

Sermon- Pentecost – May 24, 2015

Have you ever had one of those days? For me this week it was actually two days. They got away from me.

It takes 10-15 hours to write a sermon and I usually divide those hours between Friday and Saturday. This Friday I did some of my sermon prep, but was then also busy with writing the funeral sermon and funeral prep, answering email, pastoral calls, and an oil change. And of course I had to help get my kids off to their father's for the weekend. Emma texted me from school, "Where are my shin guards?" Yesterday, Saturday I was up at 6 and was busy during the day with the funeral, baptism prep, and meetings. I thought I'd leave mid-afternoon to finish the sermon, but then got a call from a nurse saying my Mom was in the hospital. She is fine. She fell and broke her wrist while trying to hang curtains. I drove to Lowell to pick her up, get her home, and get her supper. That also meant she could not pick my sister up at the airport who was flying in from San Francisco. So I was at Logan last night getting Tanya. By the time I got home it was 10.30pm and no sermon.

So what I have for you this morning is something I wrote for the Connect Class I led last fall. It is called "The Story of Redemption in Five Acts." Most sermons focus on a particular topic like "Forgiveness" or "God stands with you during the difficult times." But this Story is more of a Balcony View. It is a way of looking at the whole arc of the work of God. You may find it helpful to use as a framework on which to hang the other smaller bits of the story we hear on most Sundays. Today, on Pentecost, the day we celebrate the birthday of the church, you can see where the church fits into the larger plan of redemption.

The five acts are:

Act I: The Goodness of Creation and Original Blessing. Act II: Creation is Broken through Sin. Act III: The Healing of Creation is Begun through the five acts of Jesus: Incarnation, Teaching, the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension. Act IV: The Time In-between: The Holy Spirit, Church, & Discipleship. Act V: Restoring Original Blessing: The Return of Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The Story of Redemption in Five Acts

Act I: The Goodness of Creation and Original Blessing

God created the world, the universe, all the land, and oceans, and plants, and animals, and people, and you, and God found it to be very good. It was a blessed creation. God loves what God has made. Our very existence is founded on goodness and generosity.

As part of this creation, humanity was given free will. We can make choices about how we live. This is important, because without free will there can be no love. If we were forced to love, it wouldn't be love. Love for God and each other can only happen when we freely choose it. By allowing free will, God ensures that the original and ideal condition of the creation, including humanity, is to be within the embrace of love.

With this free will we are to choose to care for and love all the creation. Having been created in God's image, we are to rule and live in the way of God.

Act II: Creation is Broken through Sin

However, free will is a means of both love and sin. It is through free will that sin entered the world and that Original Blessing was distorted.

*Sin is treating God, or any part of God' Creation, as if it were less worthy than it is. **

Sin is not about being a bad person, or being unworthy, or evil. No one, No one, is beyond the love of God. Sin means rather to choose to do things which treat God or God's creation as less worthy than they are.

Through sin we cause wars, we pollute the earth and oceans, we hurt animals, each other, ourselves, and so on. But the Creation itself was made to be good. And God gave it to us to care for. But through our poor choices, our sin, we have broken that Creation.

But God wishes us, and all creation, to be restored to Original Blessing. To that end God chose the prophet Abraham to be a human vehicle of restoration. A covenant was made with Abraham. The Covenant said that Abraham would worship only God, and in return Abraham and his descendants would be God's people. Then through Abraham and his descendants the whole world would be reconciled to God. To aid in this endeavor, over the centuries, God sent prophets, martyrs, and the Law to teach us how to live rightly.

But sin persisted, Creation remained broken, so God decided to go further.

Act III: The Healing of Creation is Begun through the five acts of Jesus: Incarnation, Teaching, the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension

Salvation means the restoration of Original Blessing. It means we, and the creation, return fully to who it is we were created to be, reconciled to God. The definition of Salvation is “healing.”

Incarnation: God embodied God’s self in the form of Jesus to heal us and the rest of creation from sin. The incarnation by itself is like yeast in the dough. Jesus is both God and Man. The divine enters humanity and so the very nature of humanity is transformed. Jesus tells us, “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.”

Teaching: Then Jesus taught us how to live. He told us to prepare for the Kingdom of God. To return us back to Original Blessing we must choose to love both God and neighbor. We must forgive. We must ask forgiveness. Jesus taught us by word and example how to avoid sin now and in the future. He told us to trust him. He taught us how to live as inclusive, grateful, loving people, recognizing the full worth of, and serving, each other and all of God’s Creation.

The Cross: The meaning and work of the cross is interpreted in several ways by the writers of the New Testament.

