

Sermon
Lent 3-C
St. Andrew's, Methuen
March 20, 2022
William Bradbury

Exodus 3:1-15
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9
Psalm 63:1-8

Do you think there is a central Biblical story influencing your life? And if so, which one? Which Biblical story do you think is the master narrative that is running your life?

I know many Protestants who carry around as their story Genesis 3: the story of Adam and Eve, living in the Garden of Eden, until they are seduced by the talking snake to eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and are thereby kicked out of the garden of abundance and peace and thrown into the land of scarcity and violence east of Eden, all because of their original sin.

Now all these Christians see themselves and others primarily as sinners who work hard to please God the judge, who has the power to put them back into the Garden of Eden or into hell.

Others I know, however, have as their central story Genesis 1: where God proclaims, not our original sin, but our original blessing, with the words, and God saw that everything was very good.

If you are a Genesis 3 person, you focus on your sinfulness, past and present, and the sinfulness of others, living a life of judgment, keeping yourself and others in the moral straight and narrow.

Conservative churches tend to focus on teaching the sin and judgment of Genesis 3, telling others, especially those who are different from them, they had better not misbehave if they want to avoid being thrown into over-crowded prisons in this life and eternal conscious torment in the next.

If you are a Genesis 1 person, you focus on God's blessing on yourself and creation, living a life of gratitude as a beloved child of God. **Progressive churches** tend to focus on teaching the blessing and gratitude of Genesis 1, telling themselves they don't need to worry about things like spiritual disciplines like reading the Bible and daily prayer, because God knows how special we really are.

 And at first it looks like Jesus is on the side of progressive when he brings up those Galileans murdered by Pilate's thugs in the temple and those killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them and says, **"Do you think that because these Galileans and Jerusalemites suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"**

And he answers twice: No, I tell you.

But then, strangely, Jesus turns on us progressives and when he says sharply, **"unless you repent you will suffer just as they did."**

So it looks like Jesus refuses to choose between Genesis 1 and Genesis 1, which makes us wonder if there is another story that serves as his master narrative.

 I want to suggest that for Jesus and the whole Bible the most important master narrative is the one we heard this morning from Exodus 3:

God, out of the burning bush, says to Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, **and I have come down to deliver them**, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...."

This is the central story of the God **who sees and hears our cries AND comes to rescue the oppressed peoples that God especially loves.**

It is the master narrative of the compassion and liberation of God:

+++++

And our churches, conservative and progressive must start here, if we want to experience the depth of the good news of Jesus Christ.

If we merely want to be religious—religion being a human technology for the control of divinity—we can focus on making sure we don't deviate from the Book of Common Prayer while keeping our worship under an hour so we can get to coffee fellowship.

Or we can be religious by focusing on sin, especially the speck in our neighbors' eyes.

But if we want to know the arrival of the kingdom in our lives and families and communities and nation, we must first see God the liberator at work.

The good news is not a story about how we need to climb up the ladder of morality, or the ladder of success, or the ladder of progressive social values to find God, **but rather it is the story of God climbing down to us in Moses, the prophets, and finally in Jesus Christ—Son of God, Son of Man, Son of Mary.**

Once we see that we too need to be liberated by God, we make God the center of all we do—the God the center of our worship, God the center of our fellowship, God the center of our church education, and God the center of our outreach.

When we make God's liberation story our master narrative, then we can repent from all we do that keeps us from living into this story, and we can finally accept God's original blessing as God's beloved children.

That's why those of us raised in churches of prosperity and privilege desperately need the witness and fellowship of those Christians with a long history of being oppressed. For they are the ones whose worship makes central the liberation narrative.

Listen to the words of the hymn #599--**"Lift Every Voice and Sing"** to catch the echoes of our master narrative:

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and Heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as The list'ning skies,
let it resound loud as the Rolling sea

Sing a song
full of faith that the Dark past has taught us,
Sing a song
full of The hope that the present has brought Us;

Facing the rising sun
of our new day Begun,
Let us march on till victory is Won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the Chast'ning rod,
Felt in the day that hope
Unborn had died;
Yet with a steady Beat,

Have not our weary feet,
Come to the Place on which our fathers sighed?

We have Come
over a way that with tears has been Watered,
We have come,
treading our path Through the blood of the slaughtered,

Out from The gloomy past,
till now we stand at Last
Where the white gleam
of our star is Cast.

God of our weary years,
God of Our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus
Far on the way;
Thou who has by thy Might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us Forever in the path, we pray

Lest our feet
Stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Least our hearts,
drunk with the wine of The world, we forget thee,

Shadowed beneath the Hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land

This is the fertilizer we need around the roots of our barren tree, so that we too might bear the fruit of God's liberation—and thereby work for the liberation of others—like the people of Ukraine, the poor of the world, those oppressed around the corner from this church.