

February 18, 2024
The First Sunday of Lent
Pastor Matt Duerr

“God’s Narrative: ‘Have You Not Read?’”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Welcome to Lent. It's the first Sunday of Lent and we are going to begin embarking on a monumental, massive biblical journey inspired by a book titled **The Story**, written in 2021 by a gentleman named Randy Frazey. It's a 31-chapter book. That takes 31 Bible stories and walks the people through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. That brought about a 31-week sermon series using the book, which I know several pastors who used it and just loved it. It also led to a 31-week Bible study and many other things. I think it's a great idea. Get people into God's Word and introduce them to the biblical characters that we find there, all of it connected together for the purpose of saving mankind.

I just have one problem with it, the word story. Here is the Oxford New Dictionary definition for it. I quote, “An account of imaginary, or real people and connected events told for entertainment.” That's the modern view. If you go to Merriam Webster's dictionary, you'll find there's seven different definitions for a story. You'll find that six of the seven revolve around that concept of imaginary and entertainment. So, what should we really be doing? Because words do matter. I think we need to throw the word story right out of everything we deal with when it comes to the Bible and replace it with the word narrative. Again, using Oxford’s New Dictionary, here is the definition of narrative: a spoken or written account of connected events. Their example is of a person in court giving testimony under oath, or a written deposition done under oath. And why do I say that? Because we need to change how we think about the Bible. The Bible is God's narrative. He is the eyewitness to history from the very beginning of time, and He already knows the end of time. And as such, it is totally trustworthy. And that is why Jesus in His high priestly prayer John 17:17, prays for His disciples right before He's

arrested, He says. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. Set them apart in your word, because your word is truth God.

And then when we're looking at the great "I AM" sayings of Jesus; on that same night meeting with His disciples, He says 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' So back to the definition of a narrative. This is God's account of connected events. And how important is it to learn these accounts? Well, again, let's go to John chapter 20, verse 31, where John says why he wrote the narrative down. These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. There's the purpose! From Genesis to Revelation. It's all connected with the purpose so that we might have life, salvation in the name of Jesus.

So, what does God's narrative, His deposition, look like? Well, it's really simple. He starts from the beginning. Genesis 1 verse 1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Created. Exnihilo, - from out of nothing. God took nothing except the power of His Word, and He made the entire universe in a six-day time span. That takes us back to the sermon from 5 weeks ago. I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. We can look at that and just we should stand in awe of God. Is that's really what is meant? You bet!

If you go to the book of Job, there's guy there named Elihu. He's teaching Job wisdom, and in Job chapter 34 he begins it with some rabbinical teaching. He basically asks the question, 'so who put God in charge?' And his answer is simple. God put Himself in charge. He created the whole thing. And he makes the point about how big an awesome God is that by saying. If God would withdraw His breath (now remember He breathed life into Adam) if God withdrew His breath, we'd all die and return to dust. Or as God withdrew His Spirit, who works faith in our hearts, we again we would spiritually die and become spiritual dust. His message is this. Take God out of the picture. Everything ceases to exist because we are totally dependent on God. And that's because God is Creator. He loves His creation, and He sustains His creation. And so, in Genesis, one verse one, we are introduced to our first teaching and

doctrine that is connected all the way to the very end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation.

Of course, you might ask what happened To this great creation? Well, it was a great creation because God created thinking, independent mankind that had freedom of choice. God created male and female, in fact, in our gospel reading this morning, some Pharisees challenged Jesus on marriage. And where did He go? Right back to Genesis. And He said with a certain level of incredulity. "Have you not read that in the beginning He created them male and female; a fit for each other?" But there's more. When we look at that creation account, we see God created man with a purpose, a novel purpose. He created man to work the garden! But we also read that he put two trees in the garden. The Tree of life; "Eat of it, you live." The Tree of knowledge of good and evil. "Eat of it, you die."

And then we read I quote, "Now the serpent was more crafty than all the other beasts of the field." Yeah. That's a part of God's narrative. He tells the whole truth. And Satan, he's crafty. Listen, how crafty he is. And when I say listen, I mean really, please listen, because I think you might hear something just a little bit different today than maybe what you've heard in the past. "Did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?" He starts with the question. It's Rabbinical teaching. He's speaking to Eve. Now what's so crafty about that? Some people say, well, he lied because that's not what God said. No, what's so crafty? I want you to really think about this. Why did he ask Eve? I'll answer it, just sow dissension and distrust.

