

“Wonder Out Loud--Is God plausible?”

About every 5 years I feel like it's important to make sure we all know that we have permission to ask our questions. To say out loud the things that we wonder about God, about Christianity, about faith in general. That's the kind of church we are—we're honest about our questions, our struggles our doubts. So every so many years I ask you what those questions are, those things you wonder about, and I try to address them. I want to make sure and see what's on your mind, because if it's on your mind, it's probably on the mind of lots of people.

So this morning we jump in. We wonder out loud. We ask the tough questions that thinking people have about faith. It's unfortunate that there are a lot of people out there believe that to come to church you have to check your brain at the door of the church and not think. There are people that believe that you have to lose your mind to become a Christian. I am not one of those people. There are people who believe that science and religion cannot mix--that they don't fit together. That they are, in fact opposites and enemies. I do not believe that. There are people who think that to be a Christian is to be somebody who doesn't understand the world and I simply don't believe that either.

So over the next few weeks we're going to try to tackle the questions you have that keep you from going deeper, the questions that people have that keep them from faith. Because I believe that God stands up to scrutiny. I believe that God stands up to our intellect—that any of the questions our minds might ask, God is able to give answers to them.

If I didn't believe that I couldn't stand up in front of you Sunday after Sunday and talk and challenge you to be Christians. So we're going to wonder out loud, we're going to dig. But let me emphasize this: I'm not going to tell you what to think, I'm not going to tell you what to believe, but I'm going to tell you what I believe and where I still struggle for answers myself. You're going to have to think for yourself and process for yourself.

So this morning, we begin with a foundational question. All the rest of the messages will come from your questions. But today we're going to deal with this foundational question which is, **“Is God plausible?”** Is it plausible to think that there would be a God? Does God exist? How can we as modern, contemporary people, 21st century people, intelligent people, possibly believe that there is a God?

And then I want to answer another big question that was asked by a man here at Saint Paul's. He put it very well he asked, **“If there is a Creator, WHY did he create the universe, WHY did he create us, what was his motive?”**

So, is God plausible? That's a question a lot people quietly wonder about—some not so quietly. If you're a Christian you may have answered this already, but I guarantee you, there are people you know and love, people you work with, live next to, that are asking. In the past, many people saw God as simply a way explain all the things we couldn't explain ourselves. So the more science explains, the less we need God, some people have thought.

Well, today I want to share with you four reasons why God is the most plausible explanation for the way things are in life. Maybe you don't need this explanation yourself, but somebody you know does. So I feel like have to give this one warning. This is not a typical message from me. Typically on a Sunday morning we are looking at God's word and how to apply it to everyday lives. Today's not a Bible study. Today is a starting point. We believe that God guides us and informs our faith through scripture, tradition, experience and reason. Today will be mostly focused on experience and reason.

So let's look at some reasons why God is plausible. These are not scientific proofs. But we can be thinking people who embrace scientific discovery AND believe in God. Let's start with our origins. Human beings have always been fascinated by our origins. We're always asking, “Where did we come from?” At a family level we love to look at our family history. We want to know where we came from.

Scientists have developed a whole field of study just trying to understand the origins of our universe. How did everything that exists come to be? Let's talk about that for a minute. **God as the first cause.** The origins of the universe.

Now scientists will tell us that as they look back through time and try to speculate on how the universe came into being that the most recent theory is the Big Bang theory. In 1927, the Belgian priest and scientist Georges Lemaître was the first to propose that the universe began about 14 billion years ago with the explosion of a chunk of stuff the size of a dime. That dime-sized chunk contained all the matter and energy of the universe, as well as the dimensions of time and space. Years later, Edwin Hubble found experimental evidence to support Lemaître's theory. The big bang theory became nearly unanimously accepted by scientists in 1992 when more observations were made that confirmed it. Frederick Burnham, a science historian said in 1992, **"These findings, now available, make the idea that God created the universe a more respectable hypothesis today than at any time in the last 100 years."**

Why? Because it leads to the question, where did that first chunk come from? Scientists don't know. And what set the big bang in motion? Every effect must have a cause? And what was outside that first nugget of matter? When I hear this I can't help but hear the words, **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and God said, let there be light, and there was" (Genesis 1).** God was outside that beginning of the universe. Outside of time and space, and yet inside of time and space.

