In Karl Marx’s work *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* he makes his famous assertion that religion is the opiate of the people. Well he actually said “Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes" because he was German. Anyway, the statement reflected Marx’s belief that religion was used by the big shots as a way of keeping down the little guy by soothing their woes with a drug that numbed their present suffering with the promise of a better tomorrow. Now like most things with Marx there is an element of truth in what he says, but also like most things with Marx it is one data point and then he is off to the races. Certainly, religions have been used as a way to tell people that they need to accept their lot in life with good cheer thereby relieving those in power of any obligation to do anything about their current sufferings. The problem is with where Marx took this idea. It is one thing to say we need to look out for the poor and needy, but Marx believed that the salvation that religion promised could in reality only be filled by the material world. In other words, if the masses simply win the showcase showdown on the *Price is Right* all will be well. Salvation is to be found in the material comforts of the world. But we have all seen stories of the Hollywood star who kills themselves or have met a miserable rich person to know that material comfort is not a guarantee of happiness or even contentment.

Marx’s mind was not subtle enough to understand that you could materially help people and also have a hope in what lies beyond this celestial ball. And in so many words this is what we hear from Isaiah today when we read, “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.” See God is not saying that the things of this earth are bad but simply pointing out that they are not eternal. That when we look for happiness, contentment or whatever we want to call it we must do so in the places that are eternal, not in the places that are fleeting.

One of the dumbest debates that goes on in our society (and that is saying something because we have an incredible amount of dumb debates these days) is for lack of a better term we call the debate between religion and science. The underlying problem with this debate is its binary nature. It suggests that you are either on the side that posits that religion, or the spiritual explains everything or on the side that says science, or the material explains everything. But again, like the inability of Marx to see overlap or subtlety this argument leaves a lot to be desired. Let me tell a little story and see if I can explain what I mean. The other day when the family and I were on Mackinac Island we passed by a church with one those little historical signs. This particular sign explained that this church was the first Protestant church on the island. We were kind of reading it and Amy asked if we wanted to go inside. Meredith replied that we couldn’t because we weren’t Protestant. We then briefly got into a discussion about whether Anglicans were Protestant. Anyway, concurrent with this another family was passing by with some young children who apparently heard our conversation and one of the children asked the mother what they were. The mother got very animated and proudly declared that their family believed in science and then started singing a little ditty about science – it was all a little weird. I obviously do not know the inmost workings of this woman’s psyche, so I am not sure what led her to her improvised showtune, but she is not an outlier. The milieu of our current society encourages a view that science is for smart people and religion is for people stuck in the dark ages. And so by saying you believe in science you are in many ways announcing what kind of person you are. And while science speaks to many things, including the ultimate destruction of the earth that we hear about today in Isaiah, it does not speak to that place deep inside us that asks if this is all that there is. All science can offer is the material world. And in a purely material world our longings and desires will have to be filled with a new television or hot tub. But here is the thing and the reason why I started off by saying is that it is not binary.

My job as your priest is not be like the woman singing about the wonders of science just substituting science with Christianity. Because all of it is part of God’s creation and should not be cordoned off into either or propositions. We worship a God who became man and dwelt among us. In Jesus both the fullness of the material and the fullness of the divine dwelt. Which means we do not have to make distinctions. We do not have to say religion good, material world bad because it was all shown to be good in the incarnation. And this can be something we miss in the passage from Isaiah. For it is easy to look at the destruction of the earth and say that God wants us all to be spiritual beings, but the passage also talks about the destruction of heaven. God is saying these things, which we label the spiritual and material will ultimately lose their distinctiveness and we will all be united in God, just as in the garden. See ultimately it is not about picking a side but realizing that all the distinctions we make are our own creation and that true unity for everything is found in God. We cannot say that all things needed are found in the material just as we cannot say that all things needed can be found in the spiritual because ultimately such distinction collapse in the totality of God.

The beauty of Christianity is that it is not against the material world nor is it against the spiritual world, rather it acknowledges that they are all united in God and specifically in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. We don’t have to say scientists or Karl Marx or anyone else are wrong rather we just say that they are not fully right. That they are missing the unity that is found only in Jesus Christ or as Isaiah puts it today, “my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.” That is where we are going, we are going to a place not of distinction but of unity so that we may be God’s this day and forevermore.