One way to see the cross and resurrection are as a form of healing. A way of restoring wholeness. We put our sins and sickness on Jesus, the willing scapegoat. He takes them on himself. But sin is strong poison and it caused him to die, nailing him to the cross. But sin died with him.

Resurrection: At first sin seems to have won, Jesus is unjustly tried and dies on the cross, but Jesus has the last laugh and rises from the dead. Because this transformation happened from within, Jesus was human and living as a human, as part of the creation, it has changed the very fabric of creation. Sin and death are overcome and creation can be healed. The potential now exists that what was begun with Jesus can happen to all of creation. We can all take the inevitable sin and death that comes our way, and transform them, rising to a new life.

This death and resurrection are a sign of a new Covenant God makes not just with the descendants Abraham, but with all people, all creation who desire to be part of it. This Covenant means we are God's people and He is our God. Jesus establishes this covenant during the Last Supper.

Ascension: Jesus' ascension bodily into heaven underscores the value of the physical creation, and how all will be restored to Original Blessing.

Conclusion: The healing is not yet complete, but through Jesus we have been given the tools to exercise our free will in the service of God's mission of restoration. Original Blessing cannot be restored without our freely choosing to participate; otherwise love would not be part of fulfillment. And the restoration is the Kingdom of God, which is a place of infinite love beginning in this life. Therefore there must be a period of our participation in the fulfillment, an in-between time. This is the period of the church.

Act IV: The Time In-between: The Holy Spirit, Church, & Discipleship

Holy Spirit - After Jesus left earth, his followers were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fell on the disciples, it bound them together and created the church. This Spirit of God was given to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus in the millennia after his departure. The Spirit will guide us into all truth.

Church - The church holds us together with God and each other in the time where we wait between Jesus' first coming and his second. It is where we strive to implement the teachings of Jesus and participate in the healing of creation. We do this in community by loving God and neighbor and all creation, forgiving others, repenting of our own wrongdoing, and being confident in God's love for us. We freely choose to do this.

The church is not a building or an institution; the church is the people who follow Jesus. It is imperfect, like all humanity is imperfect. The church is not the Kingdom of God, but at moments we can find glimpses of the Kingdom in the church.

Bible - In addition to the gift of the Spirit, the church has been given the gift of the Bible. These stories of God's saving love and desire for justice and righteousness help guide Christians in right living, and a deeper relationship with God.

Disciples - All followers of Jesus, even today, are his disciples. We are called to be part of the church. There are many varieties of

churches, and sometimes they are in conflict (merely another sign of humanity's imperfection), but disciples are meant to be in a church. Yes, we can have a relationship with God by ourselves, but it will be limited. God is Trinity, often called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's very self is in community, and so we, who are created in the image of God, are called to be in community as well. That is where we experience the fullness of God in Christ.

In addition, disciples, those who are in the church and followers of Jesus, are called to pray, worship, read scripture, follow Jesus' teachings, love all, forgive, repent, are forgiven, stand up for restorative justice, and participate in healing the brokenness caused by sin. To freely choose love. To embrace the Kingdom now, in this life, incomplete as it is.

Sacraments - In church we participate in two primary actions or sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist. These actions are means of grace which Jesus told us to do to help bring us into right relationship with God.

1.Baptism - In Baptism we are united with the crucified and resurrected Christ and with all other baptized Christians, living and dead. It is initiation into the church. We commit ourselves to Christ and his message. We receive forgiveness of sin and enter into a new life. We become members of the Body of Christ.

2.Eucharist - In the Eucharist we affirm that unity and healing begun in baptism. We eat Christ's body and blood. We ARE the body of Christ in the world and are therefore called to live as Jesus did. Communion is a sign of our participation in the new covenant. At our deepest level, we come to realize that we are all one. That loving neighbor is the same as loving self. We are called to self-sacrifice, yet it is done freely and joyfully, because ultimately it is for ourselves as well.

Act V: Restoring Original Blessing: The Return of Jesus and the Kingdom of God

For all that we freely choose love, even with the best of us, we cannot restore Original Blessing. Only God can fully heal, repair, and restore. But our efforts mitigate some of the challenges of sin and, more importantly, hone our ability to freely choose love, forgiveness, and restorative justice in the face of sin. When the final restoration happens, the Kingdom of God will be populated by those who know how to choose love.

In the fullness of time Jesus will come again, the in-between time of church will end, and Original Blessing will be restored.

Amen.

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**This definition of sin is from the Rev. John de Beer and the Rev. Sarah Dylan*