

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, May 13, 2018
Rev. Dr. David Thompson

“Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein and the Universe”

Text: In the beginning God...

A group of prominent scientists asked for an audience with God. Their spokesman said. “God we don’t need you anymore to make a human being. We are able to make human beings from scratch.” And God said

“Show me!

The scientists bent down and picked up some dirt, but God said “No, no! You must get your own dirt.”

Laurence Krauss was a student of mine who I used to spar with in George S. Henry High School. We often debated the existence of God.

He has gone on to become a prominent physicist and atheist who knew Stephen Hawking well. On Hawking’s death he wrote these words:

“A star just went out in the cosmos. We have lost an amazing human being. Stephen Hawking fought and tamed the cosmos bravely for 76 years and taught us all something important about what it truly means to celebrate about being human. I will miss him.”

Stephen Hawking died on March 14th, 2018 in Cambridge, lauded by the world and much loved by his family and friends. He is buried beside Isaac Newton one of the greatest scientist the world has ever known. Hawking an atheist and Newton a believer in a Creator God who drew order out of chaos.

Hawking was a most remarkable man, a scholar and astrophysicist who had a brilliant mind. His personal struggle to overcome ALS and still make a contribution, is the stuff of legend. He remained positive and optimistic in the face of terrible personal odds. He considered himself fortunate to have lived and he was grateful for his life. He was supposed to live only two years after diagnosis at the age of 21, but he died only one year short of the average male life expectancy at 76 years.

On Mother’s Day we remember his Scottish mother Isobel, who was one of the first brilliant women to get into Oxford, which was once an all male preserve. She saw early that Stephen had an interest in the stars and prophetically bought an Astronomy atlas. She used to sit with Stephen in the back yard at night and look at the stars. She said that she always knew that he was destined for brilliance and that he had a strong sense of wonder.

“The Hawking’s, as one close family friend described them, were an "eccentric" bunch. Dinner was often eaten in silence, each of the Hawking’s intently reading a book. The family car was an old London taxi, and their home in St. Albans was a three-story fixer-upper that never quite got fixed. The Hawking’s also housed bees in the basement and produced fireworks in the greenhouse.”

Hawking was perhaps one of the world’s most brilliant men. He said “We are each free to believe what we want, and it’s my view that the simplest explanation is; there is no God. No one created our universe, and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful.”

What was Hawking’s prime reason for why God was unnecessary?

He said: "When people ask me if a God created the universe, I tell them that the question itself makes no sense. Time didn't exist before the Big Bang, so there is no time for God to make the universe in. It's like asking directions to the edge of the earth; The Earth is a sphere; it doesn't have an edge; so looking for it is a futile exercise."

This is a profoundly honest position that Hawking takes. He has no desire to hurt anyone who believed in God. He just couldn't logically believe in God. His first wife was a devout Christian. What must it have been like to live together each day with such conflicting views?

On the other hand, Albert Einstein was not amused when people called him an atheist. Einstein stated that he believed in the pantheistic God of Baruch Spinoza. He did not believe in a personal God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings, a view which he described as naïve. He clarified however that, "I am not an atheist", preferring to call himself an agnostic, or a "religious nonbeliever." Einstein also stated he did not believe in life after death, adding "one life is enough for me."

Unlike Stephen Hawking whose mother was a power behind his success, Einstein's mother had some dysfunctional views. She thought that Einstein had a misshapen head and talked to the doctors at his birth about that. They said "No, that his head was entirely normal." She did not believe that and always thought it was her fault that he had a misshapen head.

She knew her son was brilliant but thought that he could only come up with theories and not real thoughts. Why? Because his head was misshapen.

A biography on her said:

"Einstein's mother remained convinced for the rest of her life that her son's head, for which she felt a crushing amount of guilt, was self-evidently huge and plainly misshapen, and that it produced no thoughts, only theories. To her sister, after the photoelectric effect paper: "Poor Albert has come up with some sort of physical theory. A theory, unfortunately: not a thought." After the paper on Brownian motion: "Another theory has fallen out of our poor son's huge and horribly deformed head. Is it wrong of me to hold out hope that he might one day produce a thought?"

