

Psalm 19:1-9
“God in the Details”
Series: Religion ? Science
January 10, 2010
First UMC-Jefferson City
Daniel Hilty

Media Event 1

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What if I were to tell you that right now, at this very moment, there is a miracle happening in your life? It’s true! Right now, at this very moment, there is something amazing happening in your life that defies all logic and reason and explanation. And I’m not just talking about the miraculous act of staying awake through the first four sentences of this sermon—though you do deserve congratulations for that—no, I’m talking about something that is much more amazing.

We’ll return to that miracle in your life later in the sermon. But to help us get there, I’d like us to begin by switching gears a bit and trying a little mental exercise: I would like you to try to picture in your mind a real place where you have felt especially close to God—some place where you had a sense of God’s greatness or God being near.

A special place where you have felt close to God. Do you have something? Are you picturing something? OK. Well I’d like to ask you a couple a question about that place:

First of all, how many of you thought of a building when you remembered a place where you felt close to God? How many of you thought of a church? Did anybody think of any type of building besides a church where you felt close to God?

All right. Now...how many of you thought of someplace outdoors? Yeah—a lot of us. It's really interesting how many people feel close to God outdoors—including myself. Maybe, for example, when you thought of someplace where you have felt close to God, you pictured a location like this...

Media Event 2

(Please display graphic file, "Ocean.")



How many of you feel close to God by the ocean? Yeah, I do too. You almost can't help sensing something greater than just yourself as you stare out on this huge expanse of water and life.

Has anybody ever experienced God in a place like this?

Media Event 3

(Please display graphic file, "Desert.")



A desert? You know, Jesus looked for God in the desert. The ancient church fathers and mothers looked for God in the desert. And there are still a lot of people today who find something deeply spiritual about it.

We could go on and on, of course. Some people experience God on the tops of mountains, others at the base of a waterfall. It could be any number of places, but you get the point: a lot of us seem to be hard-wired to see God in nature...in the really big things around us. There's an old poem that reads, "nature is God's sermon unto humanity." And that's the basic idea: the beauty and awesomeness of the world surrounding us can very often inspire us to think about God more than almost anything else.

That's the premise behind our Scripture reading today too. Remember how the 19th Psalm begins:

Media Event 4
The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. <i>Psalm 19:1</i>

[DANIEL READS TEXT.] Now, "the heavens" and "the firmament" are both ways of referring to the sky in this verse, so it's just another way of saying that the sky has a message, the world around us has a message, and that message is that God is good and great and the creator of all. The Psalm goes on to say that even though the day and the night have no speech, their voice and their message about God are heard to the very end of the earth.

In other words, even way back in Bible times, people believed that the natural world could teach us something about God. Religion scholars have a fancy name for the idea: they call it “General Revelation.”

Media Event 5

(Please display graphic file, “General Revelation.”)



Isn't that an imposing term? If you say it just right it sounds like a bad guy from some science fiction movie: “*Yes Sir, General Revelation.*”

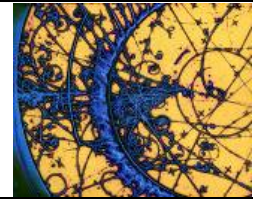
But, as it turns out, General Revelation has nothing to do with the movies; it simply refers to the notion that there are lessons about God which nature can reveal to all people. They are a “revelation” about God—or a lesson about God—and they are available to the *general* population at all times and at all places. Hence, *general revelation*.

For most of human history, people have looked at the really big stuff of creation—as a lot of us still do—in order to learn things about God: we look at the oceans, and the deserts, and mountains, and we get this sense of God's majesty and wonder and power.

But in recent years, a lot of people have been looking at smaller and smaller stuff, and saying that they can get a sense of God there too. Specifically, they've been looking at things like this...

Media Event 6

(Please display graphic file, "Particles.")



Does anybody recognize this kind of image? It looks sort of like that spin art you might have done when you were a kid. Does anybody remember that? You put a piece of paper on a spinning turntable and dribble paint on it, and it kind of ends up looking like this.

Actually, though, what we see on the screen right now was not made with paint at all. Because it is in reality a microscopic explosion. These are subatomic particles that are so small that we can't see them; we can only see the trails they leave behind.

You may have already heard how scientists do this: they take one piece of an atom over here, and then they take another piece of an atom of there, and they get them going really fast and smash them together, and for just the briefest of moments, in that impact, the scientists can see the traces of all the different little particles that made up the atom.

Well, the more that scientists study these super tiny, subatomic particles, the more they discover that these little critters are weirder and stranger than anybody could have ever guessed. Rob Bell, who is a pastor in Michigan with a deep interest in science, talks a lot about some of these oddities in his "Everything is Spiritual" tour, which inspired a lot of what we're talking about today.

What scientists have found, for example, is that some of these subatomic particles can actually disappear in one place, and then instantly reappear in another place, seemingly without any rhyme or reason. They actually teleport themselves. And at other times one solitary particle can exist simultaneously in two different locations. I mean, how crazy is that?

And it gets even weirder! This is another example that Rob Bell cites—and it's my favorite: some scientists have discovered that if you take one of these subatomic particles, and you split it in two, and you separate those two pieces by thousands of miles—say one half in New York City and the other half in San Francisco—these scientists have found that whatever you do to one of the two halves will also happen to the other half at that exact same moment no matter how far apart they are. So, you shake one half of the particle in New York City, and at that exact same moment in San Francisco, the other half will shake. Isn't that wild? It's like there's something invisible that connects them over thousands of miles.


