



Where is the Good News?: God!

**Sermon Series: “Where is the Good News?:
Finding the good news in less than ideal
circumstances.”**

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First Lesson: Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35

Gospel: John 17: 1-11

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We are in our second to last week of our Where is the Good News Series; finding the good news in less than Ideal Situations.

Today our focus on the good news will look at and engage God; next week we will study the Pentecost.....

And so what I have strived to do by help of the Holy Spirit, is to paint a theological and

homiletical picture of who the Triune God is and furthermore, what our role is in light of this knowledge.

And so as we look at our gospel today and in thinking about the past messages that I have preached; hopefully you and I should be able to see a theme emerging;

If you travel with me on my train of thought this week;

You see, the more and more I engage our weekly texts of scripture; from the beginning in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the birth of Jesus, to the crucifixion and death of Jesus, to the Resurrection of Jesus, to the (now our gospel reveals and first lesson alludes to) the Ascension of Jesus;

I am convinced that God, in each of these events and incidents, is trying to say something to us.....

And so what God is trying to say to us I believe is revealed in the repetitive theme that I have been highlighting week to week; involving God's desire to restore the human and spiritual connection between God and humanity.

Because as I have been saying for a while now; the story about the Fall of humanity as told through the story of Adam and Eve; when Adam and Eve was banished from the Garden of Eden, this represents in my theological eyes a relationship being severed.

At least that is how the story of Adam and Eve has been preached time and time again from my religious upbringing; Adam and Eve disobeyed

God by eating the forbidden fruit and was banished from the Garden of Eden as a result of their sin.

Furthermore my embedded theology has taught me that since God is not of sin and now humanity has sinned; this is the reason then why Adam and Eve had to leave.

This is the proposed reason why the relationship between humanity and God has been strained and possibly severed.

The good news out of the theology that I have shared and many of us I would suspect has been raised out of, is that through God's son Jesus, humanity is able to be redeemed because Jesus paid the price for all of our sins. You and I are redeemed through our confession and have assurance that we are forgiven along with everlasting life.

And so church this again is the foundation of where my embedded theology has stemmed from.

It is a foundation I am grateful for.....

In the same token folks, the longer I live and the more I learn through my doctoral studies and through ministry in general, I need to share that my theological engagement with scripture has evolved;

It has evolved because if I am honest, there are some pieces of this theology that really resonates with me on so many levels.

This idea of being forgiven for my sins is liberating to me.

The notion that you and I are loved

unconditionally is affirming.
Not to mention the concept of everlasting life is
life giving for me.

However there are other parts of this theology
that does not sit as well with me.

This idea that there was a time where God
banished humanity ever.... is something that I
cannot even fathom...

As a side note; it might be helpful to also
mention that for those who takes a literal
approach to the story of Adam and Eve; the
Garden of Eden's location is difficult to establish
and determine. Some biblical scholars suggest it
was located in the Middle East. Others are not
certain of this because the rivers that
surrounded the Garden of Eden are not the
same that exist today. Making the whole
banishment concept obscure, without knowing
details if they were banned 10 feet from the
garden or 1000 miles; were they getting kicked
out of the house or getting kicked out of the
universe..... this we don't know.

For those who chooses to see the story of Adam
and Eve as purely allegorical or symbolic; what
the story could represent is the disparity
between the spirit and flesh warring together
where in this instance, humanity's flesh ruled;
thereby causing a separation from God's Spirit.
Either way, you can see all of this is really heavy
stuff!

And so it is because of some of these
theological considerations and more, that has
caused me to wrestle like Jacob on the Hill with

the Angel of God;(the story can be found in
Genesis 32)

I have wrestled over this sermon so much so
that it is in my hermeneutical struggle with the
scriptural texts this week, where my prayer has
become similar to Jacob's,

Praying to God, I will not let you go unless you
bless me oh God, to be able to hear your intent
and preach your message to your children
clearly.....and so this is my hope.