When Albert wanted to get married to a non-Jew his mother had a fit. Her code was to call her *unmusical* as a way of saying that she was not Jewish. His mother was an accomplished pianist. Einstein went along with his mother's deception and said that the reason she didn't like Mileva was that she was not musical. Mileva, who dearly wanted to please her mother-in-law to be, secretly began to study music. Einstein and his mother would play together. She on the piano and Einstein on his violin. One day they started into to their favorite piece of music, when suddenly the unmusical Mileva leaped to her feet and sang the entire song in perfect pitch and with remarkable passion. When the song ended Einstein's, mother rose to her feet and embraced her. "My child" she cried as Einstein's eyes glistened.

But a few hours later she thought better of her embrace and said to Einstein "That singing Christian will destroy your life!" So much for supportive mother hood. She was able to give her son roots but not wings to fly. His father did that.

Einstein was a little more generous to the idea of God than Hawking ended up being. This is what he said: "To sense that behind everything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense...I am a devoutly religious man." In response to a young girl who had asked him whether he believed in God, he wrote: "everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe—a Spirit vastly superior to that of man." And during a talk at Union Theological Seminary on the relationship between religion and science, Einstein declared: "the situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

I want to have a look at Hawking's views in light of the Bible and the ascension of the Jesus of history.

Where did Jesus go when he disappeared from the sight of his disciples? Where might heaven be?

Scientists tell us that; The visible universe—including Earth, the sun, other stars, and galaxies—is made of protons, neutrons, and electrons bundled together into atoms. Perhaps one of the most surprising discoveries of the 20th century was that this ordinary, or baryonic, matter makes up less than 5 percent of the mass of the universe. The visible universe is only 5% of what is.

The rest of the universe appears to be made of a mysterious, invisible substance called dark matter (25 percent) and a force that repels gravity known as dark energy (70 percent).

Neil deGrasse Tyson astrophysicist writes of dark matter: “Could we be seeing the effects of forces from another dimension? Are we feeling the ordinary gravity of ordinary matter crossing the membrane of a phantom universe adjacent to ours?”

Perhaps Jesus disappeared into a dimension that cannot be seen. We have a name for it. We call it Heaven. Since no one knows what 95% of the universe is about, it does leave room for a heaven in my view. We don't know, and we can't say what we don't know doesn't exist or does exist. We don't know. But it is a possibility.

Genesis is not a scientific document. It writes about events, that we know today, took place 14 billion years ago. Genesis is a simple but profound non-literal document that is very thoughtful and spiritual.

Its central assertion is that there is a God who created everything. God said let there be light and there was light. It doesn't say how this was done. It sets light in a seven-day sequence whose prime purpose was that a day of rest be taught, to be set aside, once every seven days. On the seventh day God rested. We are to do the same. There is a ton of evidence that when human beings do have a day of rest they are healthier in every way. The justification for that was that God created for a period of 6 epochs or days, time periods etc. but rested on the seventh.

God also is seen to create all life and human beings in the image of God.

Now to Hawking's problem.

The King James version of Genesis begins with the assertion “In the beginning God...”

Hawking believed that space time did not exist before the Big Bang. Therefore, there was no time for a God to create anything.

Genesis asserts something different. God **exists beside** the Big Bang. In the beginning, God implies that God is present and an entity before the Big Bang or space time. Implicit in this assertion are all the calculations necessary to create the universe as it has presented itself. Like the speed of the explosion that had to be calibrated to an incredibly precise degree so that the universe continued to expand rather than either fly apart or fall back in on itself. Hawking is aware of this and says that if the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have recollapsed before it ever reached its present size. On the other hand, if the expansion rate at one second had been larger by the same amount, the universe would have expanded so much that it would be effectively empty now.

As Stephen Hawking wrote in his Cambridge lectures “This means that the initial state of the universe must have been very carefully chosen indeed if the hot Big Bang was correct right back to the beginning of time. It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in this way except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.”

Although Hawking does not end up buying this argument it remains as a difficulty for atheists and a most powerful argument in terms of probability for a Divine Intelligence.

Another calculation that goes back to the Big Bang is something called the Goldilocks distance between the earth and the sun. The earth is neither too hot nor too cold. Either would prevent life as we know it on earth.

In other words, if the Earth was 10% nearer to the Sun, it would have been too hot for the water to remain on the planet, and if it was 50% farther away, it would have been too cold for formation of life as we know it.

But the earth appears to be just the right distance for life. Why if the Big Bang is just an accident is this the case?

The previous Pope Ratzinger argued that the scientist uses the intelligibility of the universe to assert truth. For the scientist the universe is intelligible, but that Intelligibility, he says, exists because of prior Divine intelligence making it so.