And yet, as amazing as these particles are, they're also really frustrating, because scientists cannot what they're going to do next. You cannot predict them. They're kind of like the misbehaving children of the subatomic world: you think they're going to go left, and instead they go right. You think they're going to go up, and instead they go down. You tell them to be home by 8, and instead they stay out till midnight. You tell them to stay in their room, and instead they teleport to the kitchen. These are very ornery, misbehaved, unpredictable little

particles that make up every single atom in every single molecule in you and me and everything there is.

They're so unpredictable, in fact, that a lot of scientists have come to the conclusion that the universe at its core is made up of some sort of relationship of energy to which we are simply spectators, and we can do nothing to control. That's how Rob Bell puts it. He says that some scientists have concluded that when you get down to the smallest levels of matter, what you find is that the building blocks of the universe almost seem to have a mind of their own. They have their own personality. And even though we have no idea what they're going to do next, they somehow seem to know exactly what they need to do in order to make everything work together just right—almost as if there was some secret purpose or will or plan guiding them unseen.

Another scientist I read puts it this way: he says that when we get down to the very smallest building blocks of matter, since we cannot predict or prove so much of what we think is there, all we can do is to take a leap of faith to accept it. Those are his actual words: we have to take a leap of faith to accept it, he says.

Isn't that amazing? We humans peer into the very smallest space that we can ever perceive, and even there we find lessons about faith. It's just one more place where religion and science meet in some unexpected ways.

Media Event 7	
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That's what we're looking at for a few weeks here at First United Methodist as we start the New Year: where are some of the places that religion and science may or may not intersect? And one of the most intriguing areas where folks have seen the overlapping of those two circles in recent years is in the behavior of these tiny, tiny particles that are all around us—and *inside* of us—particles that can teleport instantly from one spot to another, and exist simultaneously in two different locations at the same time, and behave almost like magic.

Or to put it another way, these particles behave almost like tiny little miracles. After all, they disappear and reappear, they defy logic or reason...they almost seem supernatural...and if that's not miraculous, then I don't know what is?

But you know, the funny thing about miracles is that once we have an explanation for them, we think that they cease to be miraculous. Have you ever noticed that? If we can explain something, we no longer call it a miracle, even though it might still be just as amazing as it ever was.

For example, most days I carry around a tiny little object in my pocket. And whenever I want to, I can take this mysterious object out of my pocket and talk instantly to anybody in the entire world. A hundred years ago we would have called that a miracle, but today we just call it a cell phone.

Or when I go home, I can sit down in front of a little picture frame and talk face-to-face, live, with my cousin on the other side of the globe. Fifty years ago

we would have called *that* a miracle, but today we just call it a computer...with Skype.

Today we fly through the air from one corner of the earth to another. But we don't call it a miracle; we call it an airplane.

Today children and adults overcome horrible diseases to live long, rich lives. But we don't call it a miracle anymore; we call it medicine.

Right now—at this very instant—a baby is being born. New life is coming into the world. But we do not call it a miracle anymore; we just call it another mouth to feed.

And someday someone will come up with an explanation of why particles inside of us appear and disappear at will, and why—when you shake one-half of a particle in New York, the other half in San Francisco will shake too—and we will not call it a miracle anymore either.

But does that really make any of it any less miraculous? I mean...what if, in all of our explaining and all of our understanding, we let go too easily of the sheer wonder of this world that God has created around us? After all, whoever said that just because we can explain something amazing, that that automatically stops it from being amazing? And where is it written that wonders stop being wonderful just because we can explain them?

Which brings us back to the miracle that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon—that miracle that is happening right now in your life: you see, inside of every one of us, right now, at this very moment, there are those amazing particles of matter that defy explanation. Inside of you and me right now, at this very moment, there are those particles that disappear, and reappear, and jump, and move, and are uncontrollable and unpredictable. In other words, inside of every one of you right now, at this very moment, there are amazing wonders that no one can understand.

And the subatomic particles are just the beginning! Your life is a miracle—literally. And even if somebody some day can explain it all, that explanation will not make your life any less amazing. Because make not mistake about it: your life continues to be, and will always be, a miracle.

Or to get more to the point: your life is a witness to the reality of God. You are a living testimony to the wonder and power of God. Your life is already filled with beauty and miracles that can only come from something or someone who is much greater than ourselves.

But whether or not we see it that way is up to us. Rob Bell says that every day—and every season of life—we have a choice to make: either we can see our lives and the world around us as random and empty and mechanical; or we can see our lives and the world around us as glorious and beautiful and miraculous.

That's really what faith is all about, after all: faith is looking at a mountain and standing in awe of the God who made it. Faith is peering into an atom and marveling at what wonders God has wrought. (*Faith is standing by a graveside and hearing God's promise that there is yet more to come.*) Faith is gazing into your own soul and discovering the image of God in which you were made. And faith is looking into the eyes of a friend, or an enemy, or a stranger—and knowing that somehow, somewhere, God's glory dwells in them too.

We are living and breathing miracles of God each and every day—they are all around us. They are within us. And they are signs of the God who loves us, and who miraculously became one of us to show it.

You see, miracles did not just happen in Bible times. We are still living in a world of miracles and wonders. In fact, that's the only kind of world there is. Sometimes we just need to ask God to open our eyes, and our hearts, to see it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.