

October 1, 2006, World Communion, Intergenerational Service
First Parish UCC
Genesis 1, Matthew 5:13-16
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Turning on the Light

I wonder if there has been a time in your life, maybe now, when you liked to have the light on at night. When I was young my parents used to leave a hall light on at night so the house wasn't so dark. I liked that. So, when I would go to spend the night at a friend's house and her parents turned off every light, I didn't like it. It was so dark. I would lie in bed afraid, but I was too embarrassed to ask them to turn on a light.

When this sanctuary was first built, they didn't put any lights into the building, on purpose. They wanted to use only natural light. So, at the time, there were no stained glass windows. They just had clear glass. Fairly quickly, they found it didn't work very well. So, on the pillars they put in gas lamps, which have now been converted to electricity. Yet, it still must have been fairly dark, without the floodlights we use now.

Living in an age of electric lights, flashlights, floodlights, searchlights, streetlights, and so on, it's hard to imagine what it was like for people who depended on gas lamps and candles. And it's even harder to imagine what it was like thousands and thousands of years ago when the early Hebrew people first started telling the stories of creation that we find in our Bible. For them, when the sun set each day, there was, maybe moonlight and starlight if there weren't too many clouds, maybe a

campfire for a while, but that was it. They knew, in a way that we often overlook, that life on our planet is dependent on the light of the sun.

Thus, it's not surprising that in the story of Creation that we read a few minutes ago, the first thing they said God did was turn on the light.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth... God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Once when I was doing a sermon series on the opening chapters of Genesis, a parent came to me and said that her teenage son thinks the Bible stories of creation are irrelevant. He told her he believes what he's learning in science. I wonder where he got the idea that it had to be either-or.

I do not think the Bible creation stories are history in the sense of a video camera record. However, I do think they are a powerful witness to the faithful and creative perceptions of our ancestors in faith as they pondered the same questions we do - Who, what, where, how, and why is there life?

They could not have talked about these things in the ways of modern science. Our scientific understandings of evolution and modern physics simply weren't available to them.

Yet, I marvel at some of the consistencies between their stories and our scientific theories. In the Big Bang theory of the beginnings of creation, what comes first? The light. Light is at the heart of the created order. Light makes life as we know it possible. I wonder if that is why, as Einstein discovered in his work on relativity, that the speed of light is the constant in the universe.

Also, if you follow the progression of creation in the Genesis 1 story, living creatures begin in the water, then move to creeping things on the land and in the air, then to mammals, and then to humans. Sounds a lot like some of Darwin's thinking to me. How intuitively perceptive – even inspired – those early creation story tellers were!

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In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus picks up on this central image of light and says we are a light to the world. He doesn't mean literally, like the light from the sun. He doesn't mean that you can push your belly button, like a flashlight button, and have a light come out of your head. Might be kind of fun if you could.

Instead he is talking about having the light of God's spirit. Just as the light of the sun is at the heart of physical life, the light of the spirit is at the heart of our relationships with one another, as we seek to love God, love neighbors, and love this creation of which we are a part. We are to turn on our lights.

One example of this that I experienced this last week was on Thursday evening. I was talking with some of the parents

during Parent Conversations, which happen during children's choir rehearsals. One of our young people, on her way out the door after her rehearsal, intentionally came over to say hello to me and called me by name. I think we both lit up a bit. I really appreciated it.

There are many, many ways for us to be a light to the world. May we let our lights shine.