

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“In the Beginning, God”

Rev. David K. Groth

January 8, 2011

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

Stephen Hawking is a brilliant astrophysicist at the University of Cambridge. He wrote an article for the Wall Street Journal last year (Sept. 4-5, 2010) acknowledging that the laws of nature seem extremely fine-tuned to support life. Against all odds, the universe is remarkably hospitable to life. For example, to exist we need liquid water. If the Earth were a little closer to the sun, it would all boil off. If a little farther away, it would all freeze. As it is, the earth is where it needs to be. Gravity is another example. Even a small disturbance in its strength would send our planet off its circular orbit and causing it to spiral into the sun or run off aimlessly into space. If protons were just .2% heavier, they would decay into neutrons, destabilizing atoms, and making the universe unsuitable for the existence of life.

There are all kinds of these finely tuned characteristics that make life possible, many of which are just now being discovered. For us, this clearly points to the existence of the creator. Of course the earth is finely tuned to support life. That’s the way God made it.

For others who have been working from the assumption there is no God, it’s all very unsettling. Stephen Hawking himself seems hell-bent on taking God out of the equation. In this latest article, he argues our universe was created spontaneously by another universe. “The laws of quantum theory” he says, “allow universes to appear spontaneously from nothing.” Dumb question, maybe, but where did that universe come from that gave birth to our own, and the one before that, and the one before that? Where did the matter come from that makes up our earth and moon and stars? And where did the laws of quantum theory come from?

A week later there were some letters to the editor in response to the Hawking’s theory. One fellow wrote the theory requires “such intricate *faith* that it makes Jesus walking on water look like a parlor trick.” Another wrote, “Why is it so important to some scientists to show that a creator doesn’t exist? It’s no less difficult to believe in a creator than it is to accept theories that are untestable and require the acceptance of improbabilities that we would never accept when addressing any other topic.” I’ve often thought the same. That our beautiful, beautiful creation came about just by accident and chance, in my opinion, requires a greater faith than just believing a powerful, wise and loving God created the heavens and the earth. Albert Einstein once said, “There are two ways to live: You can live as if nothing is a miracle; or you can live as if everything is a miracle.” There is no in between. Either nothing is a miracle or everything is.

The very first words of Holy Scripture make an astonishing assertion: “In the beginning . . . God.” This is not a philosophical argument for the existence of God. It is simply a bold affirmation, “In the beginning . . . God” followed by the breath-taking account of creation . . . formed out of chaos, darkness and light, sun, moon and stars, sea and dry land, lush vegetation, exotic fruit, creatures to swim, crawl, run and fly, birds and cattle and finally, when

all else is ready, human beings – in God’s own image, blessed and given responsibility. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Ten simple words that assert all this – from the blazing sun that just keeps on blazing to the beautiful snow flake under the microscope, from the colorful finch to the newborn panda bear, all this is not by accident or chance. It is the work of a creative God. That’s the first point of first verse of Holy Scripture.

The second point is you and I are not the center of the universe. In the beginning, God. The beginning point is God. We westerners have been shaped to think that it’s all about us . . . as individuals. Things begin and end with the individual. I make my own choices. I set my own destiny. I choose what to believe in. I am making the plans, I am in control of my environment, I, I, I . . . I am the subject doing the verbs.

Holy Scripture, however, has a different subject doing the verbs. “In the beginning, God created.” God is the subject and you and I ultimately are the objects of that sentence. God is doing his verbs. In this way, the first verse of the Bible puts us in our place. It’s a place we need to come back to again and again and again, because we are the great, great grandchildren of Adam and Eve, and like them we want to be like God. There are 7 billion people on this planet, 7 billion individuals who deep down don’t want to be accountable to God but want to be like God. But Genesis chapter one sets us straight: In the beginning, God. He our Creator; we his creation. A special part of creation for sure, because we were created in his own image, and because he gave us dominion over the rest of creation, but still, part of creation nonetheless.

Those of you who have been blessed with children, do you want to have a relationship with them? Do you want to know them and do you want them to know you? Do you want to be able to communicate with them, teach them, help them? Of course you do. So also our Father wants a relationship with us. But there’s a problem. John 4:24 says, “God is spirit.” How many spirits do you know? Not the ones in the upper cabinet of your kitchen, you Watertownians. I’m thinking of the other kind of spirits. How many do you know? I don’t know a one. And if a spirit wanted to make himself known to me, I don’t know how he would do it because I live in a very physical, tangible world. If anyone wants to communicate with me, telepathy isn’t going to work. It must happen in physical ways, with a voice or e-mail or text message or old fashioned pencil . . . something my senses can perceive. So if you were God (as Spirit) and you wanted to establish relationship with people you would have to condescend to physical ways, wouldn’t you? That’s precisely what God has done.