Science 'rediscovers' Divine Intelligence. "Ratzinger commences with the observation that finite being, as we experience it, is marked, through and through, by intelligibility, that it is to say, by a formal structure that makes it understandable to an inquiring mind.

In point of fact, all of the sciences – physics, chemistry, psychology, astronomy, biology, and so forth – rest on the assumption that at all levels, microscopic and macroscopic being can be known. The same principle was acknowledged in ancient times by Pythagoras, who said that all existing things correspond in numeric value, and in medieval times by the scholastic philosophers who formulated the dictum *omne ens est scibile* (all being is knowable)."

Ratzinger argues that the only finally satisfying explanation for this universal objective intelligibility is a great Intelligence who has thought the universe into being. "Our language provides an intriguing clue in this regard, for we speak of our acts of knowledge as moments of "recognition," literally a thinking again what has already been thought. Ratzinger cites Einstein in support of this connection: "in the laws of nature, a mind so superior is revealed that in comparison, our minds are as something worthless." The prologue to the Gospel of John states, "In the beginning was the Word," and specifies that all things came to be through this divine Logos, implying thereby that the being of the universe is not dumbly there, but rather intelligently there, imbued by a creative mind with intelligible structure."

The psalm this morning makes the same assertion about intelligibility in the universe:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

This hidden speech and knowledge, this language is **intelligibility**. The universe shouts Design and Designer says the psalmist.

One of the most powerful arguments for me for the existence of God is the sheer complexity of all things. The universe and its laws are incredibly complex and difficult to understand even by brilliant minds like Hawking and Einstein. We as human beings are complex. Our DNA and RNA are so small yet vast in storage space for information. The latest trick we have discovered, walking in the footsteps of God, is to store data in DNA. One small shoebox of DNA could store the entire data on the Internet.

One of the categories of data today is the experience of life after life or near-death experiences. In a neurosurgeon's book The Map of Heaven, Eben Alexander says that a near death experience can open the mind of a hardened atheist scientist to a whole different understanding of the world and the cosmos and the purpose of life. He had a near death experience that totally changed his views on the universe.

He tells us this story.

A scientific, rationalist, psychoanalyst, Elizabeth Loyd Mayer of San Francisco had a problem. Her daughter's irreplaceable harp was stolen at a concert. Elizabeth tried everything she knew to get the harp back for two months. No luck. One day a friend told her if she was ready to try anything she should try a dowser. "The only thing I knew about dowsers" writes Mayer were that they were that strange breed who locate underground water with forked sticks."

Mayer knew that finding the harp using a psychic was pure fantasy from a scientific point of view. It violated all the logical rules of the world in which she was living, practising her craft as she had as a psychiatrist for decades.

At the same time she really wanted the harp back.

Silencing her inner critic, she contacted a prominent dowser in Arkansas.

"Give me a second, said the dowser and I'll tell you if its in Oakland."

"Yes" he said, "it is." Using a street map, he indicated the exact house where he said the harp was located. Mayer thought that she just couldn't knock on the door of the house with the news that her daughter's harp was there. Then she had an inspiration. She would print flyers and place them in a two-block radius of the house.

Three days later she got a phone call. The person on the line said that he had seen the flyer and that his neighbor had the harp. So, after some phone calls the harp was returned.

Driving home with her daughter's recovered harp Mayer had a realization about her scientific beliefs:

"This changes everything!"

Eben Alexander writes about having an atheist scientist's view of the world and paranormal experiences and being forced to consider that the world "as we understood it was not the world as it actually is. We may have known that these ways of looking at the world existed before, but thought them silly. We might still have thought them silly: **But... we wanted our harp back.**"

He says that another world is trying to talk to us and the more we listen the more we will understand. The twin streams of science and spirit, rather than fighting, are entwined ...the way the two serpents of the caduceus entwine, on the sacred staff, that can be seen to this day in just about every doctor's office.

On March the 14th, 2018 Stephen Hawking will have had another "Having kids—the responsibility of **rearing good, kind, ethical**, responsible human beings—is the biggest job anyone can embark on." – Maria Shriver realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful."

I believe that Stephen Hawking will have left his body, encountered a being of light and will have met his mother who was his greatest fan. He will have seen a life review and he will realize that contrary to what he thought, that there is a God who loves him dearly. He will be whole again in every way and his eyes will have filled with wonder. He will have discovered that the awe of the universe which he felt all his life resides in a Being greater than thought, a Being "that than which nothing greater can be thought" ...God.
