



FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

January 2022

We are always looking for stories, poems, photos, thoughts to contribute. If you have notices about upcoming events which you would like published, please let [Anne Short](#) or [Jody Green](#) know and we will try to include. Thanks.

In today's Chatter:

[What Might We Do?](#), R. E. Markham
[In the Beginning](#), Rev. Mark Seifried
[January Birthdays](#)
[New Members](#)

This is another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who have contributed stories, biographies, reflections, letters, poems and encourage any who wish to contribute to our church newsletter. As you can read in this edition, we have many talented friends and church members.

The newsletter will be printed at the beginning of each month and be sent via email to church members and friends, be sent by mail to those who would prefer a written copy and be available in the foyer for all to pick up when the church is reopened. We would like to get to know all of you better and encourage you to send your thoughts, poems, stories, photos, to us to publish. Thanks so much.

Dear Church friends: Church Council recently voted to support the partial distribution of recent growth performance from the Isabelle Makepeace Trust. This would need to be supported by the other recipients of this Trust and agreed upon by the TDBank who manages this Trust. If approved, Council Council would authorize \$250,000. to be transferred to the Meetinghouse Preservation Fund for the work on restoring our beloved church building and the remaining money to be spent as Church Council approves. More information about this decision can be found in the Church's Annual Report 2021, treasurer's report.

What Might We Do?

R. E. Markham

White Euro-Americans have dominated world history for at least four hundred years. Yes, they have created many inspired, marvelous, even miraculous, works of art and science, but they also over-ran native populations, undervalued their cultures, plundered their resources, and enslaved or exploited many people of color, often justified in the name of a limited and narrow interpretation of Christianity. They've engaged in conflicts and wars resulting in the deaths of millions, and persons of color numbering in the billions have suffered because dominant whites have ignored their plight.

What might be done to redress these many wrongs? The first step simply is to acknowledge that our white ancestors, largely unaware of their spiritual depth, practiced violent actions which replicated a pattern long embedded in the human (esp. male) psyche, namely the desire to be in control. Those of us who are white may resist such acknowledgment because we are comfortable with our privileges and would rather not question how we got them. It's easier to be in denial instead of admitting complicity in white dominance.

Fortunately, some progress has been made because people of good will in the millions have sought to undermine racism and minimize white supremacy, and continue to do so. But so much more needs to be done. Just observe the large crowds at many sports events or concerts, and notice the vast majority of white faces. Collectively, they are indicative of white dominance.

A positive action would be to ensure that all citizens can exercise their right to vote. But, given the polarization of our culture, obstacles to this rightful exercise are all too frequent. Is it possible that white folks fear losing control when they see the number of non-whites gradually increase?

Another positive step would be for those on the left and on the right, indeed for all of us, to surrender our hatreds and realize our human finitude and fallibility instead of rigidly holding to our points of view. Points of view, past and present, are not absolute; they are largely the product of DNA and the cultural conditioning of each individual and group.

We may be inclined to lay a guilt trip on our ancestors, ourselves, and others because of collective and individual wrong-doing. But to do so would be to overlook the fact that, without any awareness of the spiritual dimension of our beings, most behaviors arise out of some combination of DNA and heavily embedded cultural conditioning instead of being consciously chosen. Realizing this human weakness can help us have compassion for our ancestors, for ourselves, and for others, such compassion being rooted in our spiritual depth.

Ultimately, we are all one, so need to cease labeling each other and obsessing on secondary qualities of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation which are tantamount to treating each other as objects. This is so necessary if we are to achieve a more peaceful world. With the help of spirit, may love and hope prevail.

[\(Back\)](#)

In the Beginning

Based upon Genesis 1:1-13, January 2, 2022

Rev. Mark Seifried @ First Church Williamstown, UCC

I love speculating about the beginning of creation. I imagine desolate nothingness exploding to become somethingness. I wonder what caused the explosion. I wonder how all this happened: nothingness becoming rocks that soared through space, generating energy and life. That life force is still unfolding.

