

If You See Something Say Something

From the Bible: Genesis 1

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When we meet on Sunday afternoon with the young adults who participate in our Confirmation program, one of the challenges Kathy DiBiasi and I face as we talk with them about God and Jesus and the difference between faith and religion, is how to read and understand the Bible. They are so used to reading textbooks - history books and science books or current event articles - and learning or memorizing what they read so they can play it back on quizzes or tests that they try to do the same thing with the Bible. We try to encourage them to read the Bible for meaning and not like a science book or the newspaper.

One of the ways we do this is we will give them Robert Frost's poem *The Road Less Traveled*. You probably know it. It begins like this.

*Two road diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.*

And it ends with these two lines.

*I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

We give them the poem, ask them to read it and then ask them to share with us what it means. There is usually an awkward pause of some sort as they try figure out what the poem has to do with God or Jesus or church or faith, because that is usually the *default/go to* answer for questions like this which are asked by the Pastor or the Director of Educational Ministries. But they finally get around to telling us the poem is about what choice you will make and what path you will follow. Then, having gotten them that far, we give them a Bible and ask them to turn to Genesis 1. The very first words in the Bible.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Once they have found their way to that page in the Bible, we ask them to read through the entire chapter and then to tell us what it means. We give them this hint. It is not about creation.

Trusting you can do at least two things at the same time, if you want to read through Genesis 1 yourself to while I continue feel free to do so. Just remember. It is not about creation.

Here is some background which is important as you read through or think about these verses and as you seek to understand the Bible.

- The Bible was not written front to back. The authors didn't sit down and start with page one and work their way forward. The Bible was, in fact, written backwards. Authors looking back from transformative moments - the Exodus in Hebrew Scripture or the resurrection in Christian scripture - and creating a narrative to give meaning to what they had experienced.
- Genesis 1 was written sometime around the middle of the 5th century BCE at the time the Babylonian exile which was an existential crisis point in Jewish history. All the touchstones they turned to and relied on to identify themselves as God's Chosen People - land, King, Temple, Torah - had been lost or destroyed. Life and faith and identity were in chaos. In the midst of all that uncertainty, the authors and compilers of the Hebrew Bible wrote these opening verses.
- If I were in charge of putting the Bible together. I would call these opening verses a Prologue and not Chapter 1 because these words, at least for me, inform the whole rest of the narrative.

So, where is all this going?

To get there, back to the question Kathy and I ask the Ninth Graders in Confirmation.

What do these verses mean?

For me they read as a *Statement of Faith*.

The world is chaotic and broken.

Formless. A void. Dark.

And, in that darkness and brokenness and void God creates bringing order to the chaos.

And, not just creates, declares what is made *good*.

Light. Dark. Day. Night. Sea monsters. Creeping things.

All good.

Then, humankind created in God's own image.

Male and female created in God's own image.

And God saw what God had made and behold it was not just good, but very good.

I don't know about you, but the world does not feel very good or very orderly to me right now.

Beyond the relentless day in/day out swirl of craziness two headlines particularly gave me

pause this week. The first is that there were 11 school shootings in the first 23 days of January.

One every other day. The second was an article wondering if we even care about such events anymore.

We are drowning...

I am drowning...

In bad news and brokenness and heartache and heartbreak.

So here is what I did.

I went on Facebook and asked for people to tell me where they had seen or experienced kindness this week. Or, seen people treating others decently. And, people responded. Here is what they said.

I like this question... it makes me consider again the woman who smiled at me and made a nice comment as I waited for her to get out of her car so I could get in mine. And the woman who said hello to all the staff of the coffee shop when she walked in. And to appreciate even more all the people who took the time to wish me well after surgery. Small acts, but taken together they help to make each interaction more human, and make each day more connected.

In Katonah when I want to grab a quick bite I either go to Goldberg's Deli or the Pizza Station. The majority of staff in those two places are all Latino (mostly Guatemalan) and I am consistently welcomed and engaged in conversation that feels like something more than small talk. Being comforted by the opportunity to speak Spanish in those situations reminds me of the hospitality and community that seems to emanate from Latino culture and families. And the grace they display all the while facing unjust immigration reform. It makes me stop and think. If only solving the problem were as easy as interacting at the deli.

Grocery store; smiles & friendly comments to a mom with loud kids. Post Office; a man held the door for me & others.

Cars who slow down when going by my puppy and I on the road. Trying not to scare her.

I am so grateful that I see it (almost) every day at work. And I love every reminder for random acts of kindness, so thank you for that, and the thoughtful question!

A man on my walk to work yesterday gave me the brightest and warmest of smiles as we passed each other on the street. Instead of avoiding eye contact, we both briefly exchanged a sense of our shared humanity.

In the chaos of a NYC store, my daughter lost her purse. The young man who found it, texted her and it was returned to her within a couple of hours.

My 5 year old daughter giving friends, teachers and us hugs

I saw an older woman who walks with a cane kneel down to hold a toddler at bay so that his mother could focus on getting her bike off the train.

At the Atlanta airport the folks were super kind when my wife lost her boarding pass. Also the orphans in Mexico were incredibly kind and patient with us Americans who don't know their language.

So here is what feels like truth to me.
There are huge issues out there.
Just as there have always been.
Some seem to be getting better, but others are getting worse.

Racism. Poverty. Misuse and abuse of power whether in governments or in the workplace. Opioids. Hunger. Whatever was above the fold on the front page of whatever newspaper you glanced at this morning. We ignore those issues at our own peril.

But there is also this.

The older woman with the cane who kneels down to hold the hand of a toddler.

The stranger who smiles when you pass on the street.

The little girl who wants to give you a hug.

Those everyday kindnesses which grace your life.

Maybe all this is my own Statement of Faith.

I believe there is more goodness in the world than evil.

And, while not the solution to everything between us and God's Kingdom come, certainly a place we can begin is with those everyday kindnesses and goodness, and those moments of decency and respect which punctuate the lives of most of us each day.

So, don't turn away from the hard work which is ours to do.

But, also, know and name and embody the goodness which the Bible claims is built into your very DNA. And, share that goodness with others awakening theirs in them.

And, when you see something, say something.

Notice the hug of a child and the couple walking down the street holding hands.

Pay attention the kindness of a stranger and the door held for another.

And, say something.

At least to yourself so you stop long enough to see clearly those life giving moments which grace your day that you might remember how and who you were created to be.

Then turn and be that for another.