



From Genesis to Revelation

TEXT
Psalm 119:105

September 27, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Every Sunday we consider a few words of this book. It's a good thing to sometimes step back and hear the overall story. So, get comfortable. No need to take notes, just take it in. I'll leave a few parts out, but let me tell you the story.

In the beginning, actually before anything was, God spoke, "Let there be ... light and life" and there was. This is not a science story that tells the "how" of creation. This is a love story that tells us why there is a world. The world is because God wants this world to be.

God created Adam. *Adam* in Hebrew means "human-kind." So, this — like all the stories in this book — is a story about us. Adam is created by God, cared for by God, instructed by God: "You can eat it all, but don't eat that. That's not good for you."

But Adam and Eve, they eat the "not good for them" fruit. It's not just disobedience. They think they know better. God tells them how to live in this world, but they think they know better than God. That's what sin is. It's not so often that we really fail to know

what God wants; we just know better.

Sin against God always results in sin against brothers and sisters. So only four chapters in, Cain kills his brother Abel. Anytime someone is killed, or passed by, or ignored, or oppressed, it's a brother or sister who is suffering.

God looks down on his creation and is regretful. God tries to wash away the bad with a flood. The flood doesn't change humanity, but it does change God. Never again, God says.

This might be the point where God chooses to give up, to wash God's hands of the world, but we will learn God can't do that. God will not give up.

God calls a man named Abram and begins the relationship with the Hebrew people.

Abraham was called to leave his father's house — to leave life as he has known it and "go to the land that I will show you." Abraham leaves everything behind and sets out with nothing more than God's promise. And God promised that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations.

The struggle for people of faith, then and now, has always

been to remember that our relationship with God is never for our benefit alone. You are blessed to be a blessing. God's desire is that the word of God might live within these people.

God promised descendants, but they would not come easily. There was Ishmael, and after time and painful testing, there was Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and then Joseph and his brothers who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Most of these folks are more than flawed. Nevertheless, they remain the vessels in which this holy word abides in this world.

The descendants of Abraham would find themselves in Egypt, slaves of the ancient pharaoh. Oppressed, they cried out to God. God never wants her children to suffer injustice, so God raises up Moses, who leads them across the sea. The Exodus is a defining moment in Israel's history — one that showed God to be a God who hears the cries of the oppressed and loves her children from the bottom up.

Like Abraham's journey, Moses sets out leading this people armed with nothing but a promise. In the midst of wilderness wanderings, God gives the Ten Commandments. This

was a gift. Like in the garden — “Eat this but don’t eat that; that’s not good for you” — the Commandments say, “Live this way, not that way; that way is not good for you!” But like Adam and Eve, sometimes we think we know better.

After Moses died, Joshua would lead them into the land that God had promised. There they would be ruled by judges like Deborah, Gideon and Samson.

But other nations had kings. Israel was called to be set apart from other nations, but they wanted to be like other nations. It’s always been hard to determine how faith makes us distinct from others and how faith makes us like others. Other nations had kings; Israel demanded a king.

So, Saul was anointed king. Then David followed and was forever seen as the King to be remembered and the King to be hoped for. Israel would always yearn for a “son of David” to rule over them in justice and righteousness; that king they called the Messiah. After King David, Solomon followed. He built the temple, as well as a very nice house for himself.

The temple would not only be the center in Jewish life, it would be the center of the universe; the throne of God was in the temple.

After Solomon’s reign, Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

There was a series of kings in both the northern and southern kingdoms. Some kings

were faithful, but not many. The problem was kings had power. And those with power always find it hard to prioritize what someone else wants, even if that someone is God. Power is the primary vehicle to set aside morality. That’s why the powerful have an additional burden of responsibility, because their immorality often injures the less powerful.

So, God sent prophets. Elijah and Elisha came. Nathan was the prophet to King David. Later there would be the literary prophets: Isaiah and Jeremiah, Amos and others. They were poets more than anything else — word-painting a day that Israel had yet to know, but a promised day for which God had created them.