I know science can explain some of the processes that created life. It seems, though, that the more scientists discover, the more they add to the mystery of creation. I am in awe of people who devote their lives to primordial research, but only slightly. You see, if you're pondering the origins of the universe, the South Pole is the best place for it and the last place I would want to be with my intolerance of cold. The highest temperature ever recorded there was just 9.9 degrees Fahrenheit, while the lowest was -117 degrees -- not exactly the kind of place to put one in a garden-of-Eden frame of mind. Yet, the South Pole is the perfect place for cosmic contemplation because it's the one place on Earth that you can get closest to space and still be on the ground. It's also one of the driest and clearest locations for observing things like faint microwaves in space -- which science geeks think are linked to the "Big Bang" theory of creation.

While scientists love the South Pole, some theologians and biblical scholars might yawn, because -- since the Enlightenment -- science and religion have often been at odds over the origins of life and the universe and there's a lot at stake in the debate. Many people wonder if they have to check their brains at the door when they come to church, or check their faith at the door when they go to class or the workplace. That's why today we are embarking on a worship series regarding the transcendent truths of biblical myth.

Some Christians are afraid that if creation didn't happen exactly how and when the Bible says, then perhaps the other 1,187 chapters of the Bible aren't true either. Some scientists and other intellectuals struggle to hold their faith in tension with the evidence of cosmic observation, fossils and geologic time. I wonder, is this tension between science and faith really necessary?

The reality is that science and scripture observe the same universe through two different but equally valid lenses -- like the difference between viewing Van Gogh's painting "Starry Night" and looking at a picture of deep space from the Hubble Space Telescope. They are both true in the sense that they describe an actual thing: the sky.

Van Gogh, however, wasn't trying to describe it scientifically; that's a function of the telescope. Van Gogh instead painted an artistic rendering of a clear night sky. It's a picture made to tell a story in ways beyond systematic description -- it makes you feel something. The Hubble photo can do that as well, of course, but it's intended for a scientific purpose.

There is, in other words, a way to tell a story that transcends our post-Enlightenment categories of true versus false, science versus myth. The writers of Genesis would not have recognized those categories. They lived in a world where people arranged their lives around a particular story set in a particular time and place.

The Creation Narrative is neither pure history or science, nor is it pure myth and fiction. It is the story they found themselves in -- it is the story of two central characters: a mysterious Creator and the complex humanoid. It's a story about "cosmic elation" -- the joy of a creating God, a God who creates all things as "good."

Listen again to biblical story of creation's origin: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the waters." It's important to note in this story that God is starting creation with raw materials. If this were a text concerned with material origins, which is what the "Big Bang" theory does, we would expect the text to start with nothing. However, here we have this formless void, darkness and "the deep." We might miss this, but an ancient person would have understood what's going on here: these are all indicators of chaos and non-order. The Hebrew word for "formless" is *tohu* -- it means to lack worth or purpose.

And what is God's response to this non-order? God "creates." The Hebrew word for "create" is *bara*. When we think of the word "create," we normally think of "making something." We "create" a piece of art, a building, a meal, etc. But we can also "create" a committee, a curriculum or a family. "Create" can refer to a lot of things, so to understand its meaning, we look at the way the writer uses it. *Bara* is used some fifty times throughout the Hebrew Bible, and in most of those cases, the direct object of the verb has to do with creating something for a specific role or function. God doesn't just create something; God creates things for a specific purpose.

We see this purposeful creation in the structure of Genesis 1. During the first day, God creates "light" (which science tells us is actually an object) and calls it "day." God is not merely creating light, but rather the function of time. On the second day, God "separates" the waters, creating the function of weather. On the third day God creates vegetation in order to provide food. In other words, God begins by creating the functions of time, weather and food -- all the things that are necessary for human existence, which happen to be the things humans think and talk about the most. Everything is created for a purpose. The story says at the end of the sixth day, God looks at it all and calls it "very good." It's all functioning as God intended.

Modern people talk about creation that unlike any other life form, somehow *homo sapiens* got off track, as if God messed up when She created humans and gave us free will. Next week, I'll be reflecting on what the Bible calls the fall of humanity. Today what I want you to consider is the possibility that we really may not be off track. What if humans are actually fulfilling our divinely appointed purpose as we evolve socially?

What if humans were created and are evolving to fulfill God's purpose like the rest of creation? What if we are so preoccupied with the minutia of living that we overlook the trajectory of love from which we were created and for which we are created? As Ilia Delio suggests, "Love is not a sheer emotion or simply a dopaminergic surge in the limbic system, it is much more deeply imbedded in the fabric of the universe.

