

SERMON for Sunday, February 4, 2018

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Mark 1: 29-39

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen. Heavenly Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts will be alive with the Holy Spirit and acceptable in your sight. Amen.

In this world there are two different kinds of people. The first kind of people read a book once. They watch a movie once. They are continually looking for new and better stories. They crave new special effects because they are easily bored and continually are seeking more and bigger explosions and car chases. While there may be a few movies that they enjoy re-watching, they are mostly one and done people. In some ways I envy them because after reading it once they know and are able to retell the story. They have already internalized it and made it part of their reality. The other kind of people, of which I am one, are the reread and re-watch people. They can watch the same movies over and over again. They've been known to read the same book time after time. It's why they prefer to buy DVDs and books rather than rent them or check them out of the library. They read and watch the same story so many times that it is imprinted on their memory. It is as though they don't own the book or the movie but rather the story itself! When the story is theirs, it ceases to be a story and becomes a reality. This is a reality they share with the one and done people. A reality that we find in Isaiah, a reality that David shares in his Psalm, a reality that Paul lives in his letter to the Corinthians, and a reality that Mark affirms in our Gospel text. Listen to this quartet of voices as they harmonize and sing I Love to tell the story.

We begin singing the old old story with Isaiah singing the Bass line. Listen to him. Isaiah's is the foundation on which we build. He begins with a series of Rhetorical questions. These are questions that aren't looking for answers because the answer is obvious. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Who created

these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” Isaiah begins sharing the old old story when he tells us that God created the ends of the earth and is in control of our world. He created us and calls us by name. God is the one. Personally I would have lived without Isaiah making an eagles reference but I’m sure that he wasn’t referring to the Philadelphia Eagles. And so the story begins. Isaiah tells us that God created us. We are his. In the words of an ex English teacher Isaiah is the exposition. It lays out the foundation on which the story is built. Isaiah introduces us to the protagonist, God the father Almighty maker of Heaven and earth. The first verse of our story is Isaiah’s. “I love to tell the story of unseen things above, Of our savior and His glory, of the Messiah and His love; I love to tell the story, because I know ’tis true, It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.”

To Isaiah’s first verse, and his wonderful Bass voice we add the high harmony tenor of David in today’s Psalm. Truthfully there is some question as to who wrote today’s Psalm. Some say it was written after the Israelites came back to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon but others say it was written by David when he first captured Jerusalem. Whoever the author is, the circumstance and the message are the same. The Israelites have suffered. Negative things have filled their existence but the message is certainly not negative. Listen to this high harmony. “Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.” David is telling us that we are blessed to be here and we should give praise and thanks! To steal a phrase from Martin Luther’s small catechism, “This is most certainly true.” It is so easy in our lives to dwell on the negatives that we find. It’s so easy to share a litany of what’s wrong with the world but that’s not what David dwells on. David lives in a state of grace and praise! Even his Psalms of Lament end with Praise and thanksgiving. Whatever the state of his life, David says unequivocally God has blessed me. David’s is the rising action of our story. I can hear David singing the second verse “I love to tell the story, more wonderful it seems Than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams; I love to tell the story, it did so much for me, And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.”

With a Bass and a high harmony tenor firmly in place, we are in need of voices to fill in the space between them. Mark shares with us the voice of Jesus. It is Jesus's voice we hear as we read the Gospels. Mark gives us the melody or lead as he introduces us to the voice of Jesus. A Jesus who heals, a Jesus who prays, a Jesus who casts out demons, and a Jesus who proclaims a message of salvation. This is where we find the life of our story. This is the climax. Mark tells us that Jesus went to Peter's house where he encountered Peter's mother-in-law. She was ill so Jesus went to her and took her hand and lifted her up and the fever left her. He healed her and made her whole. He does the same thing for us. We are a broken sick people. If we aren't plagued by physical ailments we are plagued by financial, psychological, or emotional ones. We are captive to sin and our sin separates us from God BUT Jesus heals us by removing our sins and lifting us up. Ultimately he did this when he was lifted up on the cross. After his evening and night at Peter's house Jesus got up early and went out and prayed. He communicated with the creator that Isaiah told us about and David praised. Jesus joined his voice to Isaiah and David and told the story. After praying Jesus went out and told the old old story to the people of Galilee. As Mark tells us when he gives us Jesus's voice singing the third verse. "I love to tell the story, 'tis pleasant to repeat, What seems each time I tell it more wonderfully sweet; I love to tell the story, for some have never heard The message of salvation from God's own holy Word."

Our chord is not complete until we add our baritone, the apostle Paul. He harmonizes and fills in our story by bringing it to resolution. Paul tells us that "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings". That is our call to action. Paul met Jesus, saw Jesus, and KNEW Jesus on the road to Damascus. When Paul met Jesus Paul had to respond. When we read our Bible we meet Jesus, we see Jesus, and we KNOW Jesus. We have a need to respond just as Paul did and just as Peter's mother-in-law did in the Gospel. When Jesus healed her, Peter's mother-in-law got up and served them. Jesus healed and she served. Jesus heals us and we are called to serve. The fourth verse reverberates as Paul adds his wonderful baritone voice singing "I love to tell the story, for those who know it best Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest; And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song, 'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long."

The song is now complete except for the chorus. The chorus is ours. We are called to add our voices to those of Isaiah, David, Mark, and Paul. We are called to tell the story. AS Pastor Jim said last we, we are all parts of the body of Christ and as a unique part of this body we have a unique voice. No one can raise our voice except us. That means that if my voice is not raised then part of the message is missed. Paul tells us in his letter that he became whatever was needed to bring people to Christ, to share the message. That is our charge. We must share the story. People must see Jesus when they look at you and when they look at me.

That thought is very frightening to me because I am a sinner and there are many times when I am not Christ like. I try but I fail. My behavior will not earn me a trip to Glory. Thankfully I don't need to earn that trip because here's the best part of the story. When we fail to tell the story, when we forget the God who created us, when we neglect to raise our voice in praise or prayer, when we fail to serve, when we fail to tell the story, the story never fails us! We sin continually and each and every time Jesus reaches down and heals us. This is GRACE. It is a free gift. We are not saved because we tell the story. We tell the story because we are saved. Whether we are people who watch a movie once and know the story or watch a movie a hundred times before the story is ours, the reality is that we are all children of GOD. We are all saved by the grace of GOD. Because Jesus died on the cross with our sins, we are free to raise our voice and sing the chorus "I love to tell the story, 'Twill be my theme in glory, To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

Thanks be to God Amen!