

Wisdom Calling  
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz  
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13:55

If you ever get to the Vatican and find yourself craning your neck to look at Michelangelo's masterpieces on the ceiling (and getting yelled at by Vatican guards who herd you like cattle), you'll find yourself looking at the iconic painting "The Creation of Adam." Some of us may know this painting well; it depicts Adam reclining on his back with his hand outreached and God ascended above him reaching out to Adam, to presumably give the divine spark at the moment of creating humanity. The focus of the painting among art historians is typically on their outstretched hands, that their fingers never touch and that is part of what makes the painting unique and compelling.

Other art historians focus on the method Michelangelo used to paint the ceiling—was he standing up or did he paint the whole thing lying on his back? Or recently the focus has been on God's cloak and the fact that its shape resembles that of a human brain. Michelangelo was gifted in his depictions of the human body, so maybe he was trying to tell us something. In a BBC article on this subject, the author contends, "Perhaps Michelangelo is expressing his belief that any human concept of God is necessarily inadequate, and any image of God is thereby a creation of mind; in this case, the mind of Michelangelo." [1]

At any rate, there are a lot of theories about "The Creation of Adam" and I want to add one more to the mix today. If you look closely at the painting, God is surrounded by heavenly beings who occupy the brain-like cloak with him. God has one arm draped around a woman positioned in the crux of his elbow. There are various views about who this woman is—some say it has to be Eve, others contend that it's Mary, and yet others say this figure is none other than Wisdom herself from the Book of Proverbs. [2]

We just heard this rather mysterious passage and Wisdom is speaking and proclaiming, "When he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." [3]

Now I'm not trying to be like Dan Brown and all Da Vinci Code this morning and have all sorts of conspiracy theories about "The Creation of Adam" but thinking about the presence of Wisdom in this painting is fascinating. Truthfully, just as art scholars often don't know what to do with the woman in the painting; Biblical scholars often don't know what to do with Wisdom. There is wide-spread disagreement on whether Wisdom is a personification of one of God's attributes or is actually an independent being. [4] Is Wisdom another part of God that the writer of Proverbs depicts as a female being or is Wisdom actually an independent being hanging out with God, serving as master worker and cheering on God as God creates the world?

If Biblical scholars are divided on this subject and asking all sorts of fascinating questions, I think we can feel okay if we heard that passage and wondered what in the world it was all about. What do we do with the figure of Wisdom? In the words of scholar Elizabeth Johnson, "Holy Wisdom is mystery beyond all telling." [5] But how can we find something to hold onto this morning besides mystery beyond our ability to comprehend?

For starters, we see that God's creative work and presence is everywhere in creation, that our God lovingly crafted the mountains and hills, the heavens, and the waters for humanity to inhabit. Keep in mind that Proverbs, like the Psalms, is poetic, so we don't need to take this

literally. But the passage metaphorically shows a God who is present and a God who cares about this created world with Wisdom right by God's side throughout the process.

As John Calvin once said, "Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness." [6] Who knew John Calvin could be so poetic?

So let's think about God's presence and the sparks of God's glory in more modern terms. It's interesting that in the race to discover the Higgs Boson Particle or "the God Particle" as it's perhaps more commonly known, scientists and clergy alike often resent the nickname. Some scientists often can't or won't see any sort of sparks of God's glory in their discoveries while some clergy often refuse to see scientific discoveries as worthy and good in and of themselves. It feels sacrilegious for some clergy and too religious for some scientists to call the Higgs Boson Particle the God Particle because apparently science and religion always have to be opposed to one another.

But in the words of writer Shoshana Davis, "the Higgs Boson is thought to have caused the 'Big Bang' that created our universe . . . The nickname caught on so quickly . . . partly because it's a great explanation of what it's supposed to do—the Higgs Boson is what joins everything and gives it matter." [7] CERN in Switzerland did confirm that the Particle was successfully discovered in March, just a couple of months ago, after spending \$10 billion on the Large Hadron Collider necessary for the experiments. Physicists are thrilled and our understanding of the universe will only get better in time.

