

Did They Lie About Protons and Electrons?

Psalm 19; Luke 4:14-21

January 31, 2016

St. Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the
captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament^[a] proclaims his
handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice^[b] goes out through all the
earth,

and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens^[c] he has set a tent for the
sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from

his wedding canopy,

and like a strong man runs its course with
joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;

⁹ the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant
warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.

¹³ Keep back your servant also from the
insolent;^[d]

do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,

and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart

be acceptable to you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Three weeks ago, we talked about how our lives are like a 1,000 piece puzzle – each piece going together to form this finished piece called our life. Each piece represents a person, a relationship, an event – all the pieces of our life that don't seem to make sense in their separate pieces, until they begin to come together to form the completed puzzle.

Then the next week, Janet gave us each a puzzle piece, and showed us what the completed puzzle should look like, although we surely couldn't see that from just our

individual pieces. But, she interpreted our scripture lesson that day from Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth, about how we EACH have a unique and valuable piece to add to the puzzle. It's all gift, so none of us have a piece more valuable than another. We do each need to play our part.

The worship committee developed this "Puzzle" metaphor because it fit with the scriptures provided for us. Today's scriptures from both psalm 19, and from Jesus' pronouncement of what is ministry is all about, tell us that putting the pieces of life's puzzle requires more than just a good plan that we put together. There is a sense of mystery that goes far beyond our mere five senses.

There is more to this world than what we can experience with our five senses. Psalm 19 tells of this mysterious force at work in the universe in which [here is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...](#) I gained a whole new appreciation for the sophistication of the Psalmist's words, when I first began to hear lectures and interviews about the changing understanding of the world provided by modern day physics and cosmology.

Let me try to simply explain a very, very thumbnail sketch:

In the 6th grade, my science teacher taught me that each atom is made up of three parts. The protons and the neutrons are particles that are like glued together to make up the nucleus of the atom. And then there are an equal number of electrons as there are protons and they orbit like planets around the nucleus. Of the atom. I learned it back then, I got an A on the test, and I've been carrying that knowledge around with me ever since. It was enough, I thought.

Now I find out that instead of just protons and neutrons and electrons, there are at least 6 quarks that make up the piece of the atom. And the electrons don't orbit the nucleus like planets around the sun in our solar system. Rather each electron's position is really described as the probability of it being in a certain point at a certain time; the electrons are really essentially a smeared out cloud of probability, not in any one place at all.ⁱ Rather than in orbit, they move like waves of a string.

What?

And then – here's my latest physics lesson. We think that all matter is made up of these atoms. But actually there's another thing called ["dark matter"](#) that constitutes 80-85% of all the matter in the universe. It's just that this dark matter doesn't react to

light (i.e. it can't be seen.) It can't actually be experienced by any of our five senses; we only know its presence from its reaction to the force of gravity. But it's right here in this room – 4:1 ratio (or more) to all the liquid, solid, or gas that we can see, smell, taste, touch, or feel. It's invisible to our senses, but it's here.ⁱⁱ

Psalm 19: *There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...*
Dark Matter.

Jesus announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, in which miraculous things are going to be accomplished. And then throughout His ministry, He demonstrated the extraordinary, and unexplainable miracles that happened when He tapped into the forces of that Kingdom of Heaven, which is at hand.

There's POWER in this, that we have to be willing to let go of our simple 6th grade education model of *proton-neutron-electron-only* world view.

There's mystery and power in the acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven in our puzzle making life. There's more to this puzzle of life than meets the eye.

There is a **MYSTERIUM** to life that has been known from the creation story, through the psalms, through the miraculous work of Jesus. A lot of people want to try to limit, by interpretation, the work of God in the world to only those things, which we are able to understand.

A lot of people want to try to limit the power of God to only things that we can explain.

A lot of people miss out on the REAL power of God that really is at hand.

