

SACRED STORIES

Sermon 866

June 22, 2014

Second Sunday after Pentecost

951st Week as Priest

777th Week at St Dunstan's

42nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we enter the long green season of Ordinary Time, we are also beginning another journey. This time, the journey is not that of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers on the Jerusalem Road, but that of an older, much more ancient time. These are the sacred stories of the Book of Genesis, and they began with the story of Creation that we heard on Trinity Sunday.

Throughout this summer, we will hear as a backdrop, an undercurrent, the sacred stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Many Christians would have you believe that the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, are not really that important to us.

They would suggest that all we need to know are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the letters of Paul; and the Revelation of John. But this is wrong. It is like refusing to learn the story of your own family—your grandparents, great grandparents, ancestors—from time out of mind. No, the stories of Genesis are the very foundation of our faith. They are, as Eric Auerbach suggested, “fraught with background,” and these stories tell us a great deal about who we are today. “There is nothing new under the sun,” wrote the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Or, in another way, we are the product of all that has come before us. Christianity owes a great debt to the Hebrew Scriptures, and we would not know who we are as followers of Jesus without the sacred stories of Genesis and Exodus, the great prophets, and the Psalms.

Our Lord saw himself as the fulfillment of these writings, and we would make a critical mistake to overlook them. So throughout this summer and into the fall, remember these foundational memories, and strive to make them your own.

Here is one way to recall the ancient stories of the faith, and to be reminded of their currency. From the beginning, the writers of Torah (the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) believed that the human condition could be described in a paradigm of Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption. Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are created by God and the world is good. They sin by eating of the forbidden fruit. They are judged by God, cast out of the Garden. But they are not killed. They are given a new way of living. It is harder and more dangerous, but it also demands their responsibility and courage. Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption.

Or consider today's reading from Genesis. Abraham has fathered the child Ishmael by Sarah's slave Hagar. Every birth is a new creation. Sarah is unable to conceive and thereby jealous of Hagar. Sin. She makes Abraham cast out the child and his mother. More sin. They will die in the desert, but God saves them. Redemption. A new people are born. This is a sacred story for Islam, for

it provides the origin of the peoples of the non-Jewish Middle East.

We can apply this paradigm of Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption to every single story in the Holy Scriptures—Old and New Testaments—without exception! Jesus is born as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. King Herod sins by seeking his death and taking the lives of the children of Bethlehem. Joseph and his family flee to Egypt. Herod dies and they return to Galilee. Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption.

I have said many times that these ancient stories are never finally written until we find them in the context of our own lives. Has there been a story of Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption in your own family, or in your own life? Since we are a nation of immigrants, it may be that your family came to this country to make a new start, or to start over. No doubt there was suffering, and perhaps judgment of some kind. I have joked that anybody in America who looks back into their family's past far enough will find a horse thief.

My great great grandfather, William Foster Alexander Glass, lived in Butler County, Alabama, in the 1830's. His family belonged to the Little Sandy Ridge Presbyterian Church. Years ago, my mother and I discovered in the session records that Grandfather Glass was excommunicated from Little Sandy Ridge—he was kicked out of the church—for “drinking and fighting at church.” So what do you do when something like that happens? Well, he took his family and went to Texas, where drinking and fighting at church were normal behavior. Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption. It happens all the time, and I am sure that it has happened to you.

The good news is very clear: The sacred stories, and the stories of our own lives, tell us that though we know sin and judgment, although we fall from grace, we are saved by a loving God. We are redeemed and set right with God through Jesus Christ. Life may be different, and it will almost certainly be hard, but we are not lost forever. Creation, Sin, Judgment, and Redemption. It's the never-ending story of the people of God. It is our story, and it always seems to end with salvation, with the

God who yearns for us to know him and love him. It's good reason for us all to be thankful in this Ordinary Time. **AMEN.**

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