There is a debate in philosophy and elsewhere about how it is that we know something. Often this debate is put in terms of the observer and the observed and the amount of influence that each one has in what we call reality. Let me try and explain before you nod off. Lets say we look at an apple. We would conclude a number of things about it, things like its size, shape and color. Now let’s say someone suffered from the most common type of color-blindness, which is red-green color blindness, looked at the same apple. When they observed the apple they could still describe its size and shape but to them the color of the apple would be a kind of dull yellow. Does this mean that the apple has ceased being either green or red? Of course not, rather we would say that there is an error in the observer and that the apple has a color independent of whether someone can see it or not. There is of course a lot more nuance in this, but for the purpose of my sermon let’s leave at this for the time being. Now just to show that I was not wasting your time with this discussion of knowledge and the observer I would like to point out that it shows up in our epistle lesson today. It’s under a slightly different guise but Paul is essentially talking about the ways that we can know something and how much of our knowledge is reliant on us. He says, “But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory….God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.” Rather than dividing up knowledge between the observer and observed Paul breaks up knowledge between the knowledge acquired through the human spirit and the knowledge acquired through God’s spirit. In other words, we learn some stuff through our own innate human abilities while other stuff requires God’s spirit dwelling within us. This means that knowledge procured by human means can only take us so far. Like the colorblind person and the apple, we may get some knowledge but for complete knowledge we have to rely on something else. The color blind person may acquire their knowledge of colors from a book or other person, but for the human wanting to grow in their love and knowledge of God they will only acquire this knowledge from God’s spirit. To mix metaphors in cases of divine knowledge God needs to tell us that the apple is red.

The theologian and archbishop Anselm of Canterbury said in his work *Proslogion*, “I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe even this: that unless I believe, I shall not understand.” In many ways this is the same argument that Paul makes. Anselm is saying that only through believing is certain truth revealed, which on a practical level means that our own ability only takes us so far. To grow further requires a belief in God. Meaning that our minds are limited in what they are able to understand. If there is a more contrarian or anti-establishment argument in our day and age I am not aware of it. Our present mindset is probably best summed up by that most pedestrian of modern day thinkers, Bill Nye who said, “Science provides a much more satisfactory way to seek answers than does any religion.” Bill Nye is arguing that just like Dorothy had the power all along to get back to Kansas, humans have everything that they need to acquire knowledge. The modernist worldview argues that everything that we need to understand the universe was provided when our brain developed in the womb. So to say that our minds have limitations is incredibly countercultural in a world that believes all of the secrets of the universe are there to be discovered by 2.8 pounds of white, grey and dura matter. It seems a tall order, but Bill Nye is the science guy – how can I argue with credentials like that? Well I am going to fly too close to the sun this morning. So let’s start the argument.

To begin with I think we need to get in the WABAC Machine and see how we reached this modern belief that science can answer everything….so here it goes. Roughly speaking humanity has traditionally viewed the world as split between two realms the earthly and the heavenly, with some overlap between the two. Depending on the religious tradition there is some variance between what is found in each, but the important thing to remember is that there was the belief that there were certain things that were beyond humanity and this earthly sphere. That is there were things that only God or the gods were privy too and humanity was only able to learn of it if God or the gods decided to pass this information on.

So let’s jump ahead to the scientific revolution and the change which it wrought. The key word associated with it is materialism, which basically means the idea emerged that all things could be explained by matter, that is by the stuff of which we and the universe are composed. Actually, strictly speaking this argument is that everything can be explained by the stuff that we can perceive with our senses. And since you have eliminated everything that cannot be observed and monitored with our senses then the explanation for everything has to be dependent things we are able to observe. So for example if you are feeling sad, the materialist explanation is that your brain is a little low on the serotonin needed to lube up the machine of the mind. Similarly, if you wonder why you feel love for your children the materialist explanation is that this sense of love is simply the way that the mind gets you to take care of them so that they will be able to milk the cows when they get older. And if you have a spiritual experience, it is not God but rather just something going wrong in your brain function, in the same way some people think they are Napoleon. The materialistic worldview eliminated the heavenly realm and argued that we could explain everything by poking around under the hood.

But we as Christians, while not being anti science, simply say that this this explanation is still missing a big chunk. Science can explain how the musicians make the sounds that produce a Bach Cantata, but they cannot tell you why it is beautiful. Science can tell you the evolutionary instincts for getting married but it does not do a whole lot to explain why we fall in love in the first place. And science does nothing to explain the longing in our hearts for God. Science has done a good job of, to continue with my Wizard of Oz theme of telling us to ignore the man behind the curtain. And as a result we miss so much, becoming complacent and genuinely incurious. Total reliance on science makes us lose that spiritual connection which lifts our gaze upwards towards that which is ultimately beyond our grasp.

And so now back to St. Paul, St. Anselm, the colorblind and whomever else it is that I have mentioned in this sermon in discussing our need to be countercultural and grow in the knowledge that comes only from God. If the Tower of Babel has taught us anything it is that we cannot work our way up to God, but rather that God has to work his way down to us. Our humanity can make us aware of this God shaped void in our heart, but only God can fill it and for that to happen we need, through study, prayer and worship, to open ourselves up to be able to receive God’s Spirit which will teach us what is beyond our ability so that we may be his both now and forevermore.