

***The Uncertainty Principle***  
**Exodus 16:2-15 Sept. 18, 2011**

- I. There is always at least two kinds of people.
  - A. Those who are grateful for everything and those who are ungrateful for everything. Another grouping maybe, those that see God in everything and those that see God in nothing.
  - B. And I believe there is another break down of people:  
those who are comfortable, appreciative and even awed by the undetermined, uncertain, mysterious nature of the future and of God. And there are those who insist on black and white certainty and curse the darkness of uncertainty in life.  
These folks need certain, clear and definite answers to life's questions, even if those answers falsely create a fantasy world that is removed from the reality of indeterminate uncertainty.
  - C. There are those like Albert Einstein who insisted to his death that God does not play dice with the universe and there must be an underlying certitude.
  - D. But the scientific evidence seems to support Werner Heisenberg who showed that there

is no certitude in the underlying makeup of reality – you just can't pin it down the way Einstein wanted to do.

E. This sermon is coming to you at the request of one of the instant sermon questions from a few weeks ago.

It was a question that I thought really needed more than a couple minutes to elucidate.

That question was:

For people who like to know the right answers, how can they feel comforted and comfortable with the unknown or unspecified?

II. This question is really quite profound, especially the way it phrased.

A. We all need definite answers to function.

1. We need some unchangeable rules, otherwise the game of life is just totally absurd and unplayable.
2. We need to agree on what is right and wrong.
3. We need to believe that gravity will always hold us to the ground and that when we sit on a rock we won't just slip right through as if nothing was there.
4. We need to know that  $a^2 + b^2$  will always equal  $c^2$ .

- B. We need answers that we can commit to as if, **as if**, it is the “right” answer.
- C. But in the back of our heads we need to keep in mind that it really isn't **the** “right” answer and that others may have come to different answers that are just as valid and “right.”
- D. I have been working through this course that is a part of the Great Courses Series called “The Joy of Mathematics;” which is something that I still have suspicions that only a masochist would say.
1. But in any case Professor Arthur T. Benjamin, of Harvey Mudd College says that one of the ‘joys of mathematics’ is the “Joy of Certitude.”
  2. The only problem I have with this is that this certitude only comes as long as you only play one game and stay within rules of that one game.
    - a) For instance, we usually in our normal daily mathematical calculations use a base 10 system – that is 0-9; but there are other systems.
    - b) There is also base 2 (binary) and base 16 (Hexadecimal) both of which are often used in computer work.
    - c) Each of these will give you different answers to the same question.

3. How about geometry?
  - a) I mean the Pythagorean Theorem we all learned in school always works --- right.  
 $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
  - b) With Euclidian geometry there certain definite answers, just as long as you only operate within the rules of Euclid. Rules like parallel lines will never intersect.
  - c) But certitude disappears when you then bring in non-Euclidian geometry as Einstein had to do in order to describe the Time Space fabric where parallel lines **will** intersect and Time Space is curved.
4. Like the Hebrews following Moses we are stuck in the wilderness without any certainty – accept one.

**III. Whether we like it or not we have a lot in common with those Hebrews who were condemned to wander in the wilderness.**

**A. Moses rescued the Hebrews from the oppressive clutches of the Pharaoh, and brought them out of Egypt with promises from this new God that Moses recently encountered; promises that they would be taken from the safe, secure, though horribly**

oppressive bondage of the Pharaoh and be delivered into a land of milk and honey.

- B. But the problem was that they didn't end up in the land of milk and honey, the land of security, comfort and certainty. Instead, they found themselves wandering around in the wilderness.
- C. Maybe they should have asked a few more questions about this God that Moses had met before they agreed to leave Egypt.
- D. Yahweh was this God's name.
- E. The Hebrews in their religious heritage had been use to god's they could pin down even make images of and hold in their hands.
- F. This new God commanded that no images should be constructed of him/her/it.
- G. When Moses asked what this new God's name was, the answer was Yahweh; a name which meant – "I AM what I AM" or "I will be what I will be;" or in other words, "I AM a mystery – I can't be pinned down, put in a box or labeled."
- H. So Moses had asked them to leave the comfort of certitude to follow this God that

was mysterious and totally lacking in definitude.

- I. So there they are wandering around apparently lost in the wilderness following this guy who is getting directions from this God that is a total mystery.
  - J. Does that describe how your life sometimes feels?  
It probably should.
- IV. So the title for this sermon – The Uncertainty Principle is borrowed from Werner Heisenberg’s theory of quantum physics called the Uncertainty Principle.
- A. Pretty much what Heisenberg theorized and research has substantiated is that reality has no certitude, but is rather a wave of probability until we in our need to make sense of reality pin it down in our own conscious observation.
  - B. In other words, it is our conscious observation that creates the reality we see; making philosophers ponder if this is a function reality or the creation of the conscious mind.

V. So what this all comes down to is that for those who want certainty in life, for those who insist on having the “right” answer, for those who need everything to be black and white and no shades of gray; life is going to be very frustrating – ‘cause that’s just not the way life is.

A. Now you can force life into a box, you can coerce life to be just black and white, you can create a world where everything stays within the prescribed lines; but then there are a couple things you must realize.

1. First, you must realize that this world of certitude is a fantasy.
2. And, second there will be times that life will refuse to cooperate and the underlying indefiniteness of life will break loose from the definitions you have given it.

B. Do you remember what the Hebrews of the exodus did when they became too uncomfortable with wandering around in the wilderness?

1. They fashioned the golden calf, an idol.  
They went back to worshipping a god of certitude that would act in a defined way, a god that they could see and manipulate.
2. They didn't trust this new God;  
which is exactly what this new God wanted.
3. This new God that Moses was following and in turn they were following, this God named Yahweh, this God that was a totally undefined God of mystery who refused to be put in a box; this God who offered them no certainty – all this God wanted was their trust.

## VI. This is our God, the God of Moses is our God.

- A. It is the one God and the only God.  
All other gods are illusions and delusions and images of our own creation, idols, graven images burned into our minds by our need for definition.
- B. We are the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness and all that is required of us is to trust God.

## VII. Now why should we trust God?

- A. Well, because it appears to be this God that has gotten us here; given us freedom, releasing us from the bondage of

determinism and fate; but in the process bringing us into a land of uncertainty.

**B. Why trust God?**

**Because it is God who sustains us.**

1. As we read this morning, God cared for the wandering Hebrews by providing food for them.
2. Even then they didn't trust God and against God's direction some of them hoarded the food because they didn't believe the God would continue to sustain them.

**C. Why trust God?**

**Because God is the only one who can lead us out of the wilderness and God is the only sure bet; the only certainty.**

**D. God is the Principle of Certainty.**

**E. In a world of uncertainty, God is the Principle of Certainty, the one thing that is certain and gives meaning and coherence and purpose.**

**VIII. Faith development is learning to trust this God of mystery and incertitude.**

**A. So for those who might ask the question: For people who like to know the right answers, how can they feel comforted and comfortable with the unknown or**

unspecified?

The answer is: learn to trust God.

B. We do live in the wilderness, in a world of probability, not certainty, in a world of ambiguity, not definitude, and we must learn to trust God – a God who is a mystery.

C. Life happens. That we know for certain. What life brings us we have no certainty of.

1. How many times are lives changed in the blink of an eye in ways one never could have imagined?
2. Sometimes for the good, sometimes for the bad; through it all the one certainty is God's love.

IX. So this is all we have for certain --  
Life, Death, Taxes and God's love.  
AMEN.