Dr. Lisa Randall, a Harvard University Science professor (to whom I am indebted for her explanation I gave a few moments ago about “dark matter,”) clearly and unabashedly does not claim to be a person of faith. HOWEVER, she says: ***I am awestruck and overwhelmed by all the many connections that come together to allow us to live here. I am not a religious person; I don't feel a need to explain a purpose or meaning to all that is. But I can't help but experience a feeling that we call religious when I encounter the immensity of the universe, our past, and how it all comes together.***

I have a sense that if we limit our thinking to the science we learned in 6th grade, we also limit the understanding and worship we can encounter with the living God.

Even practicing non-believer scientists seems to have a greater sense of awe than do many so-called believers, *who have everything all figured out.*

We simply cannot sit back and allow all our old answers and old scenarios to continue to serve us in our faith journey today.

Just because something worked a few decades ago doesn't mean that it is a truth worthy of our faith. We used to be able to say 200 years ago "*All preachers are men.*" And, at that time, this was the case. They weren't lying about that, anymore than my 6th grade science teacher was lying about protons, neutrons and electrons. But neither is this the truth anymore.

How many things are we willing to say are "obviously wrong" just because they aren't obvious to us?

We may not want to delve into the fact of the Kingdom of Heaven, which coexists with the world of our five senses. But Jesus came and demonstrated, as His central teaching, just how much power is available to us when we tap into that Kingdom of Heaven – but some folks want to say he was only talking in images, and the miracles were simply literary license. Because it doesn't seem obvious to us, particularly if all we are looking for is how to get a "get out of hell card" for after we die.

It is amazing what we will be able to see when we start looking for it. And it is just as amazing at how much we will miss in life, when we refuse to look for it.

We are living today in a church that is – as we speak – preparing to meet in its quadrennial meeting to determine what will be the particular standards we will follow, and how will we deal with theological diversity. And, although I have considered it a privilege to participate in those General Conference meetings the past two times, in 2008 and 2012, I am also no longer the same person I was back then. I think that I have grown.

And what I see as important today is not the same as what I used to think. I have begun to look for new things in my life, and indeed am discovering them.

Br. David Steindl-Rast, a 90 year old Benedictine whose TED talk has been watched over 4 million times, recently described organized religion like this: *it is similar to old volcanoes, which used to spew fire and power and beauty, but have too often become as calcified as rock. But every now and again, some saint*

will chip the rock and some of that old fire and power and beauty will become apparent once more.

I am ready to move beyond calcified rock structures. I am ready to experience more of the fire and power and beauty. I think I have in recent days.

My sisters and brothers, the puzzle pieces are coming together. Each one of us has our piece to put in place. How will yours fit into the puzzle?

I invite each of you to experience a little bit of the mystery talked about in Psalm 19 – things that go beyond your safe, small, easy to explain, and ultimately far too limited view of God.

At its heart. ***mysticism is nothing more than the experience of limitless belonging – to God, to creation and to one another.*** Every single one of us has had mystical experiences – women giving birth to children, people falling in love, soldiers depending upon their mate. We have all experienced this in some way, and it has taken us beyond our world of five senses.

The great practitioners of mysticism simply, and ultimately, don't forget those experiences and they allow those experiences of limitless belonging – to God, to creation, and to one another – to shape their every moment.

We can't put it into words, nor grasp it, but **we can be grasped by it.** *There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...*ⁱⁱⁱ

People that came to the Saint Marks gym a week ago and stayed on cots and ate with us, and were saved from the blizzard, are no longer the same people that came in on Thursday night. No, there was an experience of limitless belonging – to God, to creation and to one another -- for those of us who came and shared with them and heard their stories and **came to know them as real individual people – not mere statistics or new stories.**

AND neither are any of us who shared with them the same people for them, before we came and share with them our real individual stories.

These pieces of the puzzle were transformed. What was true before no longer remains so.

Today, as last weekend, and in every moment in which you open yourself to the experience of limitless belonging – to God, to creation and to one another – in all such ways, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. What will you choose to do?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

ⁱ See *e.g.* Boards.straightdope.com

ⁱⁱ Interview of Frank B. Baird Professor of Science at Harvard University, Lisa Randall, interviewed by Krista Tippett, *On Being*, November 12, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ These three paragraphs indebted to interview of Br. David Steindl-Rast, by Krista Tippett, *On Being*, January 21, 2016