Usually, the prophets had two concerns. They reminded God’s people not to be casual about worship. It’s more than an experience to get us through the day; it’s the regular returning to the source of all life, something we do with humility and gratitude.

Secondly, the prophets were adamant that God was concerned for the community. This means God is not casual about poverty. When poverty is present, it’s not an unfortunate thing; it reveals that the community is broken. If you have a family dinner and the adults use their power to keep the small children from the table, that’s not unfortunate; that’s sinful. It’s the same in community.

Israel would most often ignore the prophets and Israel

would crumble. When morality is ignored, we crumble from the inside. First the northern kingdom would fall to the Assyrians. The Assyrians would scatter the ten tribes of the north across the empire. One hundred and fifty years later, the southern kingdom would fall to the Babylonians. The temple was burned, and Jewish leaders were marched into exile, where they would be captive for a generation.

Exile raised questions. Had God finally given up on the world? Was this the time that God would say, “I’ve had enough”? And if not, how are we to be faithful in a land that is not our home?

Well, God doesn’t give up. There are more prophets in exile. They remind Israel of her calling and of God’s dreams. The dreams of God were not small: the lion lying down with the lamb; swords beaten into plowshares; the law of God being written on the heart so that all of God’s children would live like God’s children. The prophets never let go of those dreams.

After a generation in exile, the Babylonian captives return home. They had some rebuilding to do.

Almost 400 years passed, until a baptizing preacher named John strode through the wilderness proclaiming that the promised day of God was near.

About that time, the Spirit that hovered over the deep and whispered creation, the spirit hovers again over a Galilean girl named Mary and brings

new creation. That word that God had been speaking from the beginning comes now in skin.

Jesus would talk of the promised day of God and tell stories of seeds and weeds and surprisingly good Samaritans. Some found him offensive, even dangerous. They said Jesus came to destroy our way of life. They weren't wrong about that. Others found him magnetic.

Jesus called followers to leave their lives behind, to road trip with him. They follow with nothing more than his promise. He taught them to pray ... and to care for one another ... and to see the world as he sees the world ... to live with one another as God intends human relationships to be. They did their best.

God's ways are not like our ways, and so it wouldn't matter when or where Jesus showed up — any nation, any people, any generation would want to kill him.

The Romans and the religious leaders crucified him. They didn't invent the cross for Jesus; it was business as usual with them. It's how they dealt with anyone who called their way of life into question. Jesus faced them and refused to let their ways define him. His death was not a tragedy, but the moment that revealed that God would stop at nothing to redeem the creation God so loved.

Stopping at nothing means Jesus came back. "He is risen," they said. The risen one began

to show up in his followers. They formed communities that reflected his life and teaching. Women were respected. Slaves were welcomed. The poor were not the recipients of mission, but became members of the family.

Leaders of the early, small fragile communities wrote letters as they tried to deal with ordinary issues of how one lives as a Christian in the market, or at work, or with family. And they dealt with the most significant issues, like how do we live shaped by hope rather than fear in a land that is not yet home.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus did not bring to completion the dreams of the old prophets, but he did show us what they look like. So, the followers of Jesus continue to live toward that promised day.

The Bible ends with a promise. We call it Revelation. It is a word of hope for people in their worst moments. Revelation declares that this world is no accident, and you are never insignificant. So, do not be afraid, but live toward God's promised day. Even when those around you are bowing down to idols and worshipping other gods of power and oppression ... when they worship our way of life rather than God's way of life ... stay strong, and live toward God's promised day.

This is the story of the Bible. It is a story of a God who will stop at nothing to redeem the creation God loves.

It is a story of ordinary people in whom the word

spoken from the beginning and repeated in patriarch and prophet, lived in judges and disciples, embodied in fragile communities. That holy word lives in ordinary people like you and me.

And that word calls us to set out on a road trip toward a promised day, a day which we have yet to know, but a day on which we base our lives.

Like Abraham, like Moses, like the prophets, like the disciples, it calls us to leave behind life as we have known it and strike out. We have nothing but God's promise, and the testimony of those who have trusted it before and found it to be true.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.