

Sunday Sermon -Advent
12/3/23
Series: The Story
Passage: Various
Title: Creation/Fall

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. We recognize it by lighting the first candle of the Advent wreath. This candle is sometimes called the "Prophet's Candle." It symbolizes Hope. From old, God prophesied through his Word and his Prophets that Hope was coming into world. That there would be one coming, a Messiah, who would set right again all that was broken and wrong. But to understand Hope, we need to know "The Story." And as every good story does, God's story starts at the beginning:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." - Gen. 1:1-2

"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." - John 1:3-4

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." - Gen. 1:3

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." - John 1:5

"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." - Col 1:16-17

"Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground...And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." – Gen. 1:26-28, 30-31. (pray – "God teach us your story so that we have and hold onto Hope. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

Good morning, Church! Today we begin our Advent series. The purpose of this series is to tell the story of scripture.

You know, God's story is a bit like being on a roller coaster. In it we experience highs and lows. Mountain top experiences where God shows up and does something amazing, only then to have us plummet into deep valleys of failure. This morning, I have brought with me a Christmas themed scorecard, if you will, to keep score as we ride the rollercoaster of HIStory – one bucket for when God acts with an act of incredible goodness or is honored by people acting rightly. The other when for when people respond with an incredible act of depravity. When God responds with power giving us incredible reason for hope, only to have us respond with incredible acts of faithlessness.

You know, it's kinda of like be a Buffalo Bills fan. Here we go this could be the year! Oh never mind. Superbowl/loss, superbowl/loss, superbowl/loss (wait I'm not done), superbowl/loss, now we got Doug Flutie/nope, dark ages/floundering/hopelessness, years of wandering and misery, new leadership/playoffs, Josh Allen/maybe next year.

This is a little bit like how we feel reading the story of scripture. It's a little bit like how God's people feel living the story of scripture. Hope/let down. Breakthrough/still sinful. Here we go!/Oh nevermind. And we think "If only we can get off this ride." On the carousel, the horse goes up and down and round and round. There has to be something that breaks the pattern of failure because, without it, this is the pattern.

Everything good comes from God, he is in control. He has the plan, and yet somewhere in his sovereignty we have a part to play and don't we screw it up every time: 13 seconds, wide right, 0-6 when it matters the most.

We all perhaps have heard pieces of the story – we might know about Jonah and the whale, Daniel and the Lion's Den, David and Goliath – but do we know the metanarrative? Do we know the big story? The story of Genesis to Revelation? That's what our Advent series will be about – telling God's big story.

And throughout the story we hear the refrain: BUT...something is coming. That's the hope. One day things will be different. On that day everything will change.

So, beloved, listen to the story.

We begin the story as all stories begin, Genesis 1:1, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***"

The story starts with an awesome display of God's power.

There's a song we sing for worship called "So will I" that captures this:

God of creation, there at the start, before the beginning of time

With no point of reference, you spoke to the dark and fleshed out the wonder of light

And as You speak, a hundred billion galaxies are born, in the vapor of Your breath the planets form

If the stars were made to worship, so will I

I can see Your heart in everything You've made, every burning star, a signal fire of grace

If creation sings Your praises, so will I

God of Your promise, you don't speak in vain, no syllable empty or void

For once You have spoken, all nature and science follow the sound of Your voice

And as You speak, a hundred billion creatures catch Your breath

Evolving in pursuit of what You said

If it all reveals Your nature so will I

I can see Your heart in everything You say

Every painted sky, a canvas of Your grace

If creation still obeys You, so will I

And that was the world, at the beginning of all things. Created by the power and voice of God "**and it was so. And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good.**" – Gen. 1:30-31

And it was good. This was the world before sin. God created humans to be in relationship with him. Adam and Eve walked with God, talked with God. There was no animosity, no strife, no hiding, no broken relationships. But it wouldn't stay that way. Because in God's goodness, he knew that love and relationship is only genuine if someone chooses it. And with that choice, came also the ability to choose against it.

This is how sin entered into the world. God didn't create sin, but he knew that it was an inevitable outcome of love. And if God is the source of all that is good – of truth and love and life itself – then choosing against him could only result in death. A spirit cut off from life. This is what happened in the garden. When the serpent deceived Adam and Eve into believing that they could be like God, that they could rule themselves, that they didn't need him – death entered into the human condition. And when it entered it was pervasive, it broke everything – our relationship with God, with one another, with ourselves, and with creation. **The core of the human heart was now enslaved under the curse of sin.** To go back to the roller coaster illustration, the first drop is often the biggest. That is true of humanity's story. And to get a glimpse of how fast the fall and pervasive the curse of sin is, we only need to look at the next few chapters of the story – by the next generation we see the separation of Cain's heart from fellowship with God, and then also the murder of his brother.

