

THE BIGGER STORY IN LIFE

Series: New Life Sunday
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Narratives
Exodus 3:1-4

Welcome to New Life Sunday. Today we are celebrating Baby Dedications and Baptisms. This has always been a big deal for us here at Trinity.

Personally every time I look into the eyes of children I am filled with awe. Children are just so beautiful.

Wednesday night at worship night Maki's son ran up to me just to give me a tight hug and then went on to play. The smiles of the children from the Beehive, beaming with hope, and life.

It is Storm, whom almost everyone in this community knows, who will hug and greet as many people as she can every Sunday morning infecting all of us with joy.

Children like Ahadi who will be running around this place shouting at the top of her voice just full of love and life. Or the stunning eyes of Mara who does know how to stare at someone long and hard. Or the grace of Wendo whom we just dedicated today.

I am filled with awe that any of us would be allowed that we are allowed to mould such precious lives. The things they will love, the way they will think of themselves and others around them. Who they will marry if they one day want to go there.

How the world will look like to them as God begins that journey with them he welcomes us to be part of it. I think that should fill anyone with awe. I mean some people are so filled with awe that they will not hold little babes because they fear they may break those fragile yet resilient humans. I am just amazed that I am invited to be part of their stories.

Last week I was telling some friends that I have always longed to be a father which I still do but after becoming a part of this big community I am realizing how a big a deal it is. I am thinking maybe I will just wait a little longer.

Plus anyway, so many other things have to be in place before that happens, so now until then, I am relegated to being a PUNK - Professional Uncle, No Kids. I kinda love on them hug and kiss their faces and then when the real work begins I hand them over to their parents.

The other thing we really celebrate here is baptism. Today we are celebrating the public declaration of Joyce Kimani that she is a follower of Jesus. This is a big deal. That this community would be honoured to be part of her spiritual journey. That is a big deal. That also fills me with so much awe.

Who are we that God would think of us, who are we that God would allow us to do this.

There is a bigger story. The children around us, their's is a bigger story and we are just a part of it. And they are part of ours and will be part of many others in their lifetime.

The people we baptize, that is a great story but they are on a bigger journey and we get to be part of it. There is a bigger story. There are narratives we pick and tell ourselves and the world around us. There are so many mini stories but there is a bigger story going on and we are part of it.

Yet the narratives we let shape our lives, affect the way we impact the people God allows us to be in their lives.

Unfortunately, there are also so many false narratives and like every other narrative, they end up colouring the worldview of people and shaping their lives.

We can choose the narrative we tell and become part of. We can choose the narrative we let shape our lives. Not forgetting that we are invited to be part of shaping the lives of all the children running around us, even as they shape ours. Shaping the journey of everyone who sits here even as they shape us. Have you intentionally thought through the narrative you are living out?

Let's pray

You see, the world and humanity as a whole have journeyed through a lot. There are things that were once a big deal that are no longer. There was a time when the father of modern science Galileo was put under house arrest for claiming that the Earth rotates around the sun and not the other way round. Now that is not even a question.

There was a time we wondered if we could ever leave the planet, we have moved on from that question after over 147 man years on space. Now we are asking a different question: Whether there is life somewhere out there and whether one day we will be able to live away from our home, earth.

There was a time in human history that some diseases spelt certain death. When all sickness was thought to be contained in the blood and so a lot of treatment involved draining one of their blood using leaches. Now, we have moved on from there and even though we cannot yet treat all deceases that plague humanity, we are now asking ourselves how we could cure mortality.

We have covered much ground, eliminated so many questions. Taken journeys that future generations need not take again because we have provided narratives that they can pick up from or safely dwell in them.

However, the questions we could never eradicate are the questions the human soul has always asked. A journey that no one can take for you. You can see it at individual and communal levels. And I think these are questions that concern the bigger narrative that is going on. The bigger story.

1. Where do I come from? The question of origin.

2. Who I'm I really? The question of Identity. I'm just a name? I'm I who my parents say? I'm I who I think I am? I'm I what I do?

3. What I'm I here for? The question of purpose. Does any of this mean anything?

4. What happens when we die? Does it matter? Is this all for nothing? If there is something out there, I'm I getting right now?

These questions allude to a bigger story, the real story. The journey is for everyone and then we get invited to be part of each others journey.

