



# Congregational Connections

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## QUESTIONS OF FAITH- PART TWO

As this year's Confirmation Class was coming to a close, and the Confirmands were beginning to write their personal "Statements of Faith", I asked them to send me questions they still had as it related to the different areas of their statements. The questions they asked were fascinating! When we met again, I did my best to answer many of them, but there were some that are incredibly difficult to answer. Some were the same questions asked by people of faith through the centuries: why do bad things happen to good people? What happens after we die? How could Jesus have been raised from the dead? Confirmands always ask the best questions!

I thought I would spend just a little time each month of the summer attempting to respond to just a few of their questions, and probably some of the questions we still carry around with us. Often enough we adults have learned to live with the questions, even if we haven't quite produced answers—and sometimes that is all we can do.

So, the question this month is: **If all the stories in the Bible aren't literally true, how can we tell fact from fiction?**

The teenagers in the Confirmation Class are sometimes confronted for the first time with the idea that all the stories in the Bible might not be historically accurate. It's one thing to sort of guess that there is a discrepancy between the science that is being taught in school and the story of creation in Genesis. For some, it's the first time that they have heard a person in church (me) say that the story of Noah's Ark is, in fact, just a story. For some it is a relief, and for others it can be a bit of a crisis of faith.

I try to explain that the stories in the Bible can still be true, even if not historically, or scientifically accurate. For instance, the two stories of creation in Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 are not historically accurate,

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## ...QUESTIONS OF FAITH continued...

(which even the original authors knew, because they contradict one another) but what the stories have to say about human nature, or about the ultimate source and sacred nature of the creation, along with the special relationship between God and humanity “made in God’s image” are still true. The Bible makes claims about God, our relationship with God and who we are because of our relationship with God; these are areas that science cannot discern. So, the insights that Genesis offers are deeply significant and can still be true, even if we now have a better scientific understanding of the age of the universe, the formation of planets and of how life on Earth evolved over millions of years.

It’s a little like Jesus telling the story of “the Good Samaritan” or “the Prodigal Son”. These parables are filled with meaning that we continue to discern for the way we live our lives today. There are issues of forgiveness, of selfishness, of love, of recognizing the humanity of one another, of God’s love for us, and many more that impact our decision making in 2022. Does it matter whether these two stories that Jesus told are historically accurate and factually true? Do we need to know the name of the forgiving father, or the address of where the two brothers lived in “the prodigal son”? Do we need to know the date the man was robbed, beaten, and left on the side of the road? Would having verification of the factual truth of the parable impact whether the story moves our hearts to follow the example of the Samaritan?

Behind the question of “what is ‘actually’ true in the Bible?” is the question of authority. By what authority can I know that I am making good decision, know that I am beloved, know that I am on the right path? Where is the foundation upon which I can stand?

In our tradition, scripture is the primary, but not the only foundation upon which we stand. We also value the religious tradition of which we are a part, plus our own reason and experience. In seminary I was taught that making use of these four “authorities” was the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” after John Wesley the founder of Methodism. Scripture, tradition, reason and experience need to be used together to discern our paths. We believe God has given us brains to use (reason), that God is at work in our lives (experience), that we are a part of a living community of faith (tradition) and that we have the insights of people of faith developed over thousands of years (scripture) all working together to help direct us and move us toward the world God has envisioned.

As I said earlier, Confirmands ask the best questions. I hope you have a wonderful month of July. See you in church!

Courage and Peace,  
Pastor Scott

P.S. - Special thanks to Don Niederfrank for filling in and preaching on three Sundays in June while I was away on vacation. Thank you also to all the members and friends of the church for allowing me to take a once in a lifetime trip to Scotland, traveling with my daughter, sister and brother-in-law.