That's the reality of any of the theories of the origins of our universe. You can't get everything from nothing. There has to be a cause. There is someone who initiates the energy, there is an energy that is expended in order to create and we Christians say this was God. The first cause. He was the initiator of the Big Bang. He made it happen. There had to be a first cause. That's one of the rules of science, and we know who that was.

The second reason I believe that God is plausible is because of the **Overwhelming evidence of design in the universe.** I heard a Harvard Physicist, Dr. Michael Guillen, speak several years ago. He's been a professor at Harvard and also the science editor for ABC News. He talked about how more and more scientists are seeing increasing evidence for the existence of design in the universe. And if there is design present then there is a designer. In his lecture he said that for decades it was believed that the universe as we know it was the most probable outcome of the laws of science and chance. But what scientists have discovered is that that's not the case. The universe as we know it is not the most probable outcome of the laws of science and chance. It's as if there was a guiding hand all along.

Here are a few of examples of design in our universe: The Big Bang theory. If the force of that initial explosion was just a teensy bit more or less the universe as we know it wouldn't exist. If that blast was a teensy bit more powerful then the universe would have pulled itself apart. If it was a teensy bit less powerful it would have collapsed on itself a long time ago. What is teensy? 1 part in 10 to the 59th power. That's 1 part in 10 with 59 zeros. Miniscule. It's like it was perfectly done.

Then there's water. Water is the only substance in the universe that expands when it freezes. As water cools down it shrinks like everything else, but as soon as it begins to freeze it starts to expand. It's the only substance in the universe that does that. That little quirk makes all the difference in the world. Because if that didn't happen ice would be heavier than water, ice would sink and all of our oceans would freeze from the bottom up. It's like water was designed that way.

The planet earth seems to be designed to sustain life. Scientists call this the anthropic principle. If our planet was a foot in either direction from its current orbit around the sun, life couldn't exist. If our atmosphere was 1% different in its composition you would not be able to breathe.

Then there's the carbon atom. It also has some interesting quirks. It has a very quirky attraction to oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen. Nobody knows why it's that way, it just is. But if it weren't for that little quirk, there would be no organic matter, there would be no you.

There are 75 factors, that if **any** one of them were just a fraction different, life could not exist. And more and more scientists are saying that these quirks seem to indicate intentionality in our universe. Science by itself simply can't explain these quirks. This Harvard physicist pointed out that the universe as we know it is such an unlikely outcome of the laws of science and chance that it borders on the miraculous. He even went

on to say that the more we learn about the universe, the harder it gets to explain the universe without God, the designer behind it all. Genesis 1:1 is what Christians have said all along. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now let's move beyond how the universe came into to being and start to talk about how we came to be, because that's what we're really interested in--the origin of our own species. The theory of evolution says that after the Big Bang, and after the planets started to form, the earth began to cool. And on the earth there was a primordial soup made up of the water and the basic chemicals of our planet. In that soup strings of amino acids began to form through the electricity in the air through the basic building blocks in that soup. Now this is an amazing thing to think about all by itself--amino acids forming on their own in this primordial soup. But let's just say that that could happen. Then these amino acids, on their own, say over a couple of hundred million years, began to come together and form single-celled life forms that actually were alive. Now that's a pretty amazing thing. But let's just say that that happened.

Then we fast-forward a couple hundred million more years while those single-celled life forms begin to come together in groups and form multi-cellular organisms or life forms. Those multi-cellular life forms, over another couple hundred million years, eventually began to be millions of cells put together that finally crawled out of the primordial soup. And from there they continued to develop and develop into the wide variety, the millions of life forms as we know them today: protozoa, and bacteria and plants and animals. It's truly amazing to me to think about.

Intellectually I can accept most of the theory of evolution--there are parts of it that I think really stand up. But, there seems to be something missing. The fact is that there are still huge gaps in fossil records. We're not sure how we got from there to here. We have not found fossils of species in the state of transition from one species to another. Not for any species. We have found similar species, and made a logical assumption that one came from another, but we have never found the transitional species.

Fred Hoyle, is a preeminent scholar, scientist and physicist. He said this, "**The chance that higher life forms might have emerged this way [by chance alone], is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junk yard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the material therein.**"

You are infinitely more complex than a 747 airplane. You have millions and millions of cells that are specialized in so many ways that it is truly amazing. We can't construct something as simple as a single-celled organism let alone something complicated as you are. We can't even come close to the complexity of your brain and how it functions.

