

“What is the Over Arching Story Line of the Bible?”

John 1: 1-18

Today we are beginning a new sermon series, titled “Conversations with God”. I cannot think of a more appropriate time than now for us to start having these conversations because it seems more often than not, as people of faith, we confuse our role. We seem to think that we speak for God rather than being called to listen for God’s voice. We have confused our role as disciples and somehow placed ourselves in the role of Creator and Redeemer rather than being partners in the building up of the Kingdom of God here on Earth. Unfortunately, this confusion about our calling as people of God has spilled over into our conversations about big life stuff.

As people of faith, we seem to think we know what God would say on any particular topic and ironically enough, God’s thoughts sound alot like our own person beliefs and opinions. Case in point...I was talking with a colleague the other day and he mentioned that he had the strangest conversation with one of his church members. This church member had asked him what the Bible said about immigration? With all that’s going on the news about the situation at our Southern border, this church member wanted to know what texts were relevant for the conversation as a person of faith. So my colleague shared that although the Bible

doesn't specifically mention immigration by name, it does reference it on multiple occasions. For example, in the Old Testament, God tells the Israelites that when they enter into the promised land and make their home there, they have a call to welcome the stranger because once they were strangers in a strange land as well. And then in the New Testament, on Judgment day, Jesus divides the people into two groups. He turns to the first group and says, "I was sick and you visited me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. When you did something for the least of these, you did it for me." After this, Jesus turns to the other group and says, I was sick and you didn't visit me. I was naked and you didn't clothe me. I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. When you did not do something for the least of these, you did not do it for me."

My colleague shared that the church member pondered these statements for a while and then said, "Well that's all well and good but I don't think God meant any of that to be applied towards the current situation. Surely God was talking about something else."

Now before we get all frustrated, let me say....this is why these conversations are important. Because unfortunately, we can and do make the Bible say just about anything we want to support our cause, especially when we decide to pick and choose what we hold to be Truth. Which is what we do as people of faith about 90% of the time. Yes, both sides of any cause. However, as you have heard

me say on multiple occasions, for the Bible to be our sacred text, we either have to take all of it or none of it. We can't pick and choose what we want it to say and still be able to hold it up as our Truth.

Again, I'll be the first to admit, these conversations are not easy. They are complicated because they deal with some pretty big stuff-stuff like our reading and understanding of our sacred text, our relationships with God, how we live out our faith each and every day, and how we are called to be the Body of Christ here on Earth. It's difficult work to have these conversations but it is the work we are called to do as people of faith so that there may be healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring some of these conversations, looking at some of the questions of our faith. We will be using Brian McClaren's book, "A New Kind of Christianity as our Guide". Now I cannot promise you that by the end of this series, we will have it all figured out. But what I can promise you is this... this is the deep and meaningful work we are called to do, to be a community of faith in conversation, in dialogue so that the world will know that there is another way to be... a way of grace, a way of love, a way that holds the welcome of God as our center and encourages us reach across labels and divides and to truly become the One Body of Christ here on Earth.

Okay, with that all being said...let's take a look at the first question which is: "What is the overarching story line of the Bible?" This should be an easy question. After all, there are 66 books in our Bible which tell us all about God's interaction with the people of God. Yet, as we have already said, it is complicated. Because there are parts of our Bible which we love and we tell those stories over and over again while some of the other parts of the Bible, we wish we could ignore or pretend they were never included in the first place.

So where do we start this conversation? For me, I always start with the prologue from the Gospel of John. This text is one of the most significant pieces of New Testament writing. It has influenced more doctrine and church teaching on the incarnation than any other piece of the New Testament. For these reasons and well, because I got to pick the scripture, we are starting the conversation with these words.

(Read the Text)

I always think it is a shame that we only hear this text at Epiphany time. We limit it to just one season. We limit it to just one purpose. We limit it to just one defined moment in time and in doing, we limit its potential. This beautiful piece of poetry throws the doors open wide and invites us to come in, to stand amazed at the beauty and wonder of God's relationship with God's people.

From the very beginning we know God has been a part of the process. God has been active in our world bringing about healing and wholeness for all of God's creation. From the beginning, God has been overcoming chaos, bringing forth life and light.

These words from the beginning of the Gospel of John tell us that the overarching story line of the Bible is God's grace and God's love, that there is something special about our relationship with God, that there is something to this being named and claimed as God's Beloved. The words from the beginning of the Gospel of John tell us that the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us and because of that everything changed. Because before that, most of the world religions believed their gods existed on a high mountain or on another plain completely. Even in the Old Testament, over and over again, that people could not see God's face and survive. Moses is the only person who saw God and in that instance, God passed Moses by and all Moses was able to see of God was God's back.

But John changed the narrative. God took on flesh and dwelt among God's people. Not sort of knows what it feels like to be human. Not sort of knows what we mean when we say the ups and downs of life. John tells us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Which means that "God not only goes where God's people go. But now God is who we are." As people of faith, this means, now

we can see God's presence in our midst. Now we can experience God's grace in our lives. Now we can know God's love like never before. Because of the incarnation, the word becoming flesh, these things are no longer abstract concepts. They are real. They are tangible. They are authentic signs for us of the Kingdom of God coming to fruition in our world.

John tells us all we need to know about the overarching story line of the Bible. In verse 5, the word overcome is used. A better translation would be "comprehend or seize with hostile intent...so it is a play on words (again something John likes to do.)The verse should be translated as: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it, or The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not apprehend it.

You see, it is not just that the darkness does not overtake the light. The darkness does not understand the light which for us as people of faith should be a light bulb moment (pun intended) because there are so many times when our faith doesn't make sense to the wider world, a faith that compels us to share how a humble love is the most powerful force in the world, a faith which compels to understand how grace turns things upside down. As people of faith, we know that the Word Became flesh and dwelt among us and offered all of us a welcome which is wide enough to embrace all as beloved children of God.

So if I had to sum up the overarching story line of the Bible in just one phrase, it would be this....The amazing life giving news which shapes us and transforms us into becoming the people of God which we are called and created to be is that we know without a doubt that our God is not some distant figure who created the world in seven days and then forgot about us. We know without a doubt that our God is here, active in this world, constantly at work to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

And when people ask how we can be so certain, we simply say....that our God loves us so much that God sent God's only son, The Word Made Flesh to dwell among so that we will have life and light, so that we would always know that Love will always have the last word. Thanks be to God. Amen.