

The Story of God; The Story of Us

Genesis 1
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Welcome to everyone who's here right now and also to those of you will be joining us via broadcast.

We're starting a journey together as a church community today. We're learning the story of the Bible. I don't mean 1,001 different things you have to try to remember about the Bible. I don't mean a 1,001 things the Bible says "thou shalt not do." I mean a story. A story that has the power to change our story.

Stories are powerful. About a month ago we were at the playground at Ramsey County Beach on the north end of White Bear Lake. We were there with our two kids and our niece and nephew. My son William and my niece were playing a game together, and my 4 year old niece announced to me, "I'm a princess, and William is a prince, and I'm waiting for him to come and rescue me." Do you think she got that from a story?

You know this story, right?

Once a time, a long time ago, a young girl was taken in by her stepmother to live alongside her stepsisters. She was gentle and kind and never hurt a soul. But her stepmother was a wicked woman. She worked the young girl mercilessly. She made her clean the dust and ashes from their large house until people began to call her Cinderella. Cinderella's stepsisters were as mean as their mother and they treated Cinderella cruelly.

One day as Cinderella grew up to be a young woman, news spread throughout the realm that the Prince would be holding a ball. All the young women were invited to the ball for the Prince was looking for a bride. Cinderella's stepmother wouldn't let her attend, but a fairy godmother appeared and made Cinderella a beautiful dress and horse drawn carriage, and she attended the ball. She captured the heart of the prince and they danced 'til the stroke of midnight.

At midnight they ran off to another club, did tequila shots 'til the wee hours of the morning, and sometime around lunch they woke up with headaches and Prince Charming said romantically "What was your name again." They dated off and on for three years, got married for a while, and then split up. Cinderella lives in a small apartment with two misbehaved kids and complains that Charming is always at the bar chasing Sleeping Beauty and hasn't paid his child support in 3-months.

Anybody want to see that play out at the playground? I'm a princess, but William's a prince and those bums aren't good for anything. You've got to be careful about the stories you tell to children.

What are the stories that shape your vision of life? Where do you come from? Who's in charge? Where are you going?

Did you know that the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, was written down to shape your vision of life by giving you a better story to live out of? If you've heard Genesis 1 before, have you ever listened to it carefully? You may not know this, but it's a poem. It's rhythmic and beautiful and says more things than you've probably ever imagined. And God said let there be...and there was. And God said, let there be...and there was. And it there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. And God saw what he had made and it was good. It was good. It was good. And then God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. And then God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

There's a lot we can learn from that, but before talk about it, I've got to tell you, that's not the only way to tell the story. In fact, when this story was written down, about 2,500 years ago, it was written down by ancient Israelites as a counterstatement to one or more of these other stories that they heard from another group of people called the Babylonians. Let me tell you one of the other stories they were hearing. I need some volunteers for this:

And it all started with two gods, Apsu (a male God) and Tiamat (a female God). And Tiamat had babies, the next generation of gods. And Apsu wanted to kill the young gods before they became too much trouble. But Tiamat loved them and wanted to save them. And she warns one of them about this, so they put Apsu into a magic coma. Then Tiamat finds a new husband named Kingu. But eventually another god named Marduk attacks Tiamat and Kingu. And Marduk kills Tiamat and rips her body into two halves. One becomes the earth and the other one becomes the sky. And then he kills her husband Kingu, and from Kingu's blood he creates human beings. And thus, the ancient Babylonians said, the world was created. That's where you come from. ...And Prince Charming is a dead beat who's chasing Sleeping Beauty off her barstool. The way you see your story will change the way you live.

The poetic Biblical story of creation tells you that:

1. **God made you on purpose.**

- A. Creation is not an accident. You are not an accident. There's such an order to the poem of creation so that we will know that God acted with purpose. Just listen to one example: **And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 'God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)**
- B. Has anybody here ever felt like they were a cosmic accident? Like you don't matter? Like you could just disappear and maybe nobody would really care all that much? The Bible says God cares, that God made you on purpose, as part of

an orderly plan. The very beginning of the Big God Story says that God wrote you into His story.