For me, it takes more faith to believe that all of this happened all by itself, than it does to believe that there was an intelligent designer who was a part of the process who was the architect, the research and development department, and the mechanical engineer who helped make this happen.

Yes, evolution is a fine theory of how this happened if you have someone in there designing and helping make it happen. But the parts don't come together by themselves.

The third thing I want to share with you as we ask the question, is God plausible has to do with **Moral authority**. Christians believe that one of the ways we experience God is moral authority, or the sense of right and wrong inherent within us. Now there are lots things that we think are right or wrong because of the society we live in or the way our parents raised us. Those vary from culture to culture.

But in almost every culture and every society on every continent there is a sense of certain things that are right and wrong that are agreed upon by everyone. In every culture throughout time there is sense of right and wrong that goes against self preservation instinct. Laws that are printed on our hearts that lead to sacrifice for others, that lead us to protect the weak and fight for them. They are a higher law, an law that transcends the survival of the fittest. They make no sense if there is no God. If there is no God then we live according to the laws of Darwin—survival of the fittest. God is the source of that right and wrong.

Finally, I want to talk about **Immanent presence**. God is present in our world. We sense and experience God. As far back as time goes where human beings recorded their thoughts and feelings we find them talking about someone beyond themselves. In the writings on the walls of caves we find them

communicating about God. In every culture and civilization, using different stories and different myths and different names they all describe the same thing--an experience of something beyond themselves, an experience of another presence, an experience of God.

When people are surveyed and asked, "Have you actually experienced God?" 75% of people, half of whom don't consider themselves religious, said, "Yes, I have experienced God." You've experienced God too. You've experienced him when you have stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon. You experience him when you stand on the mountaintop. You experience him at the birth of a child. You experience him at the death of a loved one. There's just this sense that there is something more. Where does that sense come from? We long for things that are real. We long for food because there is such a thing. We long for water because it's real. We long for security, we long for love, we long for God, because these are very real. We only long for those things which exist. And not only do we long for God, we experience him.

Paul put it this way, **"The God who made the world and everything in it ... gives to all mortals life and breath and all things...[His desire is] that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'..." (Acts 17:24-28, NRSV).**

I do not believe that science refutes God's existence, I believe that science points us to God's existence. I love scientific discovery. And God wants us to understand our universe by using our minds, by seeking to discover its truths, because as we do, we discover God. I wish I had more time today, but these are just four reasons that I believe that God is plausible.

And what about that other big question? **"So if God did create all this and even science is beginning to point to an intelligent designer, to God, then why would God create the universe, why would God create me?"** Did God create us just so we could worship him and boost his ego? Why? To answer that I believe we can turn to scripture. I just have one simple explanation for that. From what we know about God through scripture, we see that God is by nature always in the process of creating and re-creating. Like a carpenter couldn't stop creating fine furniture even if he wanted to; like an artist couldn't stop painting or sculpting even if she wanted to; like a poet couldn't stop creating poetry, even if he wanted to. God, by his very nature is a creating God. Just take one quick glimpse into a clear night sky and you will see.

But look around you and you will see God's crowning achievement. You. You are a work of art. The Bible says that God knit **you** together in your mother's womb. It says that **you** are fearfully and wonderfully made. It says that **you** were created a little lower than God himself. It says that **you** were created in God's image. **You!** You are not an accident—no matter what your parents may have told you! You are a work of art.

But you are not just a work of art, handcrafted by God, you are his precious child and he knows you by name. And he has a plan for your life. And he wants to be in a relationship with you. He didn't just create you randomly. He wants you to know him...so much so that he sent his son Jesus so you could know exactly what was on his mind and in his heart.

The great thing about the Christian faith is that God offers a relationship to him. That we have the capacity to have a friendship with God and it's in that relationship with God that our lives are transformed. In that relationship we find hope in the midst of despair. It's in that relationship that we find strength when we're facing the really tough things in life. And that's my hope for you. That as we dig into these tough questions about God, that you know that God is also speaking to your heart. And that you know him here and here and serve him out there. Is God plausible? Yes. But what's more, God wants you to know him. And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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