Let's go back to Genesis 2 and walk our way through what happened. God Creed. He put me on in the garden to work the garden. He told me that he could eat of every tree in the garden, including the tree of life. He ate of it, he would live. And then there was a tree of knowledge of good and evil, if you eat of it, and that day that you eat of it, you will surely die. OK. We've all heard that, right? Now the very next word is "then." That means this comes after everything I just said. Then God said. "It is not good for man to be alone." There you have it. Then he created Eve. Eve wasn't there when God told Adam. Actually, when God

told Adam, He was setting up a precedent there. Dad's, Father's, men, be men and pass on what God says to your family. But when, Satan asked, did God really say? What he's really doing is sowing a little seed of dissension. See if maybe you've ever heard anything like this in today's day and age, you know? Did Adam get it right? Did he tell you the truth? Or is this just a part of male dominance and he's trying to take advantage of you Eve? There's so much more that God had in store for you than to be listening to Adam, by the way. Why is everything about God written in the masculine and Adam was masculine? Why would they? They have talking amongst each other before you were even created? What sort of evil things were they doing behind your uncreated evil back? You can't trust either of them. See, because they didn't include you. They were not diverse, equitable and inclusive.

And yet, Eve was rock solid. She comes right back with. We may eat of every tree of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and of that we may neither eat nor touch it, lest we die. And again, some people go, 'there's the first sin, she lied.' But I don't think so, and I'm maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think so. But let's think about how this is laid out. Adam was told all of this. He had to teach it to Eve. Now if you were Adam and you were teaching it to Eve or to your children, would you say? Don't eat that, OK? Or would you say? Make a wide berth and stay way away from that, because on the day that you eat of it, you're going to die. I have a funny feeling, that's exactly what Adam did. He said you know, let's just play this super safe Eve. Let's just not even touch it. Stay clear.

But Satan then goes from just being crafty To the liar, because lying is his native name language, 'you will not surely die.' Which brings up again. They were lying. They were leading me astray. They are taking advantage of me. And then he starts to entice. For God knows, the day that you eat of it, your eyes are gonna be open. You'll be like Him. He doesn't want you to see how He and Adam have conspired against you Eve.

And that leads us to our second basic doctrine. Trust God. Trust His word. Why? Well, because God followed through on His word. The day

that you eat of it, you surely will die. Death will come into your life. God kicked them out of the garden, He followed through. And they experienced hardship just like He said. Weeds had started to grow up out of the ground and made life miserable. They didn't even have Roundup. Contrast that with Satan. You will not surely die. They both did. So, who's the accurate one? The one who says something and follows through? Or the one who says something and there is no follow through? In fact, it's 100% false.

So, getting back now to our definition of narrative; a spoken or written account of connected events. Now this is connected from Genesis all the way to Revelation and the Gospels in between. He addresses Satan, "I'll put the amity between you and the woman between your seed, (your lying) and her seed, the truth in the flesh of Jesus Christ." He's going to strike your head. It will be a fatal blow, but you're going to strike his heel, and this is going to hurt him tremendously.

This is God's creation narrative, His eyewitness deposition. And when we look at it again, we should stand back and recognize, our God is big. He is awesome. He's a God of wonder. And He's also a God of truth, and He validated that truth. Everything He said came true, and He followed through because He is the righteous and just God. And yet, He is the God of love, and He will save, and He announced that salvation. And why is there a need for salvation? Because there is sin, and sin equals death. God says so.

And Satan is a crafty liar, an expert in lying and deception and sowing seeds of distrust. That is why Saint Peter writes and says be sober, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone who he may devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith. Resist him. He's still lying. He's lying and saying you're not created. He wants to diminish the greatness of God and the purpose of our creation. He's saying you're a modified ape. And God is saying, I created you, male and female, a fit for each other to be fruitful and multiply. Well, Satan's lie says no, there's no purpose. It's not be fruitful and multiply, it's live for yourself. Live for self. Live for the here and now. Don't listen to God's word that says whatever you do in Word or deed, do

all to the glory of God. No, no, it's all about you. Live for yourself. That's what he did with Genesis, live for yourself Eve. And when Adam came along and said OK, I'll go along with that, because I'm gonna live for myself. I want to make you happy. I want to be happy.

And you go all the way to the Book of Revelation, and we have this number 666. Six is the number of man, three is the number of God. It's when man lives for himself instead of for God. It's really quite simple. It's all connected because it is God's narrative.

And so, I challenge you to listen. I challenge you to faithfully believe and to act on that word. Then I'd like you to ponder for just a moment what else that scripture says. As we enter into holy communion, Jesus says "This is my body, this is my blood given for you." Saint Paul takes it a step further. If we don't recognize his body and blood, we eat and drink to our own condemnation. That awesome God, who has given this phenomenal narrative, who allowed Himself to be confined to the womb of a woman, the body of a human, comes and is in the bread and is in the cup. He says take me in to you. Let me be in you. Let me sustain you. I am the great Creator. I sustain all of creation. Let me sustain you. In our Savior's Name, Amen