Is it not a big deal to be invited to shape this important journey for these beautiful children and others around us? I think it is. Who are we that God has us in mind to shape the journey of people finding their origin, identity, purpose and the question of eternity? This is a big deal. It is daunting even.

And the story we are inviting people to, is one that is described in the book of beginnings in the Bible.

In Genesis 1 (Zuma Joke)

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God...

The story really starts with God. That we all have a starting point. That everything is contained at this point here, in the beginning, God. That there were no accidents. We are no accidents we are the careful work of love in action.

The narrative we are inviting people into is this narrative. That continues with an intentional decision to make us.

Genesis 1:26

***God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."***

A narrative that says we are precious. A story that resonates with our souls that every human being is precious. Why? because we bear the image of the creator.

To bear the image of the creator means He is Lord over us and that we are uniquely like him in many ways. And certainly, it means we mean the whole world to him.

A story that says that we all have a purpose. The thing that brings life to hopeless souls, the knowledge that it is not all for nothing. We are created to be part of a story.

Yet in the age of severe self-centeredness a narrative that says we are players in the story but not the main story. That this is God's story and all God's children have a place in His heart and His story.

Here is why it is important to be aware of the story you are living out or wanting to live out. We are surrounded by narratives. Our narratives shape our whole life. Our narratives shape our influence on other people lives. If you are not intentional about it, you are still choosing a narrative anyway and it will shape your world and your influence in a specific way you are just not choosing how. And you can only see the impacts of narratives, even harmful ones.

The narratives that we are the centre of the universe have made us ignore our responsibility to take care of the planet. They have fueled our narcissism making nations think themselves better and more deserving than others. Making us more selfish even in relationships where we should primarily be giving love even as we receive.

The impacts of such untrue narratives have led to the soaring of desperation in society today. Suicide is a major issue all over the world. Hopelessness seems to be so normal that faking happiness and contentment on social media platforms is second nature.

So what we need is to have our narratives as close to the Big Story as Possible. So how do we recalibrate our narratives while surrounded by all these other fake narratives around us? How do we invite people around us to the narrative that sets us right? I think it will take an encounter with the one who the Big Story is about, God.

I wanna tell you a section of the story of a prophet of the nation of Israel. This guy was born at a time when Israelites were slaves in Egypt. They had been slaves for centuries but this time it was worse. It was at a time when the ruling Pharaoh was a bit insecure about the numbers of the Israelites. So he tried to control their population the same way we control the population of troubling insects and pest; make the males sterile. And he thought the best way to actually do this is killing off any males who were born.

So when families would receive newborns they would hope it is a girl because if it were a boy he would be thrown into the sea to die. Not a great time for Queen Beyonce's song 'if I were a boy'.

So the guy was born to an Israelite family at this point. So he was born a slave.

After his birth instead of being killed his parents set him afloat praying that someone will instead pick him and have mercy on him. And by God's Grace, the baby is picked by an Egyptian Princess. So he escapes death, but only does he get away with his life, he ends being raised as Egyptian Royalty.

The Princess hired the child's own mother for a nanny. Talk about twist and turns. His mom taught him Jewish ways while nurturing him and His other mom, well the Egyptian Princess made sure she is brought up in the ways of the Pharaoh. Talk about the perfect recipe for an identity crisis.

Was he an Egyptian, or was he an Israelite? Is he a slave or is he a prince? All these were narratives that surrounded him. Whichever one he picks was going to completely define him whether he was in the palace or in the fields with the slaves.

Whichever narrative one lives, defines their outlook completely. If someone's narrative is that they are loved, even in the hardest of situations with the people in their lives they have a way of remaining hopeful. If someone's narrative is that the world revolves around them, oh my word you will have a hard time making them focus on someone else even for a second.

So Moses' choice of narrative was going to be very important and these were the narratives around him. And I am sure they both influenced his life to some degree. This is Moses when we meet him.

But as I said, you end up seeing the fruits of a narrative. At the end, we see Moses who is the deliverer of a nation. Moses the great leader of Israel. Moses the great prophet, the one who gave the Torah which is an important piece for not only Jewish tradition but also Muslim and Christian Traditions. Moses the one who the Messiah is promised to be like.

