

Origin Stories

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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Jen has already done the heavy lifting this morning. She has situated our origin story in its cultural context, within the story of Israel and, by extension, the story of the church.

I'm going to see if I can make some connections to our own lives.

This week, as I was thinking about "origin stories," I thought of a night way back when we lived in Nanaimo.

Our kids must have been around eight, and I looked over at the couch and saw Claire poking around in a scrapbook that Naomi made.

Sensitively intuiting the possibility of a moment with my daughter (or just being tired of trying to write my sermon), I closed my computer, sat down beside her and just looked on as she turned the pages.

Eventually, she started to ask me questions. Then she asked if I could read her what mom had written under a picture (the words were mostly in handwriting which the kids hadn't quite mastered yet). She wanted to know every detail.

Eventually I just picked up the book and began to read to her. I read stories about what she used to do in her crib, about the little yellow wheeled duck that she and Nick used to tear around our house on, about the time during potty-training when, upon my emergence from the bathroom one day, she offered me a piece of chocolate for my "success," about her first words, first steps, first time riding a bike, first holidays, etc.

We laughed harder than we had in a long time. She leaned her head on my shoulder, slipped her hand in mine, and before I knew it half an hour had passed.

"I like it when we read from my book," Claire said later that night. "How come," I asked. "Because I like to hear funny stories," was her reply.

But I suspect that there was more to it than that, even if she couldn't quite articulate it. The half-hour spent reliving the story of Claire's life reminded me how important stories are to us, as human beings.

Claire liked to hear funny stories, certainly, but more importantly she liked to hear *her* story—the story of who she was, what she did, and how she affected others.

I think that even if she couldn't quite express it, her delight was not just the result of hearing about a bunch of funny things she did once upon a time. Her story is who she is.

We cannot do without stories, whether we are eight or eighty-eight. We need to know who we are, what has shaped the person we are at present and what can influence the person we will yet become.

We need to know the parts of the story that preceded our arrival and the parts that are yet to come that might fulfill the deepest hopes and aspirations of all our stories.

We are storied creatures—we cannot make sense of who we are and what we can hope for apart from stories.

Gen 1:1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...

What follows is a story of order, of structure, of creativity, of diversity, beauty. Over and over, the refrain. *And God saw... and it was good.*

At its core, our origin story is quite simple.

It is the story of one good God who created a world and human beings to bear his image in it, out of love.

It is the story of a God who created not out of conflict or a need to dominate, but because he loved beauty and wanted to share it.

Christians may differ on how to read the creation narratives of Genesis, but what all Christians believe is that the world was *created* by God.

I want to read another origin story. The first words of the gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:1-5).

John 1 mirrors Genesis 1. Of this origin story, Australian theologian Ben Myers says this:

The Gospel of John begins by retelling Israel's creation story: "In the beginning..." (John 1:1; Gen 1:1). The followers of Jesus believed that in him they had encountered the enabling source of creation. They had come to know the one through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3). Looking into the face of Jesus, they had seen the blueprint of reality.¹

Later in John 1, we read:

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:16-17).

Grace in place of grace already given.

On Wednesday night I watched a movie with the guys at the jail. In our pre-Easter bible studies, *The Passion of the Christ* had come up, and the guys wanted to watch it.

I had decided to put a poster and sign-up sheet on the unit so that anyone could come to the movie, not just those who came to chapel each week.

Part of the poster included a line that said there would be pop and popcorn. The guys in chapel didn't like this. "If you say there's pop and popcorn, everyone will come just

¹ Ben Myers, *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 30.

for that. They should come for the right reasons, like we do, when we come to chapel each week.”

A certain parable of Jesus’ came to mind, on involving workers in a vineyard, where the ones who worked the whole day got paid the same as those who showed up at the last hour.

But I didn’t say any of that. I didn’t have to.

One of the guys said, “Well, I guess Jesus gives grace to all of us, right? None of us earns forgiveness. It shouldn’t matter if people come to the movie for the wrong reasons. Anyone should be allowed to come.”

Six to eight guys usually come to chapel. Twenty came on Wednesday night. There was popcorn everywhere when we were done.

Grace upon grace. Grace in place of grace already given.

Creation is grace already given. It is a gift. It is unearned. It is a home where we are invited to flourish and to contribute to the flourishing of all that God has made.

And of course, Jesus, the Word made flesh, is grace.

Grace in place of grace already given. Light in the darkness. Forgiveness of sins, a love like no other. Life triumphing over death. And the promise of new creation, and life everlasting.

These are our origin stories. These are the stories through which we understand who we are and what we’re doing here.

May God help us to live lives of grace upon grace in response to the grace we have been given.

Amen.

