

Waiting for Us
Rev. John Allen

This is the final week of my series about the relationship between religion and science.

We began by looking at human origins, where did we come from, and discussed how scientific knowledge gives us a clear picture of the mechanics of how life formed, while the creation story in scripture reminds us that this process was not random or meaningless, and that God's intention lay behind all life that formed, and indeed God loves and values all of creation.

I shared a bit about John Calvin, a founding figure of our sect of Christianity, who believed that science was a gift from God, and that since all knowledge inevitably reveals more about God, believing the truth we learn from science is a way of honoring God who is the author of all things.

In my second sermon, we zoomed way out to consider our place within the scope of our vast cosmos. We contemplated a photograph taken from the Voyager space probe of Earth from the very edge of the solar system, where

our home appears as a faint, pale blue, dot. And I encouraged us to try to take a ‘God’s eye view’ of our world, the kind of view where so many of the difference and distinctions that we fixate on disappear into our fundamental unity with one another and with all creation, sharing this tiny delicate world with one another.

So science can help deepen our spiritual exploration of where we came from.

And it can stretch our imaginations to a broader understanding our our place in the universe.

This week, I want to talk about something much more immediate, and perhaps more tangibly actionable.

And that is when science sounds the alarm.

In my first two sermons, we discussed how our faith and scientific discovery can work together to help us explore the big questions and mysteries that lie at the heart of the human experience.

Today, I want to talk about how science and faith can work together in our ethical behavior in our everyday life.

Science presents us with an a fact so distressing that our minds backpedal in resistance, but it is worth hearing plainly.

Humans are wrecking the Earth. Our activity is currently driving the planet past the brink of disastrous consequences, massive extinctions, rising seas that will eliminate cities and even some island nations from the face of the Earth, stronger and stronger storms, famines, and on our current trajectory, a world that will simply be unlivable for our species.

For most of my life climate change was discussed in the future tense, here is what will happen if we are not careful.

Its here now. The science is describing what is happening as a consequence of our unfettered burning of fossil fuels.

Returning to the words of John Calvin, echoing across the centuries, science is a gift from God. It is one way that we learn about and understand God's creation, and listening carefully to what we learn from scientific exploration is a way of honoring God.

In the case of climate change, God's gift to us in science is that we are given the means to understand what is happening, and we are given the opportunity to change direction.

In a prescientific world, the connection between human economic activity and the sea-level would have been impossible to see.

But we can see it. We can understand it.

In the case of climate change, the relationship between our science and our faith is that science shows us the problem, and faith inspires us to respond.

It seems like luxury condominiums are popping up everywhere these days. But here is an unusual one. In Glasco Kansas, a developer has built luxury

condos inside an old Atlas Missile Silo, underground and sheltered from any disaster that might unfold on the service.

They are called “Survival Condos”

Each 2,000 sq. ft unit offers a 50-inch LED TV and home automation system, high-end finishes and fixtures, stainless steel appliances, washer/dryer and a professional interior design, as well as access to a pool, a spa, a library, a bar & lounge, and of course free wifi.

All for just 3 million dollars, which also includes helicopter rescue to bring you to the bunker, 5 years of food, and a training course on survival.

The existence of facilities like this represents one type of ethical choice when faced with global catastrophe. That choice is to lookout for myself, and to take no responsibility for what happens to anyone else.

That is an ethical choice that our faith does not have space for.

Science has shown us the problem.

Our faith teaches us that our responsibility is not only for our own well-being, but for the good of creation. Jesus tells us that whatever we do to the poor and vulnerable, we are doing to him.

Our faith strives to undermine our indifference, widen our capacity for compassion, and our sense of moral responsibility.

So in the case of climate change, science shows us the problem.

Faith compiles us to respond.

Now I don't think most of us are likely to purchase multi-million dollar bunker condos. That is but an extreme example of the indifferent response.

But we do live in a place where the worst consequences of climate change are, for now, happening to other people, who are out our sight, and could be out of our minds.

So even if we are not holing up in literal bunkers, we (and in the spirit of confession I include myself in this) are more or less ok going through the ordinary motions of our lives with little thought toward the consequences to others.

God wants us out of these self-protective places, to face the truth, and to get to work to build a future that is livable not just for our species, but for the Earth that God has formed to sustain us and all life.

In this morning's scripture, the Apostle Paul is addressing the issue of despair and the place of the church in the midst of a hurting and broken world.

And although Paul did not have access to the sort of scientific clarity we have today about environmental destruction, he lived amidst the Roman empire which, for the first time in human history, was altering the landscape of their world in dramatic ways through large-scale mining, and carving aqueducts through mountains and valleys.

Remember the Roman Empire you learned about in school. Those immense legions of soldiers with bronze weapons and shields. The guided lives of the wealthy. The monstrous public building projects. Think of everything that must have gone into making that happen.

Paul was a great critic of the Roman way of interacting with the world. He saw their disregard for vulnerable people, and their pillaging of resources by conquering foreign lands, and conquering the very earth beneath their feet.

This is what he was talking about when, in his letter to the Romans which Doug read this morning, he says:

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, and we hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

Creation is groaning.

Paul's assessment of the state of the world is as true today as it was then. The prevailing way of life in the world causes not just other people, but creation itself to suffer.

Paul sees that the whole world has been subjected to this sort of deluded and destructive way of thinking that yields one disastrous consequence after another.

Until now.

That is the heart of Paul's message. The world has been captive to, and subject to, these ways of death and decay, until now.

Until Christ came and changed the course, by awakening the children of God to their cause and their call. By calling forth from among humanity faithful people who are ready to stand up and say that there is another way, a way of living that seeks the flourishing of all humanity, and all the creation.

All creation is groaning says Paul, waiting, in eager expectation, for the children of God to be revealed.

And friends, that's us.

Us, people of faith, children of the living God, disciples of Christ.

Science just tells us how things are, and science holds up for us a simply, horrifying truth, that we are so tempted to shield ourselves from

We are wrecking the planet.

But left alone, the science breeds mostly despair, and perhaps for a select few, a well-appointed bunker.

Faith tells us that this problem is our responsibility, that the welfare of creation is our rightful concern. Faith teaches us that we are the ones the world is waiting for, each of us.

And one more thing. Faith gives us hope.

Not idle hope that things will just work out.

But the confidence that if we work together, and in alignment with the spirit of God, then creation can be redeemed and restored.

But not by waiting for someone or something else.

Its us. It has to be us.