And so with that; in investigating the source of
why I might be wrestling with this banishment
aspect of the story of Adam and Eve; I suppose
it takes me back to a time where growing up in
NY, I had a friend who was basically kicked out
of her church community because of being
pregnant out of wedlock...

I remembered her tears and anguish so fresh as
if it just happened yesterday.

And I need to say being with her then during that
time, before knowing much about my faith
and before accepting my calling into the
ministry; I sensed something wasn't right with
how the church responded to her then.

Now today I can boldly declare that I know that
her church community's response was
absolutely wrong.

This is why I preached in one of the past
sermons the notion that salvation is like a home
made available to all of us; where each of us
has a metaphorical room with our name on it;
because folks, I am getting frustrated with
theologies that continuously excludes

people....and the list keeps getting longer and longer....

I just don't believe in my heart that this is characteristic of the God I know.

Furthermore, this is why I feel myself moving further and further away from seeing the cross as a symbol of atonement into resonating more with a cross being a symbol of liberation—because for me being a people of the Resurrection is supposed to be liberating!

And so folks this is why I wrestle with this banishment aspect of the Garden of Eden story.

Because to me, it is not consistent with Jesus; who did not join in the proposed stoning of the woman who was brought to him for adultery; (John 7:53-8:11) instead he forgave her.

Nor was it consistent with the woman who Jesus offered living water to at the well, when others ostracized and judged her for having 5 husbands in the past and living with a 6th man who wasn't her husband...(John 4:4-56)... instead Jesus affirmed her and empowered her to tell others about the living water that never runs dry.

And folks there are so many stories where when God came to Earth by way of Jesus, God did not turn God's back on humanity ever;

There were so many instances in Jesus ministry where banishment was never part of God's response....

Furthermore the more I wrestle with this Fall of humanity story, a question that has begun to rise in my spirit that I feel emboldened to ask is this;

are we getting both sides of the story?

I am wrestling with if this is even an accurate and plausible interpretation of this story of Adam and Eve.

Because we know there have been other gross misinterpretations of Eve alone, that most of us women are still paying for... please don't get me started about that....

So church i raise the question for all of us to think about..... **who severed the relationship between God and humanity?**

I want to know, who broke up with who?

Furthermore was this a mutual decision?

Because when I think about relationships in general and reflect on some of my own past breakups whether it was friendships or personal relationships to help guide our conversations

In those relationships/ friendships for me....When it was over...it was over....

For I have many friendships that I still have and very much value....

But there were some relationships and friendships that I have had, that it became very apparent that those individuals were only meant to be in my life for a season, but not necessarily a lifetime....oh that alone would preach!

Now over the years I have learned to appreciate the complexity and hardships that came with those severed relationships.

I have come to a place where I could even forgive and ask for forgiveness in those instances.

But again there are some friendships and relationships that are like chapters that came to an obvious conclusion and that is ok. The wisdom is being able to learn how to accept our own story and grow from those lessons and learn from our experiences.

So church; the purpose for me going down the memory lane of some of my own severed friendships and relationships is to emphasize that I don't think that this was God's intent with humanity back in the Garden of Eden.

I don't think that God would ever sever the relationship between humanity.

But I would liken God's approach towards humanity and the free will that God gives us, to that of the boomerang effect as it pertains to love; where the Dalai Lama quote is the best I ever heard to illustrate my point; where he says; "give the ones you love wings to fly, roots to come back and reasons to stay."

So I believe that in the Garden of Eden, whether you adopt a literal understanding of this story or view it as symbolic; humanity was never banished by God.

Instead it is through free will, God has given humanity wings to fly, spiritual roots to come back and reasons to stay.

So I say again, God has never broken the connection with humanity, but I do believe it is fair to suggest that the relationship between God and humanity is complicated.

And in today's time, I am certain that you and I know what it means if you and I were to look at

someones relationship status that is listed as:
it's complicated.

For a relationship status of **“it's complicated”** normally means that the parties involved are still speaking to one another on some level.

Now the level of engagement of how much said parties are actually speaking to one another is questionable and it varies....

But again, there is a strong likelihood that there is some type of communication occurring from time to time....