Love is the integrated energy field, the center of all centers, the whole of every whole, that makes each whole desire more wholeness.”¹ While love-energy may not explicitly show itself in the observable expressions of creation, it is presently partially formed as the unifying principle of wholeness as created entities, including humans, evolve toward greater complexity.

Delio suggests that “love-energy marks the history of the universe. It is present from the Big Bang onward, though indistinguishable from molecular forces. It amplifies itself by way of union because ‘it is the most universal, the most tremendous, and the most mysterious of cosmic forces.’”

The brilliant young poet and activist, Amanda Gorman seems to understand that we are evolving and on the cusp of something new. As we look back at so much devastation these last two years from the coronavirus pandemic, racial reckoning and the climate crisis, she invites us to look at the new life that the Spirit is creating. In "New Day's Lyric,"² she writes:

*May this be the day
We come together.
Mourning, we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better.
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we weren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
Steadily we vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.
This hope is our door, our portal.
Even if we never get back to normal,
Someday we can venture beyond it,
To leave the known and take the first steps.
So let us not return to what was normal,
But reach toward what is next.
What was cursed, we will cure.
What was plagued, we will prove pure.
Where we tend to argue, we will try to
agree,
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future
we foresee,
Where we weren't aware, we're now
awake;*

*Those moments we missed
Are now these moments we make,
The moments we meet,
And our hearts, once all together beaten,
Now all together beat.
Come, look up with kindness yet,
For even solace can be sourced from
sorrow.
We remember, not just for the sake of
yesterday,
But to take on tomorrow.
We heed this old spirit,
In a new day's lyric,
In our hearts, we hear it:
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
Be bold, sang Time this year,
Be bold, sang Time,
For when you honor yesterday,
Tomorrow ye will find.
Know what we've fought
Need not be forgot nor for none.
It defines us, binds us as one,
Come over, join this day just begun.
For wherever we come together,
We will forever overcome.*

1 Ilia Delio, [The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love](#), (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), pgs. 43-44.

2 <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/amanda-gorman-new-poem-new-days-lyric-1276981/>

Beloved, at the beginning of this New Year, let us rejoice in the fact that our world is evolving to make more room for love and thus the perfection of creation. Let us ponder our role as creatures who are created to build the Beloved Community. Let us give thanks that parts of our world are falling apart so that we can become whole. Let us acknowledge that our preoccupation is in itself the problem, that our vexation and distress, however understandable, hinder rather than help our capacity to see. In this New Year, let us redirect our gaze from focusing on that which is falling apart so that we can direct our energy and attention to the evolution and revolution of love which will make all things new. Amen.

[\(Back\)](#)

*A little bit about the members of our community who
joined the Church on Sunday, December 19, 2021:*

§ Nadia Jensen is a resident of Goodrich Hollow in Hancock where she lives with her husband, Richard Gillerman, her dog, Clementine, and cat, Baby Marmalade. Nadia and Richard also have three sons, one daughter-in-law, and one grandson who was born in August, 2020. Nadia is an adjunct professor of education at Bridgewater State University in the School of Education. She is passionate about teaching and her work for social justice. Nadia is a reader, baker, swimmer, walker, snowshoer and also savors time with her family friends.

§ Mike and Karen Kuranda live in Stamford, Vermont. They are joining First Congregational Church, transferring from Acton Congregational Church, UCC in the Boston area where they were members for 30 years before retiring locally. Mike enjoys working outside, flying, biking, hiking and tennis. Karen is a quilter, knitter, weaver and loves all things textiles. They have three grown children – two sons that are married living in the Boston area and a daughter in Nashville who will be wed next September.

§ Ruth Giordano was born in Baltimore, Maryland and moved to the Boston area with her parents in 1965. She spent years in the theater on stage and behind the scenes in set and costume design and production. Ruth spent several years in Taiwan. She is recently widowed and has two wonderful adult children. She has been part of the First Church Community for several years, presently serving on the Shawl Ministry Team and is working with the textile mending group.

[\(Back\)](#)

January Birthdays

5 th	Pat Leach	12 th	Sally Sussman
7 th	Julie MacDonald	12 th	Susan Clarke
9 th	Lola Bohle	25 th	Amelia Murphy
12 th	Wilder Burris-Wells	28 th	Ed Lawrence

[\(Back\)](#)