For our purposes, we need to know that the Higgs Boson Particle is called the God Particle because physicists believe it's what joins particles together, just as we see God knitting creation together in scripture. This brings up an important question when folks in either "camp" get offended by the nickname: do we always have to make science and religion fight? In thinking about where we find God in our world of scientific knowledge and discovery and how we reconcile these discoveries with our belief in God, Rob Bell writes, "I'm talking about the paradox at the core of our humanity—that we're made of dust and stars and energy and patterns of planks and yet, as it's written in the Psalms, we've been crowned with glory and honor. We are both large and small, strong and weak, formidable and faint, reflecting the image of the divine, and formed from the dust." [8]

It appears to be a both/and relationship as opposed to an either/or one. We are dust and we are made in the divine image of God. We are a small speck in this universe and we believe in a God who delights in the human race. We are sitting here struggling with this complicated passage from the Book of Proverbs and others are studying the origins of the universe and how we got to be here in the first place to agonize over scripture and try to figure out what we're supposed to be doing with our lives.

In this discovery of the God Particle and a better understanding of our universe, we have plunged even further into mystery. We plunge into this paradox at the core of our very being—that we're dust and yet we're beloved dust, thank you very much. We worship a God who poetically fashioned the universe, knitting creation together. We worship a God who rejoices in us—small, weak, and faint though we may be. This kind of mystery should blow our minds. As we like to say in the UCC, our faith may be 2,000 years old but our thinking is not.

It seems to me that the deeper one gets into science, the more abstract and mysterious the universe seems. After all, it was Albert Einstein who once said, "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all

true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness."[9]

It's actually fitting that the Higgs Boson Particle is called the God Particle. Yes, it will help us understand the origin of the universe better, but it also points to awe and wonder, and God's sparks of glory in creation (from a religious perspective anyway.) Likewise, it's fitting that we may never know the identity of that woman in "The Creation of Adam," but we can still look up at that ceiling in awe and wonder at that beautiful painting. It's fitting that we may never know what the poetry in Proverbs means when it comes to Wisdom, but we can still read the passage and feel some awe and wonder that our minds may not have the ability to grasp Wisdom fully.

The deeper one gets into art, science, and religion, the more mysterious it all seems. How do we account for a God who is knowable and yet mysterious? How do we account for a God who is powerful and present in creation and cares so deeply for each of us and yet maybe can't save towns from being torn apart by tornadoes or prevent a loved one from suffering? Maybe God's power doesn't work that way, even if we wish that it could. We may never know how to account for this beautiful and yet sometimes harsh world we inhabit, where we are made of dust and stars and energy and yet in the image of a God who loves us and delights in our very presence on the face of the earth. I guess I'm with Einstein on this one after all, "the most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious." [10] Thanks be to God. Amen.

[1] "The Mystery of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam," BBC, February 14, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/dna/place-lancashire/plain/A681680>

[2] Ralph W. Klein, "Exegetical Perspective of Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31" in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3, 31.

[3] Proverbs 8:29-31.

[4] Klein, "Exegetical Perspective of Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31" in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3, 27.

[5] Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse, 185.

[6] John Calvin as quoted by Richard Boyce "Theological Perspective of Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31" in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3, 28.

[7] Shoshana Davis, CBS News, March 15, 2013, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-205\\_162-57574534/god-particle-why-the-higgs-boson-matters/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-205_162-57574534/god-particle-why-the-higgs-boson-matters/)

[8] Rob Bell, What we Talk about When we Talk about God, 55.

[9] Walter Isaacson, "Einstein & Faith," in Time Magazine, April 5, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1607298-2,00.html>

[10] Isaacson, "Einstein & Faith," in Time Magazine, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1607298-2,00.html>