- C. In fact, you are so precious to God that God created you in His own image. Genesis 1:27 says **So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27).** Maybe you have trouble believing that. When I was at the state fair a week or two ago I was walking around in the 4-H building and saw someone who needed to remind themselves. Can you see **this picture here?** It's a mirror set in a beautiful woodshop project. And can you see what's etched around the mirror? It says, "God's Image," Genesis 1:27. Maybe you should write that on your mirror somewhere, or put this verse somewhere to remind you that you have a treasured place in God's story.
2. But it's not just you that has a good place in God's story. In fact, the poem of creation teaches us that **The world is a good place.**
 - A. This isn't a naïve Pollyanna thing. This isn't just a story for optimists. The Bible will have plenty to say about the existence of hatred and violence and all kinds of sin in the world. But the creation story says that the world isn't hateful and violent and sinful at its very core. That's not how God made the world.
 - B. Listen to another example from the story, **And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:9-10)** When God created, he did it by the simple command of his voice, and when he created it, he saw that it was good. The whole poem works like that, each section begins, "And God said...And God said...And God said, and each section ends And God saw that it was good. It was good. It was good."
 - C. On this very day 10 years ago, a group of people with a very different vision of the world praised their God and flew airplanes into buildings. Hatred and violence were at the core of their vision of this world and how to fix it. And 10 years later, many of our imaginations are still filled with hatred and violence as the best way to fix what's wrong with them. I recognize that in a broken world, nations may sometimes be left to choose between the lesser of two evils. Nevertheless, the Big God Story is asking you to look again at the world, whose true nature may not be easily visible anymore at first glance, and to look more deeply, and think more godly and ask what God could create again now. The Big God Story says that the world is really a good place, and our faith in that story will shape our lives in this world.
3. The third thing that this Story wants you to know is that **God can be trusted.** God is in control.
 - A. Do you remember the other ancient story I told you. You never knew which God was actually in charge or who might kill whom to get their way. Nobody was in charge. Chaos was charge. But listen again the very beginning of the whole 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. Genesis 1:1-2.** The waters were an

ancient symbol for uncontrollable chaos, and he God is over the waters and commands them by His Word and creates a world full of life and goodness.

- B. God is in control. God also gives his human creatures freedom, so He's not controlling, but he's not "out of control." We don't have to worry about which God will actually be in charge on any given day.

In fact, God is so committed to His creation that he wouldn't let it go even when it was marred by human sin. Think about that: Imagine you're an artist. A sculptor shaping a vase or a pot. And in the process, the clay clumps up somehow. Maybe it's got a rock in it or something. Would you maybe just pound the thing down and start over. No big deal. You're the artist, you're the person. It's just a lump of clay and you can do it over again. God could do it that way. In fact, it would make perfect sense.

Fortunately for us, love makes no sense. God loves you. God loves his creation. And he is all in. When sin scarred the very image of God in us, God sent Jesus into the world to bear the image of God for us. Colossians 1 says now, "**The Son is the image of the invisible God.**" (Colossians 1:15). The image of God was scarred in humans, so God sent his own son in human flesh to save us because he won't give up on us. And the Bible says that God is working to remake us in His image. It our destiny to be "conformed to the image of His Son."

When people ask me, "what's the vision of this church?" I have different ways of answering that question. The shortest answer is this: Jesus. My deepest hope is that this church – like every other! – will be Jesus people. And when you are a disciple of Jesus, this is the God you worship. This the story you know. Being a follower of Jesus means that you believe in, worship, and serve this God rather than some other.

And the truth is, you can give your story into the hands of another God. You can read and believe and shape your vision of life according to another story. People do it all the time. We are worshipping on the 10th anniversary of an event that happened because people believed a very different story about the nature of this world and its one true God. Closer to home, we are surrounded by a culture that shapes our value and behaviors according to other stories. We are tempted every day to live in stories that have no hope, no grace, and no life giving power. And you can do that if you want to.

I want to tell you today that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the Creator of this World and Lover of your Soul. And the story of this world and the story of your life is in His hands. And so there is hope for us, and there is work for us to do in His world to serve Him.

Friends do you know that this story is your story? And will you give your life into the hands of the God we know in Jesus Christ? However you got to this point, whatever your story has been up 'til now, will you let this God write the rest of your chapters from this forward? We're on a journey together. We're going to learn the story of the Bible, and if you put your life in His hands He will guide your journey and write your story, and you will see all that God has made, and it will be very, very good. ...PRAY