

A little girl asked her mother, "Mom, how did the human race appear?"

The mother answered, "Well, first God made Adam and Eve and then they had children, and so on . . ."

Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, "Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved."

The confused girl returned to her mother and said, "Mom, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said we developed from monkeys?"

The mother answered, "Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his."

One of the questions that divides the Christian community is, "Where did we come from? How did we get here? Is there a God who set it all in place?"

For some Christians this is not an issue. The biblical description of creation is all they need. "God said it and I believe it!" But there are many Christians who need to deal with science in an open and honest way. I'm not going to deal with Creationism vs. evolution today. But I do want to address those of you who need more than a biblical explanation. And I do want you to understand that the more I know about science the deeper my faith in Christ becomes.

**There are many things we believe in this world that we haven't seen.** As children we learned that the earth is round. We've never traveled into space and looked back at the earth but we believe what we have been taught.

It was the ancient Greeks who first theorized that the earth is round. This discovery is attributed to Pythagoras who first proposed it sometime around 500 B.C. "Earth is a sphere floating in space," he declared to a packed lecture hall.

It is said that a grave silence fell upon the hall when he said this. His listeners were amazed. They wondered how they could live on a sphere! Common sense suggested that earlier philosophers were right when they said the earth was a flat disc floating on the air. Pythagoras had deduced the idea of a round earth based on his observation that earth casts a circular shadow on the moon during eclipses. (1)

His revolutionary idea was accepted by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers and became common knowledge as early as 300 B.C. Most of the rest of humanity, though, had to accept it on faith. It has only been within our own lifetime that human beings have escaped the earth's magnetic field and ventured out into space and affirmed that Pythagoras was right. The world is round.

Of course, there are still some people who belong to the Flat Earth Society. They believe from their own limited experience that the idea that the earth is a sphere is preposterous. Of course, some people still contend that humans have not landed on the moon. That it was all a government hoax. I have no idea what to do with such folks, but most of us have accepted the truths of science from an early age. We believe even though we have not seen.

Scientists tell us that life began to emerge on earth as early as 3.5 billion years ago. That is amazing. They also tell us that our earth is rotating on its axis at 1100 miles per hour; that our earth is rotating around the sun at 481,000 mph; and that our sun and solar system are whirling into space at 57,000,000 mph. Wow! It would take quite a leap of faith to believe all that, but people I know and trust tell me it's true, and thus I believe that, yes, it is all likely true.

Furthermore, they tell us this universe is enormous. Now this isn't mere conjecture. For four decades two Voyager space crafts have been hurtling beyond the edge of our solar system at a rate of 100,000 miles per hour. These space craft have been speeding away from earth and are now approximately 12 billion miles from this small planet. When these craft were still responding to signals at about 9 billion miles away engineers would beam commands to them at the speed of light. It took these commands thirteen hours to arrive, even at the speed of light! It is estimated that to send a message to the edge of our enormous universe at the speed of light would take 15 billion years. And within this enormous universe there are billions and billions of galaxies. (2)

That's more than I can get my mind around, but isn't it a magnificent thought that we live in such an amazing universe? Is there anyone in this room who believes that such a magnificent universe could just have happened with no guiding hand at work? Are you mad?

British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle compares the likelihood of life appearing on earth by accident as equivalent to the possibility that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials found there. (3) An accident? I don't think so.

There is a story about a caveman who was out hunting one day and found a modern-day watch. He noticed this strange looking object on the ground making a ticking sound. Looking at the face of the watch, he saw the hands go around. Opening the inside, he saw a system with order. At that time, he didn't know what it was but he said, "If this is a watch, there must be a watchmaker."

And that is the way most of us respond to this amazing universe. Without a watchmaker, there could be no watch. And without Supreme Intelligence, there could be no universe. There is no way this world with all its immensity and intricacy and beauty could simply have happened. Even a caveman could see that.

Do you remember Thornton Wilder's classic play *Our Town*? There is a scene in it where Jane Crofut gets a letter from her minister when she is sick. The envelope is addressed like this: "Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God."

That's right the mind of God. That is where it all began. Science can tell us how it happened, but only faith can tell us why it happened.

A father told of taking his family to the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. He said the sky seemed more brilliant than they had ever seen it, and the stars were so close you felt as if you could touch them.

Their three boys decided that they would put their sleeping bags out on the ground so they could go to sleep watching the stars. The man and his wife had just settled down for the night when their youngest boy came into the tent, dragging his sleeping bag with him.

"What is the matter?" his parents asked. "Is it getting too cold?"

"No," he answered. Then he added, "I just never knew I was so small." (4)

Well, it does make us feel small. But it also reminds us of how great and wonderful God is. Even if you were determined to be an agnostic, you would still be left with mysteries that science cannot answer: The first of these is the creation of the universe itself: that there should be something rather than nothing is miraculous. The second is that, once upon a time, some of the inanimate matter on this earth planet suddenly came to life. And the third is that some of that matter that came to life gained the ability to think, to be motivated, to seek, and to imagine, even to hope. (5)

Even if you weren't impressed by the immensity and the intricacy of it all, the wondrous beauty of creation alone should show the sheer lunacy of believing it all happened by pure chance. "Nature," wrote Jonathan Edwards, "is God's greatest evangelist." And he was right.