Over just a few generations ***“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”*** – Gen. 6:5. By chapter 6 of the story humanity has already hit rock bottom. And maybe you've experienced this in yourself or in a loved one - that **the search for life is so desperate that it begins to drive all of our choices even if those choice become devastating to us and begin to hurt us and those around us.** It's bondage, and God saw that bondage.

In fact, it was so bad that it says, ***“It grieved God in his heart.”*** God says, “I am sorry that I have made them.” That word sorry is the word “nawkham” which has a connotation of comfort. In other words, the sin of man was so grieving to the heart of God that it would bring him comfort to make it go away. Like watching a loved one suffer on their deathbed. You feel “nawkham” “grief, regret” that they are in the condition they're in.

But wait...In this, God is going to do something! God's going to respond! He's going to start over with Noah! He's going to wipe out sin and wickedness with one fell swoop and start again with a blameless, righteous man who still walked with God. This is going to be the answer!

But it wasn't the answer, was it? In fact, the story of the flood is to show humanity that the problem of sin isn't an issue of simply being blameless, a moral issue of right and wrong. It is a deeper issue of the heart. An issue that even a man like Noah was still in bondage to. And so is Muhammad. And so is Gandhi. And so is Mother Teresa. And so are you and I. Because even though God promised to never again wipe out the earth as he did, the reset didn't work. You see, we didn't need a man like Noah to save us. We needed a new Adam. One who could start a line of descendants no longer tainted by sin, free from its curse.

If we fast forward the story, Noah grew into many nations. Nations that enslaved one another and were driven by power and self-exaltation. That's what the story of Babel is about. People trying to become God. They said, "**Come, let us build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.**" A project anchored in the original lie to Adam and Eve, "You can be like God." But the truth is that there is no one like God. And we could never hope to be like God, without God, that only leads to more wickedness and bondage because the human heart is corrupt.

But wait...in that God said, "I have a different way. I am going to choose from the nations a people to be my own people! A people that will conduct themselves according to my goodness and perfect law. A people that I will reveal myself to, so that the world might see and know me again. A people I will bless, so that they in turn can be a blessing."

Enter Abraham. There was nothing special about Abraham. God chose him because he wanted to choose him. Abraham was just as undeserving as everyone else of God's grace and favor. But through an act of love and faithfulness, God called him out of his paganism and idolatry to be his own.

We say, "All right! What a cool thing!" Surely, God's chosen people would be able to overcome the power of sin. Surely, they wouldn't struggle with pride and self-seeking and broken relationships. Certainly, they would be a righteous people and full of faith. And you know what? They were! Until they weren't.

God promises to turn Abraham into a great nation, but instead of holding fast to the promise of God, Abraham and his wife Sarah take matters into their own hands, and Abraham ends up bearing an illegitimate child through a mistress.

In fact, the conflict in Israel and Palestine today comes from Abraham's sinful decision to abandon the Lord and play God in his own life. Ishmael would become the father of Islamic people.

On top of that, Abraham's family was full of anger, jealousy, faithlessness, hatred, broken relationship – not God's design.

But wait! See, even in our failings God never fails. Because he is faithful, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and gave him a son, Isaac. And he provided for his son. And when Isaac grew up God gave him a wife, Rebekah.

But, she's barren. What about the promise? You can't grow into a great nation with no children. Ah, but Isaac prays for her, and the Lord opens her womb! They have two sons – Esau and Jacob.

So there they are right in the middle of the Lord's plan, surely they'd have their act together!

But the Lord tells Rebekah, "**Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from birth shall be divided.**" Again, even within their own family they can't escape the pervasive effects of sin.

In their relationships we see favoritism, manipulation, deception, lack of trust, hatred between brothers, arguing, division.

Kind of reminds me of Thanksgiving dinner! Especially with my extended family. Not Becky's family, they're perfect, but I grew up in an Italian family. You know how it goes. The family's all together everything's cordial until someone brings up politics. In fact, we know exactly how to get under someone's skin, or press each other's buttons. We know what it's like to walk around on eggshells waiting for the ticking timebomb to explode. Right? Brokenness, relational discord, continuing conflict. Why? Because of sin. It's a heart problem. It's pervasive. We can't just wish or even will it away. It holds the world in bondage.

But wait...God remains faithful and even in the midst of conflict and brokenness. Through the story we see him at work, shaping the lives of those he's committed himself to. Throughout our story we can see him at work, chasing us, revealing himself to us, patiently teaching and wooing us back to him. I love Genesis 32:30 where Jacob declares, **"I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."** God doesn't desire to destroy us through an encounter with him, but renew us! He is good! In fact, through that experience, God changed Jacob's name to Israel (that's where the nation of Israel gets its name – a name that literally means "he strives with God") because of this cosmic dance that God is doing with his people – teaching us who he is.

