I recommend the hymn, ‘Praise the Source of Faith and Learning, ” words by Rev. Thomas H. Troeger,(Oxford University Press) Music by Rowland H, Prichard, Tune Hyfrydol, 87.87.D.

### First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

May 18, 2008

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme-Faith and Science as One,

Genesis 1: 1-2:4a, Matthew 28: 16-20

It is Trinity Sunday. Actually, every Sunday worship service is a form of Trinity Sunday in our church, because each involves the one true God in three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is especially noted in the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed we usually confess, and in the Gloria Patri and Doxology we often sing. We usually have at least one of these elements in the worship service because we want worshippers to remember the Trinity—the one true God in three persons.

The Trinity was emphasized even more today when we baptized Cassidy Jo Clark in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Every time we baptize someone in the Presbyterian Church it is in the name of the Trinity. Why? Because this is what our Lord Jesus commended us to do as we heard in the reading from Matthew 28: 19.

Our benediction from II Corinthians 13: 13 is also one of the verses in the Bible that particularly highlights the Trinity, God as three-in-one, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” What a rich description of God’s character, and our relationship to the Trinity this is.

Today’s lectionary scriptures highlight each of these aspects of God’s Trinitarian character. The creation story from the Book of Genesis, and our Call to Worship from Psalm 8 are litanies of praise to God the Father for being our creator and for the creation in which we live. Matthew lifts up Jesus Christ the Son and his Lordship over us. Genesis, Psalms, Matthew and II Corinthians all lift up the Holy Spirit or Spirit of God in some manner. All of the scriptures used in today’s worship, as well as the concept of the Trinity, are beautiful and poetic attempts to describe the character of God, and how we are to respond to this one true God, who is our creator, redeemer and ever present friend.

I would propose to you that one of the ways God wants us to respond to his character as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit involves the linking of faith and science, heart and mind. In some parts of our American society, this response is a problem. One I cannot fully understand. Usually the problem of linking faith and science surfaces in public as being between two extreme sides of the creation issue. On one side are the creationists, who take the Genesis creation story we read literally and who say this is exactly how creation occurred—no questions are to be asked otherwise. On the other extreme side are the pure evolutionists who say that there is no God behind any of creation, it has all evolved by itself. The foundational problem to me is that the attitude of both sides are undermining the character of God, and are denying the understanding of God’s creation the Biblical people experienced and wrote about, as well as our modern day comprehension of God’s good creation. The people who wrote the scriptures lived in a world where faith and science were one. This is still true in today’s world. The character of God as seen in today’s scriptures reflects faith and science as being one, just as our hearts and minds are really one. I believe God wants us to respond to faith and science by linking them together.

This response is especially poignant to me today as we recognize our graduating seniors who have been both educated in our Sunday schools and worship services on faith, and in our secular schools and settings on science. Have we taught them contradictory ideas or have we shown them that faith and science can work together as one? As your pastor I have a Master’s of Divinity Degree where over half of my seminary credits are in the Bible, and a Bachelor of Science in elementary education with a major in science. I have never had a problem with faith and science working together or understanding that God created and continues to create the universe in an evolutionary manner.

Let me take you through the creation story in Genesis whose basic message is that creation is a gift of love from God to all living beings, and is a hymn and/or litany of thanksgiving to God for this very reason. The Genesis story is also a reflection of the scientific understanding of creation by the well educated Jewish Priestly writers of the sixth century B.C. Like good scientists, they observed how creation worked and made well founded conclusions from what they saw. They also had the gift of faith in God from the Holy Spirit, and so by faith gave credit to God for this creation that made scientific sense to them. NIBC, Vol. I , pg. 337

The creation story tells us that God just suddenly created the universe and earth over periods of time, called days in Genesis. In those days, however long they may have been, God and the Spirit or wind of God also created the heavens and the earth, light and darkness, the sun and moon and stars. Also in those days they thought the earth was flat and covered by a dome. This is all they knew at that time and it was not until many centuries later that scientific studies demonstrated that idea to be deficient, but they gave it their best shot. In college, I studied astronomy where we could see into the night skies and notice the continuous evolving of stars and galaxies in the universe, but our sight of the universe was still limited back in the 1960’s. Today, thanks to better equipment, the evolution of the heavens is stunning to see. I praise God for such a spectacular and ever changing light show. Did it begin with a big bang? Who knows for sure, but, the big bang scientific theory does not mean God did not do it that way. I mean Genesis tells us that God just suddenly created the heavens and the earth. Could this have been the big bang?

