

“THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING”

A Sermon for Holy Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2017

We watched a movie a while back called “The Theory of Everything”—a romantic drama about Stephen Hawking, the theoretical physicist who is sometimes called the most brilliant person living. He wrote a book with the impressive title “A Brief History of Time.” He has solved problems which eluded other brilliant minds, in spite of suffering from a serious illness most of his adult life. (He is not “theoretically a physicist” as though he were pretending. He is called a “theoretical” physicist because he helps our minds to conceive of, to understand the universe. “Theory” comes from the Greek word for “seeing.”)

I mostly enjoyed the movie, which tells the story of how he fell in love with Jane, got married, had kids, fell out of love, fell in love with someone else, etc. The movie has a sort of “happy ending.” To wrap up the story they had to depart from the truth, however. Michelle Dean, reviewer for the Guardian, wrote this:

The movie presents the demise of their relationship as a beautiful, tear-soaked, mutually respectful conversation. Of course that didn’t actually happen either. Jane’s book describes a protracted breakup that comes to a head in a screaming fight on vacation. She also described devastation when Hawking announced by letter he was leaving her for his second wife, Elaine Mason. He ended up married to Mason for 10 years before that fell apart and then he and Jane mended fences. Which, as it happens, the movie fudges too. It tries to present the rapprochement as coming when Hawking was made a Companion of Honour in 1989, but that actually happened before the couple separated.

The movie gets its title, of course, from the amazing theory Hawking developed about black holes being

an explanation of how everything got its start. All creation comes from that. So, in a manner of speaking, his theory was a “theory of everything.”

But I am not satisfied with the movie. I think it is ironic that when Stephen Hawking revealed brilliantly how everything really happened in the beginning, how we should “look at” it all, a movie which wants to help us see how to “look at” his life would have to deceive, to sell tickets.

All movies, all books, all people “theorize” about how things really are and should be and why they are the way they are. How do you see your life? How do you look at it, in the context of the lives of others? Is your life how it should be? Why not? Whose fault is that? Do you deserve the life you have? Are you getting the ending that you want to this “movie” you call your life? We all have our pet theories. We tell each other “it’s fine,” or else we say “it isn’t fair”—things like that. We have our theories. About everything. Everything that matters, at least. Matters to us, I mean.

To theorize simply means to figure out how to look at something. We all have theories which are meant to help us cope with the variety of life experiences, both those we observe and what we go through ourselves. Underneath it all, whether you want to admit it, you have a theory about life—your life and the lives of others. Is it good? Is it not good? Some of us rely on our feelings to forge a theory; others think things through. Some rely heavily on comparison with other people; some depend on books or other authorities. But we have our theories. Of everything.

I was disappointed with the movie “The Theory of Everything” because of what is left out of the theory. I don’t care much how you explain the universe. I want to understand why people disappoint. How

people change. Whether we can be hopeful. Those are the things I want to understand. I know I shall die someday. I want to know whether my having lived will mean anything. Anything positive or negative. And what will that depend on? How good a pastor I've been? How many grandchildren I have? Whether people remember me? What does it all depend on? My having lived a certain sort of life? My mind is still open, and will be until the day I die.

I've heard many theories. Most of them center on one word: enough. People feel like a life should contain enough accomplishment. Enough opportunity. Enough good feelings. Enough happiness. Just enough. We are only sad about people who don't have enough. For us, things don't have to be perfect—just good enough. But I don't know your theory of everything. I'm talking about people I know, some of them.

Having raised the issue of having a "theory of everything," I haven't left myself much time to propound one. But here it is. Here is a theory of everything: the Holy Trinity.

This theory, this way of looking at myself and all of you and my world and its circumstances, is roughly outlined in the Apostles' Creed, and interpreted by Luther in his Small Catechism. At the end of his explanation, we affirm "This is most certainly true." So we don't think of this as a theory which needs to be tested and might change. We affirm it as revelation. It is similar to our own theories, just a lot better. Its central hypothesis is that Jesus is the answer to what we seek, when we wonder about a theory of everything. Here goes:

Everything comes from God, who created it to be good and sustains it. (First reading) That includes me, head to toe. I thereby incur an obligation of thanksgiving and praise to God, which, sadly, is beyond me because of sin. But the Spirit of God calls me always back into that relationship, pardoning my sins for Jesus' sake and assuring me of everlasting life and safety for Jesus' sake. The recall God issues

by his Spirit applies to the whole world—everyone should be restored to the peace which we can have only through fellowship with the creator. Amen.

The key to this spectacular set of equations which I'm calling a theory of everything is that the calling back to God occurs from start to finish in the form of a gift, not a quest. Or rather, God is on the quest, not me. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . . means, God is tracking me down and will get me to come home, no matter how far I roam.

Yes, there is lots of really bad stuff in this world. Astonishingly horrible, sad, cruel, desperately foolish stuff. I get angry, I get sad, I get frustrated. But according to this theory of everything which we call the Word of God, my anger and sadness and frustration are not what God wants for me or for anyone, but rather a peace which passes understanding, which is not available "to go" but only in Christ.

There are invented theories which may lead us to take action or reconcile ourselves to the bad stuff in the world or just do "what comes naturally." But the "theory of everything" of which the Apostles' Creed is a synopsis is not something somebody came up with. It would be pointless, if the God who we call the Trinity was our enemy, and some third-party vendor came up with a theory of how we could bring God around to our wisdom. Not happening. God would not be God, if God could be suckered into befriending the wicked people who live in the world just like the people did before Noah. But God is God, and God is both almighty and eternally merciful to all who trust in him.

Now, that's a theory of everything which I am not making up. Seeing God like that, seeing God through the lens of Jesus Christ, I am bold to say, with some regularity, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." Amen.