

“The Story Begins”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney ~ July 21, 2024

Genesis 1:1-2:4, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Today is the beginning of VBS. What you will hear today is the adult version of what the kids learn today. Every Sunday you will have the opportunity to participate in this service. I encourage you to talk with the kids. See what they learned. Thank the many people who have participated in the making this possible. We don't have a lot of kids. But we are just beginning. What starts off as a trickle today can be a raging river in years to come. Have faith and tell your stories.

You know, life is a story. Bring two people together and they will soon be telling stories. Two men in a fishing boat -- well you know how that ends. Look at our fixation with the news. Every morning and every evening, millions of people read Facebook or turn to the news. Why? Because we human beings have this craving for meaning; we want to know the “rest of the story”

“Tell me what happened,” we say to a friend. Tell me your story. I'll try to help you make sense of it. Who am I? Why am I here? What does God want of me?

Neil Postman wrote: Science provides many answers. “But in the end science does not provide enough. They have unique answers to the origins of our universe, our evolving human body. But somehow it is unsatisfactory. How did it all begin? Science will now answer: “probably by accident.” “The Big Bang” or “Intelligent Design.”

In 1996, astronomers focused the powerful Hubble Space Telescope on a small and utterly black patch in space right next to the “Big Dipper” constellation. They left the shutter open for ten days. Wow! 3000 more galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars, planets & moons.

In 2004 they did it again. This time they focused on the constellation Orion and left the lens open for 11 days and discovered 10,000 more galaxies. And recently, they did it again with the James Webb Telescope and found 25,000 more galaxies. And here we live on a small blue marble spinning in our own orbit

around the Sun. While fascinating, it does not answer our toughest questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What does God want of me?

Walk into any large mall. Everything looks familiar, but unless you have been there before, you are lost. So, you find a map. All big malls have a map. On the map is a big red star. We know that the star means “you are here.” This is the big picture. This star is where you are in the big picture.

God has a story. Genesis tells us the story about God’s interaction and plan for humanity. The real point of Genesis is not to explain scientifically and historically how everything was created, but rather that God loves us and wants to be with us.

In the beginning or Once upon a time...

It is a wonderful phrase. Full of promise. An invitation. Once upon a time a beautiful maiden....

A long time ago in a galaxy far far away....

All good stories start that way.

Christianity tells us that there is an Author, A Creator, and He is good. He is the source of all things good. The Hebrew word for God is Elohim. Elohim is plural for God. Not the English word “gods” but God plural. The Trinity. God the Father. God the Son. God the Spirit; for the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Before the world began there was darkness. Like the darkness of a cave in which you cannot see your own hand inches from your face. Suddenly a voice shatters the darkness. A voice breaks the silence. There is light. Another word. The seas form. Another word and mangoes appear on the branches of trees. Poppies fill the hills. Rain forests. Prairies in full bloom. All in an instant.

It doesn’t stop. God opens his hand and animals spring forth. Birds of every kind fill the skies with flight and song. Thundering across the plains. Buffalo, horses running like the wind. Elephants. Caterpillars. Peacocks.

Stop. Think of the complexity. Step outside this evening. Look at the universe, or a blade of grass.

The perfect and beautiful world God created was good. Hummingbirds. Kangaroos. Tulips. Mangoes. The Serengeti. Morning mist.

We have come to the dramatic words of the Creator. “Let us make humans in our image.” Elohim the master potter scooped out of the ground a clump of clay,

molded and made it into the first human, and then breathed into that human the breath of God. He began with a lump of clay.

We were created to be like God. What does that mean? The ability to create. To share intimacy. To know joy and laughter. And most of all. We can love. In love he gives freedom. Yes, even the freedom to reject His love. He wants to be invited into your story. He wants to be involved in your personal history and mine.

One of the deepest human longings is the longing to belong. We are relational to the core. We want to be invited into “family.” We want to be accepted. This is the harmony and peace our soul longs for. **All was well.**

Once upon a time... all was well with Adam and Eve.

Once upon a time... all was well and the animals ate grass.

Once upon a time... all was well and there was no stress, no tears, no sadness.

That is how God wanted it to be. God envisioned not just a good life for us, but a perfect one. A beautiful garden. An abundance of food. No disease. No sadness. He said, “This is very good.” Like any parent, he wants the absolute best for you. God never intended for human beings to suffer. But someday we feel we are living in a nightmare.

Remember when God created Adam and Eve, he gave them “freedom.” Rather than force them to love Him in return, they could choose to be with Him or go it alone. The story says they listened to the voice of a ‘creature’ rather than their Creator.

It must have broken God’s heart to see his creation choose evil over love. And today we are surrounded with evil. War. Famine. Betrayal. Murder. Surely, we know there is evil in our world. Where does it come from?

It comes when we do not take evil seriously. We live as if the “Story,” our “story” has no villain. Every story has a villain. The Big Bad Wolf. Darth Vader. The Wicked Witch of the West.

But God never gives up on us. God created us and loves us deeper than we will ever know. God has faith in us even when we have given up on him and lost our faith. God continues to take the steps necessary to repair that relationship with us.

He initiates redemption. God gives hope. God offers forgiveness.

Remember God tried everything. That's part of the Story.

He warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door. He chose not to listen.

God tried a flood.

God tried a covenant with Moses at Sinai.

God tried prophets.

God tried kings.

God even tried a temple.

Nothing worked. Finally, God literally stepped into His own creation. His name was Jesus. And his mission was to bring us back into harmony and peace with Him.

God never gives up on us. He loves us as we are and hopes that we can become what he created us to be. God heals the blind. He accepted those the Jewish culture considered "outcasts." The leper. The lame. The Samaritan. He raised the dead. God never gives up on us because we are his creation, and he loves us.

Forgiveness is offered to Adam and Eve. To you and me. He offers you Himself in the Bread and Wine. He offers to walk with you in Your Story. But he will let you choose. Amen.