

Journey to the Cross... *It's Not About the Cadbury Creme Eggs*
Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - March 29, 2020

Well, I'll say upfront, my goal this morning is not to talk about Cadbury Creme Eggs, though I do like them. Today I want to talk about the **Big Story of Christianity** and then ask you to think about where you stand in relation to it. I'm about to give you the entire Bible story in 10 minutes. *Why don't you stop and get some coffee, this is going to be awesome!*

To begin let's look at the absolute center of Christianity, the Cross, which we celebrate at Easter. I like that Jesus tells us what is going to happen to Him before it happens. Matthew 16:21, ... **Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**

Now I assume you already know what happened at Easter, so what I want to do is to spend some time on the BIG STORY Easter fits into. And then why we fit into the BIG STORY in a very real way.

THE BIG STORY: First there is the Bible. We believe this is where we learn about God, God creating the world, and we learn about Heaven. We believe the Bible is central to how we learn about God. And you know how it starts, "**In the beginning God...**" God spoke and there was light, God

spoke and there was land, and God spoke there were animals and there were humans. God created them all.

And when we think about things starting, like little babies when they're born, or in this case creation, we often feel like from the beginning these are unblemished and good things, and that is definitely reflected in the story of the Bible. It says that God created and "**It was good.**"

I don't know if you ever get nostalgic for the past, but I sometimes think life was somehow better when I was a kid. Or you know what, it was probably even better in the 1950's. Life seemed simpler back then: there was Gumby on tv and no reality tv shows.

Now sometimes we also have some memories that weren't so positive. Because something good got messed up along the way. A family is supposed to be a perfect and loving thing that communicates God's love to children and future generations. But something good got messed up along the way. You may be thinking, "*Yup, my family got really messed up.*"

That leads to the next aspect of the **BIG STORY** which is the....**Fall**. This is where something happens, and that something that happens is bad, and it's not God, and it's not good. The Bible calls it **SIN**. But now even if you are not familiar with the Bible story or you struggle with believing the Bible's story, we know from experiencing life that things deteriorate, they decay, they run into trouble.

The Bible shows the same thing. Life is messy when we read the stories of the people in the Old Testament. And even away from the Big Story, almost everyone would agree we see these first two in play out in life: *Creation* and then a *Fall*.

Now some people think that after the fall, or decline, it is just over. It will always be broken, it will never be what it was before. It is better to escape it. If that is our view in life it can lead to despair. But that is not where the Big Story goes. Next we believe in something called **Redemption**.

This is where there is a **great turn around** in the story, a **comeback**. I know we love these stories from sports. I remember watching a Green Bay Packers game and in the last two minutes, they were down something like two touch downs and the Packers had some big plays, came back and won the game. It was wonderful. We love redemption stories, a good turn around is something we like to see.

And I think we actually all inherently want this redemption. We have this feeling that if we could just get back to that which is pure, unblemished, then our lives would be better. And I'm not sure I disagree. But as we study the Bible, we don't see a return to the Garden of Eden. We don't see a cycle beginning again. As we study the Bible, we see in the Big Story that life gets better than what was in the beginning. Redemption is about going beyond the

beginning to something better, greater, and new. This is what I believe God wants to do even today, with each of us. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we have hope for resurrection for us as a free gift from Him. But some people haven't heard that message yet or they haven't yet received this resurrection promise as a free gift.

Do you know what makes me really sad as a pastor?

Not the setbacks in life we all go through, although they can be tragic. It is when those setbacks cause us to believe we are past redemption. We've given up and then we get hopeless. Maybe you believe God has given up on you. But you know what gives me hope, seeing people who have made their way through difficulties to hope.

See, one of the things I'm in awe of about the Big Story, especially the resurrection, is seeing it bring about actual change in people. And we see it in Jesus' disciples:

One minute they're defeated, the next minute they're dynamic.
One minute they're crushed, the next minute they're confident.
One minute they're having a pity party, the next minute they're taking on the world.

