

Title: “Lessons and Carols: Continued”

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Genesis 1:1-2 & Mark 1:9-11

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Service Readings: Gen 1:1-5, Romans 6:1-11, Mark 1:4-11

The passages in Genesis 1 and Mark 1 provide a deeper appreciation of God’s redemptive work through Jesus. We see how God created, sin disrupted, and Jesus began the process of restoration. We live in the knowledge of this work and the promise of its fulfillment when Jesus returns.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

She sat silent and prayerful in the pew towards the back of the church. This was not her home church but, then again, she really didn’t have a church to call home. She hadn’t had one for many, many years. But during this past Advent season she answered the tug on her heart and found a church to attend. This one was very welcoming and so she stopped searching and came here every week.

She felt a sense of peace in this place, a calmness that she never remembered experiencing those long years ago when she did have a church home. She was much younger then and life was much simpler; or maybe she was just naïve. She remembers believing that she felt so in charge of her life, that she felt she would accomplish such great things. Oh, how she longed that it had been true. But it hadn’t; her life became complicated as the years progressed, the normal stresses of adulthood steadily weighed her down. First college, then a career, then marriage, then children. Milestone by milestone the complexities in her life increased and the dreams that she had for herself decreased. Life simply didn’t allow for any of them. And church attendance? That faded during that first year at school. She just didn’t have time for it when faced with everything else she needed to focus on.

But throughout all these years, that little voice in her heart kept whispering to her, tugging at her to return. And not just to church, but to Jesus. She always suppressed it for one reason or another, but finally, when she could no longer find an excuse to stay away, she relented and her journey began.

One of the first services that she attended was something the congregation called “Lessons and Carols” and she spent the next two weeks, maybe even longer, meditating on it. Sure, the music was lovely but what really caught her attention was the storyline that was woven with the threads of those selected passages.

The service began with a reading from Genesis, the account immediately after Adam and Eve’s sin. This was the start of God’s promise of redemption for his fallen creatures. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.” This is what God promised: a savior that would right the wrong that man created. And then there was the lesson of Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his only son, only to be stopped and be provided a lamb for the sacrifice. What a foreshadowing of Jesus. And then the famous promises of Isaiah, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” And the thread continued to weave by the words from the prophet Micah. And then the visit

from Gabriel to Mary and Joseph, and finally the birth of the savior. What a beautiful tapestry of God's story: God created, sin disrupted, and Jesus began the process of restoration.

That service offered her so much to mediate on, but the one she just sat through this morning seemed to continue right where the other left off. First, it recalled God's creative act:

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And then the Gospel described the baptism of Jesus. This marked the beginning of his earthly ministry and was really the next major activity after his birth.

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

God's chosen people had strayed from the path and John the Baptist had emerged to call them to repentance because the Messiah would soon arrive. And he did arrive, not as an outsider but as one of them. And with this baptism of repentance, he was declaring his solidarity with all of Israel and acknowledging their need for forgiveness. And he would continue to stand in for Israel when he would later bear their sins on the cross, suffering their punishment, and the punishment even for *all* mankind.

Back in the garden, when man had sinned, man tore apart a relationship that was perfect in every way. In that garden he turned his back on God, and in many ways began to walk away from him. And as the years progressed, and as the earth was populated, men would continue to reject God: over and over again. But through this rejection God would execute his plan of restoration. Through the sinful acts of man would come Jesus, his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. A relationship would be restored and a path to God forged. And a promise of full restoration would be made when Jesus returned once again.

This is the tapestry of God and it paints a picture of mercy and grace upon all of creation. And it is a beautiful image. But included in that very fabric is a thread that is her life. And, although nothing more than a tiny thread in this grand masterpiece, it is a thread that represents a microcosm of that larger story. For that thread is the story of her. It is a story of a healthy relationship with God. And it is a story where her relationship was temporarily broken as she turned her own back to him and focused on the worldly priorities of her own life. It is not that she hated him, or rejected him, but that she just... ignored him! But it is also a story of God's pursuit to restore that single relationship. He never stopped pursuing her; he never ignored her! He never stopped calling out to her and one day... she listened; and one day she stopped running. And one day he came and carried her back into his fold.

Jesus was baptized. Not because he needed repentance. Jesus was baptized because *she* needed repentance. And so Jesus stood in the middle of that river and said, "I am here for you. I will stand in your place with John the Baptist so that I can stand in your place during God's judgement. I will allow John to pour water over me, water that was reserved for you, so that I can allow God to pour his wrath and judgement on me, the wrath and judgement that was reserved for you. And I will take endure it so that you don't have to. And through this act, through *me* I will make you presentable and perfect to the

father. I will restore what was lost and I will do it *for you*.” Restored. That’s her reality. A relationship restored with God, by God.

And today she sits, reflecting on her own restoration. She finds comfort in knowing that she has turned back to Jesus in repentance, and that he has forgiven her. It may not be a grand story like that of creation, but it is a story that is just as important, for it is a soul that is just as important to God as any other that he has created.

And this same restoration is available to us as well. For we too have been baptized into the death of Jesus and buried with him. And we too will be raised from the dead, just as Christ was raised from the dead. Our lives are threads that have been woven into the grand tapestry of God’s story. And just as this woman was renewed and refreshed with this understanding, so should we. And we should live in this knowledge that we are a thread in God’s tapestry, a thread that was painted with the blood of Jesus. A thread that is part of the tapestry of the restoration of God’s relationship with his creation.

How does your thread look in this master fabric? Is it dull and needing renewal and restoration? If so, Jesus stands ready with his body and blood. Allow him to paint you with his forgiveness of our father so that your thread reflects the glory of his mercy and grace.

Please pray with me.

To Jordan came the Christ, our Lord,
To do His Father's pleasure;
Baptized by John, the Father's Word
Was given us to treasure.
This heav'nly washing now shall be
A cleansing from transgression
And by His blood and agony
Release from death's oppression.
A new life now awaits us.

Amen.