas of low pressure.

Why? Because God made things that way- now put on your coat"

Any parents out there – sound familiar?

When I was young I studied science and I worked for 30 years in a science based industry.

When you are a student they are always teaching you laws- Boyle's law, Avogadro's law, and Newton's law of Gravity which was published in 1686.

You are probably familiar with the story that Newton started thinking about gravity as a result of an apple falling on his head when he lay under an apple tree. From this start he was able to work out the laws that govern the movement of planets and stars and the reason for phenomena such as the tide in the sea.

But – the apple fell before Newton worked out his law. All these laws of science existed beforehand –the person whose name is attached is the first to discover and measure and record. Boyle, Newton and so on were driven by the need to find answers to the question, Why? Like children the true scientist is never satisfied.

And when the question why? is asked and answers are found it turns out that we live in a very orderly world. I repeat - a very orderly world. Things happen for a reason. The laws of nature are consistent. An apple will always fall and the speed at which it falls is always the same. The law is the same wherever the apple falls all over the world.

Screen two - Old hymn

A hymn writer named Kempthorn wrote in 1796, 100 years after Newton-

Praise the Lord for he has spoken  
Worlds his mighty voice obeyed  
Laws which never shall be broken  
For their guidance he has made.

The quest for the answer to the question why? continues. Scientists keep digging.

Unfortunately some Christians see the discoveries which science has made to be in conflict with the Bible writings of Moses.

Conversely there are some today who say that science has disproved the Bible and that there is no God.

I hope to show that what science tells us is the reverse - that God exists and is much greater and more amazing than our ancestors could know. That is because they did not have the advantage of a modern world view based on the discoveries of science.

For what I want to say now I am drawing on the writings of an eminent English physicist, Paul Davies. Professor Paul Davies gained his PhD at University College, London and has held posts at Cambridge University, Adelaide University and Arizona State University. He has been given numerous awards including the Order of Australia and even has an asteroid named after him.

He has written a number of best-selling books trying to explain modern scientific discoveries to non-scientists including "The Mind of God" and "The Goldilocks Enigma"

The Howick library has a copy of "The Goldilocks Enigma" or, if you promise to return it you can borrow mine.

You remember the story of Goldilocks. She went exploring in the forest and came upon the home of the 3 bears who happened to have gone out for a walk leaving on the table their 3 plates of porridge. Goldilocks samples the 3 plates - one was too hot, one was too cold, but one was just right. From this the sub-title of the book *The Goldilocks enigma* - Why is the Universe just right for life?

Professor Davies writes about the amazing universe in which we live. The universe is unimaginably old and so vast that it is not possible to see how big it is because even with this great age light has not had enough time to travel from the edge of the universe to our earth.

Screen three- image- Solar system

The planets and sun in this image of our solar system are to scale but the distances between are not to scale. The system in which we live is only a tiny part of the universe. Our earth is that little blue dot 3 out from the sun.

Professor Davies then outlines the fundamental forces that gave rise to the laws that govern the universe and make life possible. There are just four fundamental forces that explain everything. Gravity, electromagnetism, and the two forces that operate within atoms.

The amazing thing, and the reason for his book is this. These forces operate under laws and values that are tuned with exquisite precision. If any of the fundamental forces had a different value there would be no universe and no life. Stars like our sun would not burn or burn too brightly or explode. This is the Goldilocks enigma - Why is the universe just right?

The British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle said that the universe looks like a put-up job. Meaning it is too good to be true, that someone made it up.

Paul Davies talks a lot about God but being a scientist he always wants to ask another why? Having explained that the universe is just right he hesitates to give the answer that this proves that there is a divine intelligence and a master plan.

To me the fact that the universe and our world are just right tells me that when Moses says in Genesis chapter one, "God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good", he was right but what Moses was saying was much, much more amazing than he knew.

Paul says in Romans 11

"Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgements, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counsellor?"

Absolutely!

But there is more. Science can tell us about facts like gravity or electricity but how does science explain beauty or music or love? We human beings are more than just a collection of atoms or an intelligence.

Furthermore our world is not just a wonderful creation running according to laws set up by a remote God. God has not just, so to speak, wound up the clock and left it running. We Christians know that God is not remote but sent Jesus and is available as the Holy Spirit to us now. I am sure that if I asked, there would be many here who would testify that God has made Himself known to them. Like me you have treasured memories of the presence of God in your life.

The New Testament reading from John tells us that God in the form of Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He says "I know my sheep and my sheep know me". Think about it. This is an amazing statement - we are known and can know, the God who made this incredible universe.

I want to close by talking about our responsibilities. We live in a universe and a world which has been designed and finely tuned to be "Just Right". Yet there are so many of us human beings living in God's world now that we are messing up the fine balance of nature. Habitat destruction, species extinction, pollution, climate change all caused by people. Then there is

the wrong in how we live with our fellow human beings - inequality, wars, crime and corruption which create great differences in the life experience of people.

Today in Land Sunday we are asked to consider how we are carrying out our responsibilities as stewards or servants of the God who made us.

We have an election in two weeks time. It is our chance to have a say in how we want things to be "just right".