What made the difference? The resurrection made the difference! It makes all the difference, because it's always bigger than the difficulty we're going through. Let me read to you from Acts, **When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were**

astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13

The resurrection restored their confidence. It brought about real redemption. They saw Jesus die, then rise again, and then they stood with Him. They saw Him and themselves in the Big Story.

Can I ask you, are there areas of your life, where you need God's redemption? You need a turn around story. Is it Covid 19, do you need redemption hope for a better day? Can you see through it to the **Big Story** of God's love and good purpose?

See as we talk about the **Big Story** it's not just sermon material, it's personal. In the Bible, in John 20-21, we see people with real struggles like we have, and we see the risen Jesus meet those needs.

One of the turnaround stories we read of in the Bible is Mary Magdalene's. I've talked about her before. She was the first at the tomb Easter morning, because she had the most to lose in Jesus' death. We know a bit about Mary Magdalene from the Bible. It says she had been freed from seven demons. Also, Christian tradition says her reputation was she was the unnamed prostitute mentioned in the Bible.

And she was alone. Most of the rest of the people in Scripture, especially women, are mentioned in relation to

other people, “the mother of”, “the daughter of”, “the wife of”, but she is always mentioned alone. We don’t get the sense that this was by choice either, but that she was often left alone.

In the Bible we see that Jesus treated her with respect and love, but now He is gone as well. She’s alone on Easter morning, so she goes to the tomb. She is at the empty tomb, everyone else is gone, maybe because they had some place to go, but she didn’t, and there she encounters Jesus. We read in John 20: **Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher).**” John 20:16

I love that Jesus calls her by name, this lonely outcast woman. This is an indication to us that a relationship with Jesus is always personal. We see this in John 10:3, **“He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”** Jesus does not just love the whole world generically, it is by name. This is a powerful truth in the **Big Story**.

And because Jesus has risen from the dead, He is no longer under the confines of time and space and so He is also present in a real spiritual sense with us today. That is why Jesus says in Matthew 28, **“...Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

Another turn around we see after the resurrection, we see the disciple Peter decide to accept this redemption and not stay lost. Peter had denied Jesus three times, as the

Bible tells us, and then when Jesus finds him He says in John 21, “**The third time [Jesus] said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep.’”**

Here’s the interesting thing. It is interesting that Jesus asks three present tense questions and then gives him three future tense assignments. Do you know where Jesus is looking? Not backwards, He’s looking forward: **Redemption**. Jesus’ message to Peter is, “**You’re Forgiven!**” God’s redemptive power tells us, “**You’re Forgiven!**” and it changes lives. We remember Mary and Peter, and even the doubting Thomas’ story.

One of my favorite parts of being a pastor is hearing stories of redemption, changed lives, because of God’s redemption power. Seeing ourselves in God’s **Big Story of Love** is the most important thing we can have in life. There’s redemption power, even amidst setbacks in life.

Here’s a Key Truth from the **Big Story**, you can say it today: **I am defined by my faith, not by my failure.**

The Apostle Paul wrote this about God’s redemption in 2 Corinthians 1, ...**We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it. We felt we were doomed to die and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves; but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God, who alone could save us, for he can even raise the dead. And He did**

help us... yes, and we expect him to do it again and again. 2

Corinthians 1:8-10

The truth we find in the Bible is that God has a good plan for our lives. This Easter I invite you to define your life by faith in Jesus, receiving His resurrection gift to us, not by the setbacks that so often come with life. Would you pray with me?

*Our heavenly Father,
You know what we need at this time. Be close to us by
Your Holy Spirit, so we will know that the redemptive hope
You give us is always new for every challenge we face.*

*As we struggle with the Covid 19 pandemic, as some of
those we love risk death, renew our hope in the
resurrection, that the total redemption of our lives is a
Bigger Story than any struggle we face.*

*Thank You Father, for You're always loving us. You never
give up on us! In Jesus Name, Amen.*