And yet, even Jacob will find that that would do little to break the bondage of the heart. It would need a deeper renewal still.

The story of Jacob's son, Joseph, is a story that sets up the story of one of the dominate narratives of scripture, of how God will show up in response to the bondage of his people. That's next week. But before God can bring a person out of bondage, they must first understand their bondage. You see, the narrative of the OT is often a physical picture of a deeper spiritual reality.

God was going to move his people into bondage, so that they might understand not only his power but his heart to release them from their bondage. Like his parents, Jacob played favorites. This made Joseph's siblings angry. So angry they sell their brother into slavery and then lie about it. But God keeps his hand on Joseph. He becomes a servant in Potiphar's house. But Potiphar's wife wants to get frisky, so Joseph does the honorable thing and runs. But that lands him in jail through lies and deception.

And there, God gives Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, but keeps him in prison for over two years. One day, Egypt's Pharoah has a dream. No one can interpret it, except Joseph. He interprets the dream which is a dream about a coming famine and Pharoah (I mean...God) sets Joseph as second highest ruler over the entire nation of Egypt. Eventually, famine does come because now, under the curse of sin, sometimes creation doesn't work right. And that forces Joseph's brothers to come to Egypt to buy food.

Listen, God in his sovereignty used Joseph's hard story to provide for his people. And through a bunch of circumstances Joseph eventually reconciles with his family and moves them to Egypt to live, well taken care of, even though there was hardship in the land. And for 400 years God

provided for his people as they grew into a great nation, the nation of Israel. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham. God protected his people under the mighty hand of Pharaoh.

But listen, God's people were still not where they should be. They were not in their land. Just as humanity was not in the place God wanted them, they were still under the curse of sin. And because of that, after 400 years, there arose in the land of Egypt a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, who would enslave God's people and put them into bondage – a place of hopelessness and helplessness. A physical picture of a spiritual reality. Who could save them? Just wait...Someone is coming. Tune in next week to hear the rest of the story.

Let's ready our hearts for communion.

Revelation 13:8 tells us that **Jesus was God's Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.** What does that mean? It means that Jesus was not God's plan B. Jesus was the plan. From the foundation of the world God knew that humanity would choose against him. God knew that sin would enter the world. God knew the world would need a savior. Something is coming. That's the hope of Advent, the anticipation of God setting things right. Making a way when there is no way. And his story points to that day. Gen. 3 - that one day, **the woman's seed would crush the head of the serpent.** Gen. 6 - That one day, **God would save us from the wickedness of the earth.** Gen. 12 - That one day, **I would be blessed through the offspring of Abraham.** Gen. 22 - that **God would provide an alternate sacrifice in my place.** Gen 28 – that one day, **One would come who would bridge the gap between heaven and earth.** And Gen 49 – that **God would gather his people to him as their as just and strong ruler and King.**

Someone is coming who was crucified before the foundation of the world. And it's in him that we must set our hope. Would you do that this morning? Jesus, in John 5:39 says to all who will listen, ***"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is the scriptures that testify about me."***

Jesus bids all who believe in him to come and join him at his table. When you receive the elements please hold them, and once we have all been served, we will share in them together.

THE STORY



“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

- Gen. 1:1-2



“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”

- John 1:3-4



***And God said, “Let there be light,” and
there was light.”***

- Gen. 1:3



“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

- John 1:5



“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

- Col. 1:16-17



“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...”



“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground... And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

– Gen. 1:26-28, 30-31



THE STORY



***In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth.”***

- Gen. 1:1



***“In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth.”***

- Gen. 1:1

***“And it was so.
God saw everything he had made, and
behold, it was very good.”***

- Gen. 1:30-31



“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

– Gen. 6:5



“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

– Gen. 6:5

“It grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, ‘...I am sorry that I have made them.’”

- Gen 6:6,7



***“Come, let us build a city and a tower with
its top in the heavens, and let us make a
name for ourselves...”***

- Gen 11:4



“And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- Gen 11:4



Abraham's descendants



“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from birth shall be divided.”

- Gen. 25:23



***“I have seen God face to face, and yet my
life has been delivered.”***

- Gen. 32:30



“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.”

- Gen. 50:20-21



***“Now there arose a new king over Egypt,
who did not know Joseph...
So they ruthlessly made the people
of Israel work as slaves.”***

- Ex. 1:8



“You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is the scriptures that testify about me.”

- John 5:39