First, in the Garden of Eden, God’s voice sounded out; physical sound waves bounced off their ear drums, ear drums he created for them, causing three tiny bones in each ear drum to vibrate. (Stay with me now.) These bones passed the vibration on to the window of the cochlea, which has fluid in it and about 17,000 little hairs. These are not the troublesome big ones that sprout out every which way. These are really tiny hairs in the cochlea and when the fluid vibrates because of the shaking of those bones in the ear drum, it causes those little hairs to tremble and shake and that creates an electrical impulse which is carried by the auditory nerve up into the brain. The brain processes these electrical impulses, sorts them and tells you what they mean. And which is the greater miracle: that you have ears that hear, or a Creator who condescends to communicate with you through his spoken Word because loves you and wants you to know him, wants to teach you how to live, wants even save you?

Which is the greater miracle? That we have eyes complete with a beautiful iris, the jet black pupil, the lens that inverts everything, focuses it, and then, in the back, the retina, which has about 120 million rods on it and 7 million cones. Which is the greater miracle, that we can see flashing colors of darting salt water fish, or that we have a Creator who sent prophets and inspires them so we can see God Word engraved into stone, written on vellum, printed on paper? Either nothing is a miracle or everything is. There is no in between.

Millions of sperm swimming upstream like salmon to spawn. Somehow they know where to go. One of them breaks through into the egg. A genetic bomb goes off and the father's genetic material fuses with the mother's. The embryo starts dividing and growing and if all goes well, a baby is born nine months later complete with eyelashes and fingernails and the ability to scream bloody murder which will rattle the three bones in your ear, but they can also smile, which will be a delight to the millions of cones and rods on your retina. Which is the greater miracle, the ordinary birth that happens every day, or the extraordinary one that happened once with a virgin in Bethlehem? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18.14)

Which is the greater miracle? That we have a God who gave us a plant that somehow turns soil, sunlight and water into grapes which, when pressed and stored will naturally ferment into wine . . . or a Savior who took a short cut once in Capernaum and turned water directly into wine without the mediation of a plant, to save a young couple from major embarrassment.

Which is the greater miracle, that we have skin that when cut is usually able to heal itself . . . or a Savior who stooped down to pick up the ear of Malchus which Peter had inadvisably severed? The ear he created once he recreated again so Malchus wouldn't have to live with an unsightly deformity.

Which is the greater miracle, that our heart muscles will keep on pumping, without ever taking a nap, for 80,90 a 100 years . . . or we have a Savior who submits himself to be crucified which causes his own heart to grind down until it fully stops?

Which is the greater miracle, that we have liquid water because the earth's orbit is at just the right distance from the sun . . . cold clean water so that we might live, or the water of life in Holy Baptism, so that we might never die?

Which is the greater miracle, that each of us has about 10,000 taste buds in our mouths which makes some things taste so good, or a Savior who gives us his very body and blood for our forgiveness and hides it under bread and wine so that it doesn't taste so bad? Either nothing is a miracle or everything is. There is no inbetween.

Some claim God exists but we cannot know him. He is spirit, high and lofty, and we are flesh and bone, poor and lowly. He is immortal and we always seem to be dying. He is awesome and brilliant and we these have puny little brains. The end result is the gap between God and people is just too big a gap they say. There's no way we can know him, they say. But the premise is deeply flawed. It assumes that God is also incapable of making himself known to us. God's spiritual hands are all tied up, they think. Even if he wanted to communicate with us, he cannot because he's so spiritual and ethereal and transcendent and we're so hopelessly tied to the physical and the earthly. Doesn't that reduce God to something of an absurdity? A god who is unable to express himself, when we, mere mortals, are forever expressing ourselves! A god who created our inner ears and our eyes so wisely and well, but cannot use them even for his own purposes! What kind of god is that? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

Hebrews chapter one says, “In many and various ways, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets. But now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son” (vv.1-2a). God bridged the gap. God has been bridging the gap since Genesis 1, so we can see him, and hear him, and record his words. At the baptism of Jesus, that thunderous voice from heaven sends sound waves that bounce off a lot of ear drums: “This is my beloved Son.” And again at the Transfiguration. “This is my Son. Listen to him!” That is, if you want to know God, Jesus is the one to watch and listen to and learn from. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

God also bridged that other gap, the one between his holiness and our sin, a gap bigger than any other. For that he must go to the cross, meek as a lamb, but without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Spirits cannot be pinned to a cross, and spirits don’t bleed, and God is spirit. But in Jesus, God is also a flesh and blood man. Real flesh, and real blood, for our salvation. Either nothing is a miracle, or everything is.

“In the beginning, God.” One last thing: If God is not powerful enough to create the world, he is not powerful enough to redeem the world. But God did create the world. And God did shed his blood for you. And so you belong, body and soul, in life and death, not to yourself, but to your faithful savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.