That is one of the reasons you and I are in this room today. **We can't imagine a universe such as ours coming into being without some Intelligent Being saying, "Let there be light."** Whether it happened in seven days or whether it happened over billions of years is irrelevant. It happened because God caused it to happen.

But there is another reason we are here. **It is because two thousand years ago in Jerusalem a man named Jesus rose from the grave.**

Oh, we weren't there. We didn't see it with our own eyes. But there were a host of people, reliable people, who did see it. Listen to their testimony.

In today's lesson from Luke's Gospel we discover that when Jesus was seen after he was resurrected from the dead, some of his closest friends reacted with shock and disbelief. They thought he was a ghost. They wanted to touch him and hold him. We can't blame them. How could he be resurrected from the dead?

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcano tells about a parishioner in a church she once served who had not seen his family in over 20 years. There had been conflict. He had been hurt and decided to leave home and never return. More than 20 years later he had a change of heart knowing that he needed reconciliation with his family. He gathered up all his emotional strength and returned home. His mother and sisters, who had not had any word from him during the long period of separation and had on occasion even wondered whether he was dead, responded like the early followers of Jesus who first saw him after his resurrection.

When the man arrived at his home the family was startled and fearful. They had not expected to ever see him again and they remembered the conflict that had separated them. Was it really him? Was he back for revenge? They wondered. But finally, their pain became joy, the joy of disbelief this son and brother was alive and had returned to them. Throughout their visit the mother and sisters would say to him, "We can't believe it's you," and would touch him and hug him for a sense of verification that it was him. (6)

That's the way his disciples reacted to the risen Christ. They wanted to touch him and feel where the nails pierced his flesh. These disciples needed proof he was alive. If he were merely a bodiless apparition, it would be too easy to dismiss his appearance as a mass psychosis brought on by their grief. But they touched his hands and his feet and his sword-pierced side. He even ate a meal with

them. He was no ghost. He was the risen Christ. Of this they had no doubt. You can see that from what happened next.

Christ gives them their mission. He says to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opens their minds so they can understand the Scriptures. He tells them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

**Note that: they are to be his witnesses.** And what witnesses they became. They were fearless. No matter how hard the religious and the political authorities tried to squelch their fast growing movement they would not recant their faith.

We're told that the word Luke uses here translated as "witness" is a unique word in Greek. It has two or three meanings. Initially, it simply meant someone who was an eyewitness, who saw something happen with their own eyes. In that sense, the disciples were definitely witnesses. However, it can also mean someone who might not have seen something happen with their own eyes, but who nonetheless believes strongly enough that the event happened that they are willing to tell others about it. Paul is called a witness even though he wasn't present for Jesus' actual ministry. You and I also fit into this category.

But there's a third meaning for witness as well in the New Testament, and it's the one that applies the most. We get the word "martyr" from the Greek word for witness. It even sounds like it "martus." As you know, a martyr is someone who was killed for their convictions, for their witness. The Greeks understood the connection between martyrdom and being a witness. So did the disciples. We don't know exactly how the disciples died. Most of the stories come from tradition, not from scripture. But we do know that, of all the disciples, none of them died a natural death. (7)

That is why we know that their witness is reliable. Nobody dies for something that they know is not true. People with a second-hand faith might be reluctant to give their lives. After all, they might have a degree of uncertainty. They weren't there. They simply heard a report from people they trusted. But the disciples were there. They spoke with absolute certainty. They saw nail scarred hands. They spoke with him and ate with him. And, eventually, they died for him. There can be no doubt of their reliability.

Chuck Colson says it better than anyone else. For our younger worshippers, Chuck Colson went to prison as part of the infamous Watergate burglary and subsequent cover-up during the presidency of Richard Nixon. Colson was part a determined conspiracy to cover up a crime committed by high government officials. Colson says:

"The Watergate cover-up reveals the true nature of humanity. Even political zealots at the pinnacle of power will, in the crunch, save their own necks, even at the expense of the ones they profess to serve so loyally. But the apostles could not deny Jesus because they had seen Him face to face, and they knew He had risen from the dead. No, you can take it from an expert in cover-ups I've lived through Watergate that nothing less than a resurrected Christ could have caused those men to maintain to their dying whispers that Jesus is alive and is Lord. Two thousand years later, nothing

less than the power of the risen Christ could inspire Christians around the world to remain faithful despite prison, torture, and death.” (8)

It’s a matter of faith. But that doesn’t mean we have turned our minds off and accepted as truth something that is appealing but without substance. Just as we accept the teachings of science, no matter how incredible, because we accept the witness of authorities we trust so we accept the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because we accept the testimony of reliable witnesses. And now we seek to be reliable witnesses as well. “He lives,” says the old Gospel hymn. “He lives! Christ Jesus lives today . . . You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart.” That’s the best evidence there is of the resurrection. Won’t you open your heart and let the risen Christ take residence in your heart today?

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3. Lee Strobel, *The Case For Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).
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6. [http://day1.org/852-the\\_good\\_news\\_is\\_for\\_everyone](http://day1.org/852-the_good_news_is_for_everyone).
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