

Sunday Sidebar: January 27, 2019

Beginnings

What's your first memory? Some folks claim to recall images from infancy, while others can't remember much before age 6 or 7. My (Pastor Penny's) first really vivid memory is of my fifth birthday party - my father gave me a really beautiful pant suit (hey, the year was 1970). It was white with beautiful flowers and it had a matching vest! I felt like a princess. AND....my father took us to the Memphis Zoo that day! I wore my new clothes, of course, and had an awesome time strolling around the zoo with my family and looking at all of the animals. My dad even bought a bag of peanuts for us to feed the elephants! What a great day...

If the universe could speak, what would be its first memory? A big bang? A little pop? A gentle swirling into form? However the universe formed, Christians understand that God formed it. Perhaps with a big bang, maybe a little pop, or a gentle swirl, certainly by the power of the Word: ³ **Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light** (Genesis 1.3). However it came into being, God is the agent - the prime mover - behind creation. Before anything else was, God was. I had a teacher in Sunday School that encouraged us to memorize the first four words of the Bible : **"In the beginning, God..."** It was her way of helping us understand that God has always existed, before galaxies and planets, before stars and heavens and humans and molecules, God was. God is foundational. God is before all, above all, beyond all, and over all. Perhaps that is one of the reasons idolatry is such a terrible sin in the Bible - because it puts the created things above the Creator.

Just as individuals are interested in the stories of their origins and trace their genealogy and interview family members and research events and try to piece together an understanding of where they came from, so scientists interested in the origins of our world, do lots of research and postulate numerous theories as to how and when the earth began. After all, human beings have always been curious about the world in which we live. We have a healthy curiosity and we are, each one of us to a degree, thinkers and explorers, scientists and humanitarians. We want to understand our world and our place in it. And as our understanding grows, so does our appreciation for the beauty and complexity of creation.

If we are truly interested in the truth, and not just validating our own presuppositions, then we learn to examine all the information available, even if it comes from a surprising source (i.e. the Bible). To search for truth, means to be open to it, even if it surprises you and is not what you expected. Thus, many Christians over the centuries have been surprised by the revelations of science, and many scientists have been surprised by the revelations of faith and religion. Those most open to the truth welcome it, however it is revealed.

So How Do We Discern Truth?

John Wesley used what we now refer to as "Wesley's Quadrilateral" to help discern truth. He took an Anglican tradition and added a fourth emphasis, experience. So the four points of Wesley's Quadrilateral are Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. In essence, these four things help us determine truth. For United Methodists, *Scripture* is considered the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine and understanding of the world and our place in it. *Tradition* refers to the experience, witness, and development and growth of the faith through the past centuries and across many nations and cultures. What does the past teach us? *Reason* brings our intellect and cogent thought to bear on the issue and helps us determine if a position is logical and reasonable. And finally, what does our own personal *experience* teach us? These four elements used together bring us toward Truth and help us develop a mature and fulfilling understanding of the Christian faith and our place in the world. As we grow and mature in faith, we worship God with a thankful heart, and serve others in the name of Jesus.