

Today we wrap up our current sermon series called “What is the Bible?” It goes along with the Bible study we’ve been doing by this same name, which ended this past week. In May I’ll offer the next part in this series of 6 week Bible studies - Introducing the Old Testament Part 1. I don’t have the dates set for that yet. More information will be available in a week or so. Today’s sermon topic for this last sermon in the series is: Archaeology and the Bible.

I had the wonderful opportunity to study in England for a semester my second year in college. It was an amazing experience. One of the classes they offered there that fulfilled my credit requirements was a basic Archaeology class connected to that region. It was fascinating to learn about how archaeologists excavate finds, how they date items and what they look for in terrain to see evidence of ruins under the surface. Most of it was above my head. I had a really hard time remembering and recognizing the traits of certain architectural styles and periods to know whether the arches we were looking at in different cathedrals were romanesque or byzantine or gothic. So if we ever go on abroad as a church, don’t ask me when we get there, ‘cuz I still can’t tell you.

One thing that stuck with me, though, was going to see the ruins of Hadrian’s wall, the largest Roman archaeological feature in Britain. I knew, as I stood there, that I was connected to something ancient and miraculous, much like my experience of standing in certain cathedrals there built in the 11th century like Canterbury Cathedral.

Archaeology means “the scientific study of the material remains of past human life and activities.” Archaeology is science so it begs the basic question about science and faith. How do science and faith go together or do they? The author of the book we’ve been using for our study, Rev. Anne Robertson, makes this statement. “It’s generally a mistake to look to the science of archaeology (or any other science, for that matter) to prove or disprove biblical accounts. Such expectations taint the spirit of objectivity on which all science rests.

Science cannot prove or disprove matters of faith and faith cannot prove or disprove matters of scientific inquiry. They are separate and distinct ways of discovering and defining “truth”.”

I think it would be helpful for you also to hear what the United Methodist Church says about science and faith in our Book of Discipline - found in the Social Principles section, specifically the paragraph on The Natural World, Science and Technology:

We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God’s natural world. We affirm the validity of the claims of science in describing the natural world and in determining what is scientific. We preclude science from making authoritative claims about theological issues and theology from making authoritative claims about scientific issues. **We find that science’s descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology.** We recognize medical, technical, and scientific technologies as legitimate uses of God’s natural world when such use enhances human life and enables all of God’s children to develop their God-given creative potential without violating our ethical convictions about the relationship of humanity to the natural world. We reexamine our ethical convictions as our understanding of the natural world increases. We find that as science expands human understanding of the natural world, our understanding of the mysteries of God’s creation and word are enhanced.

In acknowledging the important roles of science and technology, however, we also believe that theological understandings of human experience are crucial to a full understanding of the place of

humanity in the universe. Science and theology are complementary rather than mutually incompatible. We therefore encourage dialogue between the scientific and theological communities and seek the kind of participation that will enable humanity to sustain life on earth and, by God’s grace, increase the quality of our common lives together.

What do you think?

Many archaeologists have spent their lives trying to prove or disprove the truth of stories in the Bible. Today we red

together the story again of Noah and the ark. This is definitely a focus of many archeologists past and present.

In fact, The Discovery Channel aired an episode May 2020 on their show "Forbidden History" about the "Noah's Ark Formation - a mysterious rock formation in Turkey, believed by some to be the physical remains of Noah's Ark.

And an Israeli daily newspaper and website - Israel Hayom - posted these pictures in October 2021 of the same location - the Durupinar site on Mount Tendurek in eastern Turkey, an area some believe to be the location of Mt. Ararat - the resting place of Noah's Ark. Their article says Dr. Yuksel of the Department of Geophysical Engineering of Istanbul University used 3D scans to discover this formation to be the exact length of the ark as described in the Bible - 300 cubits or 150 meters. Though the last line of the article does state: "Still, geologists say that that formation, first unearthed around 50 years ago, is just a simple rock formation."

Is the story of Noah and Ark real or true? Part of our Bible study time a few weeks ago in our groups was to rate between 1 and 10 - one being completely true and ten being completely false - where we would rate certain stories in the Bible for ourselves - true or false. This story lends itself to that same examination. Where would you rate this story of Noah and the ark for yourself between 1 and 10?

If scientists can't completely prove it, I can't either. Though of all the Biblical stories archaeologists have tried to prove, THIS story does have the most evidence in literature that indeed a lot of water did consume great areas of the earth all at the same time with cataclysmic consequences in pre-history. Again Robertson states in our study book:

"There are over 200 stories from cultures in the Middle East, the Americas, India, China and other areas that report a great flood. In about 70 percent of those narratives, someone is saved in a boat. "

Must one choose between science and faith? Is this a false dichotomy? Can we be interested - excited even about scientific discovery - yet have a deep conviction that the words passed down to us in the Bible speak into our lives about One God, known in three persons, who is, was and will be?

Might this story and all the other stories in the Bible have been preserved partly to teach us about ourselves and God and our relationship together, possibly not ancient history exactly, but very much anchored in history?

Unfortunately - or fortunately - this topic - Archaeology and Bible, I think, leaves us with more questions than answers. Which, I personally believe is a great thing. I think it's better to come away from a subject of faith having even more curiosity and openness to discovery than we were when we first started thinking about it. I believe that place of wonder about the mysteries of God and life is exactly where the Holy Spirit can meet us and move us and mold us into a new creation - willing to be born again spiritually. This is life from death.

Speaking of life from death - I'm going to pivot now to a different topic for a moment. This week on Wednesday, according to the tradition of our Christian calendar we move into a new season called Lent. Yes, it does feel a little bit like we just celebrated the new year - but life marches on and so will we - but we'll do it together in community.

You'll hear me say this a few times over the next couple of weeks, but Lent - L - E - N - T - not lint, comes from an old english word, lencten, for lengthen, which basically means the season of Spring - the lengthening of the daylight hours, which I've definitely noticed happening in the last few days, have you?

Lent is not a Biblically or Jesus mandated experience - but for a very long time, Christians have set aside these next 40 days leading up to Easter on April 17 for reflection, renewal and preparation. One of the traditions Christians experience during Lent is either the giving up or the adding something that daily reminds them to stay in touch with God. It's different for everyone and usually relates to some personal need for change or renewal in your life. This giving up or adding on of something is an experience I really appreciate and almost every year, through prayer, I've chosen some way to get closer to God. Some people give up certain foods or drinks or experiences. Some people add on a time of daily prayer or reading or acts of kindness or charitable giving - acts of generosity. Really there's not limit to how to observe this season. Be creative.

So I invite you, if you are being moved by the Holy Spirit, to pray and think about these next 6 weeks before Easter and see if there is anything you are being led to give up or add into your life that will improve your relationship with God through Jesus. I also encourage you to share a decision you've made about this with at least one other person you trust so you can be held accountable.

God bless us and keep us as we hold each other up in this community of faith and rely on each other to make this life more together than it ever can be alone. That's the point of THIS church, in THIS place, an opportunity to gather together and make a difference in each other's lives and the lives of all our neighbors near and far.