

## **Tell Me The Story: Week 1**

### ***The Story That Makes Sense of All Our Stories***

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - August 22, 2021

*"Tell me a story, Grandpa."* Probably every child has made that request many times. *"Tell me a story, daddy."*  
*"Tell me a story, mama."*

*"Tell me a story."* Not just to entertain, although a good story certainly does that, but to help us make sense of our lives, of the mystery of our existence.

We are the creatures who are always seeking to understand who we are, where we are, and how we are supposed to be who we are where we are.

And the primary, indeed the primal way we do it is by telling stories. Every culture in every era in every part of the world has a story or cluster of stories that it passes on to each succeeding generation to help each navigate the mystery of being human on this earth. We simply cannot make our way in the world without knowing the stories that shape our understanding of the world. All of us - children, parents, and grandparents – need stories that help us know who we are, where we are, and how we are to be who we are where we are. And when we know there's a God we can trust, as we seek to find answer, we can even be comfortable with what we don't know or understand.

*"Tell me a story."*

This is part of the reason, it seems, we are in the so-called West are presently a people adrift. We no longer have a compelling story to tell each other and pass on to the next generations. We can be praying this soon ends. Of course, we have all kinds of stories. The bookstore and online sources offer countless stories, and we enjoy reading many of these to our children and grandchildren or watching them on video – Superman, Star Wars, Frozen and Frozen II, to name a few recent stories.

As powerful as they are, none of them finally satisfy. All of them are seeking to do what stories are supposed to do, but none of them finally help us make sense of our world.

Thank God there is a Story – actually, a cluster of stories – that has served this purpose in the past and can do so again in the present. It is the story that served as the foundation for western civilization and, sadly, has largely been forgotten by Westerners, at least for now. I am referring, of course, to the story told by the Bible. This is the story I so want my children to know, and it appears the only way they're going to know it is by hearing it from me, from their grandparents, and from you their church family in Sunday School. This is an important call upon our church. We need teachers to *“tell the old, old story”* to younger generations.

Times are different than when we were young, than I was young. I remember reading a children's book of Jesus' Good Samaritan story in my public elementary school. I

remember celebrating Easter and Christmas in my public school education. Some of you may remember celebrating and learning about Easter, Christmas, Passover, and the Gospel message of Jesus in your public or private schools.

You and I were then able to go to university and study art history, for example, and actually "get it." When we saw a painting like Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, we could enter into its reality because we had heard, somewhere along the way, Jesus' great story about the Father and his two sons.

Today, if we were to take a group of average university students to the great art museums, they would probably have no clue how to interpret what is on the walls. If we were to take them to the Sistine Chapel in Rome and have them look up at Michelangelo's masterwork on the ceiling, most would have no clue as to what he was describing and, perhaps even more sadly, most would not have a clue about the meaning of life being portrayed on the ceiling.

*"Tell me a story."* Because it's important.

Thank God, God himself has a story - a great cluster of stories - in the sixty-six books of the Bible. And the key to the whole story that the sixty-six books tell is the first "half" of the Bible – not the

Old Testament, as one might think, but Genesis 1-11, “the second half” being all of Genesis 12 through Revelation 22. The story that begins in Genesis 12 with the call of Abraham and Sarah and then walks through the history of Israel, leading up to the coming of Jesus Christ and finally to the new heavens and new earth, that story makes sense when it is heard in the context of the story in Genesis 1-11. The authors of the second half of the Bible (Genesis 12 - Revelation 22) assume we know the first half. This means that if our children and grandchildren, our friends and neighbors, are to understand the whole story God tells, we need to make sure they know the story that makes sense of the rest of the story.

Fascinatingly, all the other stories we tell, all the other great stories and myths all cultures tell, are grappling with what Genesis 1-11 reveals. These chapters make sense of all our other stories, for they speak to the fundamental questions we ask in every age and culture:

Where did we come from?

Why are we here?

What are we?

Are we alone in the universe?

What does it mean to be human?

Why does it hurt to be human?

Why can't human beings build impressive skyscrapers, make exquisitely beautiful art, play sports, and compose and sing songs and then use one another for our own ends, manipulate loss, exploit the earth, and kill?

What is wrong with us?

Why did human societies rise and flourish and then begin to rot at the core?

Where is God in all of this?

What kind of god is he in all of this?

Can the world be fixed?

Who will do the fixing?

And when?

The most important role of the stories in Genesis 1-11 is to help us realize why we need a Savior and what the Savior comes to do. When we inhabit the stories of Genesis 1-11, we come to realize just how good the gospel of Jesus Christ really is. We have hope!

*"Tell me a story, Grandpa."*

So, let us listen to one of our great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandpas tell us a story. Tradition says it was Moses. For the sake of simplicity let us go with that tradition for now, and let us listen to Moses tell us a story.

This is The Story That Makes Sense of All Our Stories.

We begin The Story That Makes Sense of All Our Stories at the beginning, Genesis 1. I'll note here that the chapter numbers and verse numbers were added in 800 or so years ago to help us reference specific verses. The content of Genesis 2:1-3 is not actually a new section or a new chapter, but is the continuation of Genesis 1.

Therefore, whenever I say “Genesis 1,” I mean Genesis 1:1 through 2:3.

Now get this, Genesis 1, the beginning of *The Story That Makes Sense of All Our Stories*, is a poem. It is not a philosophical treatise. Nor is it a scientific paper, although it has huge scientific implications. Genesis 1 is a poem, a song.

Many people in our cultures are familiar with the show tune “Do-Re-Mi” from the musical *The Sound of Music*. It gives the listener a solid foundation for learning and understanding Western music’s major scale. In a similar way, the concise and memorable Genesis 1 “*In the beginning GOD...*” gives a foundation for understanding the Bible and God's work in the world. If only our cultures knew Genesis 1 as well as “Do-Re-Mi.”

The first three notes of this Genesis 1 song are C, C, C: that is, “Creator creates creation.” If we get these three notes correct, we can sing the rest of the story in tune. Without these three notes, it is not possible to make sense of our existence. I’ll say that again. “Creator creates creation.” Without these three notes, we cannot make sense of our existence.

**“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). Not just “some power or process somehow did something to cause the emergence of Mother Nature.”**

No, Creator creates creation. However it all happens,  
Creator creates creation.

These are the opening notes. We will continue The Story  
That Makes Sense of All Our Stories next week. Genesis  
chapters 1-11. I hope you will join us for this study in  
person or online.