What changed? Moses met God. Moses met the one who the true narrative is about. He met the one who the Big story is about. There is reality which is subjective that we all see through our lenses and then there is capital R reality which is how the creator of Reality sees the world. The one whose story, History is actually about and in whose hands the future is. The one who science is trying to catch up with.

When people meet God, our lives are readjusted to line up with the truth. Our stories change and our history finds their place in him. When we meet God, our pasts no longer define us and the narratives around pale in comparison to big story. Their impact dwarfs at the sight of the impact the experience of meeting God has on our lives.

Here is how it happened. Before Moses became this person, he was still living princely in Egypt while being drawn to the slaves because they were his family. In this identity crisis, he killed an Egyptian man who was beating up an Israelite slave.

This made the Pharaoh so angry that he wanted Moses arrested. Moses then fled to Midian. Another piece of narrative around him. He is now not only a slave raised as a prince or a prince with slave origins, but he is also now a fugitive and a prince turned shepherd of goats and sheep.

While in this state this happened

Exodus 3:1-4

Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

God saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He said, “Yes? I’m right here!”

This encounter here, this yes from Moses here goes on to change his life forever and that of a whole nation and quite frankly the world.

You see Moses met God and this changed his narrative. The world needs a change of narrative and if the world’s narrative is going to change, the world needs to meet God. This country does and our families do. I know I do. And we have been invited to be part of God’s work in the world of changing the narrative or rather bringing the truth into focus.

So how do we be part of that? By being the bushes that burn and not get consumed. Moses saw a bush that was burning but was not being consumed, that caught his attention.

There is nothing special about a bush that is burning, but if it is not being consumed, now, that is something.

The story does not tell us how long the bush had been burning but it was long enough for Moses to have expected the bush to be consumed and the flames to start dying down. It was long enough for Him to realize this is not usual so he moves closer to it.

I will tell you one thing for free, Moses was not raised in Kenya because we do not move close to strange things. We run the other way.

Listen, this is how we will be able to influence the narratives of others. If we remain faithful in the things God is doing in us.

There is nothing strange about being Kind to the person who does not like you but when you are continually kind and not being consumed that will catch their attention.

There is nothing strange about being a person of faith, but if you continually step in faith despite all that is around you. Choosing to trust God over fear, without being consumed, that will catch the attention of your children.

There is nothing strange about giving but if you continuously accept the call from Jesus to be generous with who you are that will catch the attention of the world around you.

It is a big deal to be invited to be part of the journeys of everyone around us but I think God is fully confident because he has confidence that the work Jesus is doing in us will be like a bush that is burning and not being consumed.

Do not give up on faith. Some of us give up right when it is about to finally Catch the attention of the people around us. Even the people we think very unlikely.

Trust me even the people we sometimes think would never be interested in Jesus.

One of the preachers I listen to gave a story of his brother who was an atheist and so darn stubborn about it that this preacher never thought he would ever go to church or care about God ever. One day he comes home and says that he has given his life to Jesus and this preacher, then he had not become one yet, says “Wow and Jesus actually accepted it?”

The things that are not necessarily very special yet you do them from being empowered by the Holy Spirit, keep doing them faithfully because it is through them that God wants to draw people around you into a conversation with him.

Listen I am not saying that any of us has the one and only and the best narrative. Because unfortunately, this kind of thinking leads to obnoxiousness. And it is sad that sometimes it actuals comes from the church.

I admit that for all my good intentions and even though sometimes I do not have good intentions, I only see in part. I admit that even though I believe I have encountered God like many of you, my narrative is still incomplete because it is just a very small part of the big story. Jesus is the main story.

You see, God was not the burning bush and the story of the burning bush cannot contain the entire big story, the story of God. This is just a part and a small part of the story. But because of God's faithfulness, it had far great a reach.

Engage the world with the humility that you do not have the entire story, you are not the entire story while boldly trusting God and being faithful that He will use the little part you are to bring an encounter for the world around you to change the narratives around us and align them with the truth.

So as we finish I want to invite the band back on stage and the ministry teams to be in place. I invite you to stand. We want to enter into response time. As you respond to the Holy Spirit, I want you to think about the things God has empowered you to do. They seem simple and small but He is calling you to keep at it. To not grow tired, to not lose faith in them?

Let's Pray