In those early days of creation, God also created the dry land, oceans, vegetation and animal life of all kinds. In college, I also took geology. We took field trips to the Uniontown area of Western Pennsylvania where the hillsides had been cut away for roads. This exposed hundreds of millions of years of sediments demonstrating the evolution of the earth. I went on trips to the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh where a fantastic array of dinosaur bones and fossils are displayed showing the evolution of animals, sea life and vegetation. I also took a course in Taxonomy which is the study of the classification of flowers and trees. On one field trip along the Monongahela River south of Pittsburgh, our class discovered a never before seen specimen of trillium flower. Instead of three petals and three leaves, it had six of each. It was carefully dug up, replanted and grew the next year and was named after the two students who discovered it. This flower had mutated or evolved into what it was. We also took up bird and bee watching on these field trips, because birds distribute seeds that spread tree growth and bees help pollinate the flowers. God created and continues to create things in a mysterious and exciting manner. Scientific study is a stimulating way to learn about it all.

Then, as Genesis also tells us, God created humankind in our image, according to our likeness. The sixth century BC priests believed that God created us in consultation with other unknown divine beings. By doing this, God was demonstrating that he was willing to share his power of creation with others. What does it mean we are created in the likeness of God and other divine beings? Theologians have debated what this means for centuries. I like the idea promoted by some Biblical scholars that to be made in God’s image means to we are to look outside ourselves and this creation to the creator God to understand how we are made and what we are really like. It means we have the ability to speak with the God who made us and God with us. There is more to us than the eye can see or human science can fully understand. But, we can still use science to learn more about ourselves and how to take care of ourselves while we pray in faith to the God who made us. I thank God every day for the science of education that teaches us how to read and think, for medical science that saves our lives many, many times over, and for the scientific study of the Bible that helps us more accurately understand what God really is saying to us in it. NIBC, Vol. I pg. 345, G. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology Vol. 1, pg. 145

There are some scientific questions the Bible does not speak to, like did we evolve from the apes? This is because the priest of the sixth century BC did not know anything about this science. However, lots of good jokes on this come to mind when I hear and see things that make me wonder if we have not evolved to far above the ape level. If God created us this way, fine, if not fine, no need to get bent out of shape over it. It does not deny the truths in Genesis. As a student teacher in an elementary school, as a Christian educator and parent, I have seen firsthand how children evolve in their learning and physical growth. As a pastor, I have seen how people of all ages mature as humans and evolve in their faith. I evolved in my faith and understanding of the church in what I learned on the sabbatical. Yes, we do evolve and change as humans and I think it is part of God’s plan from the earliest days of creation. Remember, God saw all this and said it was “Good!”

As I mentioned before in the creation of humankind, God is into power sharing and so God shared the responsibility of the care of this earth with us. Genesis tells us, “God blessed humankind and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Misinterpretation of these verses by greedy and power hungry human beings has just about destroyed the earth. These verses mean we are to care for this planet as God does. We are reminded many times a day about our responsibility to do a better job than we are now. In one of my science courses in college, we learned how to care for our environment. We learned about air and water purification and how to stop soil erosion to name a few areas. In meteorology, we learned about the weather and how wind patterns not only help control our climate, but how they can spread our pollution. Even after living in Cheyenne for over seven years, I am still trying to figure out the winds of Wyoming. Back in the last of the 1960’s, we also heard that someday there would be satellites what would help us watch and predict the weather a “whole seven days in advance.” Through the science of these satellites and our space travel we have a new appreciation of this planet and the universe do we not? I think all these discoveries not only expand our understanding and appreciation of creation, but of the God who made it in the first place and said it was, “Good.” Who gave us the responsibility to care for it as he does. For me, science along with the creation story in Genesis have worked together to help grow my faith in God so that I can spend a life time of discovering how great, how expansive, and how wonderful God is!

In Matthew 28, God’s awesome Son, Jesus told us to go out into this magnificent creation therefore and make disciples of all nations,….. teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” To make disciples of anyone means that we teach and demonstrate the truth about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to them. If we think about the many ways Sunday school teachers, pastors and mission workers have spread the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world, we can see how making disciples involves the sciences we call education, Bible scholarship, medicine, psychology, social work, farming, animal husbandry, water purification and more have been vital to the success of the mission.

Today’s scriptures and my life experiences have convinced me that faith and science are one, and that the One true God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the creator of it all. I hope you might see God in the same way, too.