Furthermore in a relationship that is **complicated**, there is normally an interesting cycle that occurs; where sometimes all is well and life is good with one another; until some of those same issues that caused the strain and discourse or dare I even say drama; inevitably rises to the surface again; hence why the status of the relationship is listed as complicated....(Oh I know I am telling someone's story or business today!)

But the most important thing that I will note with relationships that **are identified as being complicated**, is that in this category it is evident that **neither party** is ready to declare that the relationship is over;

In a relationship that is complicated, **Neither party** is ready to sever those ties because apparently there is still something that the people involved; feels is worth holding onto.

This is why, as I get back to our gospel and conversation, I am comfortable with suggesting that for some, the relationship between humanity

and God is complicated.

It's complicated, because I believe that what complicates this connection is not necessarily God's view towards us;

But it is often humanity's inability to sometimes move past and move through our own perceived setbacks, faults, wrongdoings and disappointments.

It's sort of like for instance in my marriage; Steve and I have almost been married for 4 years;

Both of us have had marriages that didn't work out prior to for a myriad of reasons.....

However this is why I believe that both him and I places so much emphasis on our relationship being built upon this mutual foundation of trust, fidelity and honesty....

Furthermore what keeps him and I committed to these values is knowing what damage could and most likely would occur within our marriage if these tenets are not kept.

It would complicate things.....(there goes that word again)

The path to healing, wholeness, forgiveness and restoration would be a slow process for us.

This is why we strive to keep the lines of communication between him and I open no matter what, so that those core values can stay intact and so that there is not a wedge that comes in between us as a result of.

And so this church is where I believe the complexity of it all comes into our relationships with not just God but everyone, because as you

and I know these things take time because relationships of all type can get tricky and messy.

Furthermore, working through difficult matters like these can take a lot of work....

And so again, I share these intimate thoughts and details with you so that we might consider that if this is the process that it takes with one another when setbacks and hurdles come along in our day to day relationships; then should it really surprise us that the human connection with God is so complex?

Because what I have shared is only the tipping point of some of the layers that might come into play as it pertains to God and humanity's relationship

The fact of the matter is that the majority of us have not yet mastered relationships with people yet; let alone begun to explore how we might have a relationship with God.

And it is this acknowledgement alone that lets me know just how loving and just how resilient the character of God really is....and this is where the good news lies.

Because in everything I have shared, God I am certain already knows the wounds that we carry...

God already is aware of the guilt that we carry;
God knows the shame that we carry;
God knows the hurt, the anger, the resentment,
the feelings of inadequacy that we carry;
God knows and recognizes the fear that we carry; the fear in particular of being banished

and abandoned;

God knows all of this and more and yet in my biblical imagination and interpretation has been trying to send the message to you and I that although things might be complicated for us in all of these things; they are not complicated for God when it comes to God's love for us.....

Through the Birth, death and Resurrection of Jesus, God has been sending a message to humanity to say I love you....

I love you like I love the moon.....

I love you like I love the stars...

I love you like I love the light...

I love you like I love the wind....

I love you when you are at your best...

I love you even when you are at your worst...

I love you just as I love the animals and the fish and the creatures that crawl the Earth if not more....

For God is love...God is Agape love
And Agape love is "the highest form of love and charity there is.

Now the word Agape is not to be confused with brotherly or sisterly love, but Agape love embraces a universal, unconditional love

And this my friends is who God is.

For God is a love that goes beyond just the emotions; to the extent of seeking the best for others.

God is a love that transcends and persists regardless of any circumstance or anything that you and I have done.

So when God says I love you....this is not

complicated for God.....

And where our gospel fits in directly and indirectly as we witness the Ascension of Christ beginning to take place; where Christ will be reunited with God again and God's Spirit will continuously envelop and surround all of us; is an invitation for us to step out on faith and trust this love that God has for us;

To trust that in a world where love may have disappointed us; in a world where love may have failed us; in a world where love may have judged us; in a world where love may have betrayed us; as Jesus ascends back to God; Jesus wants the world to know that God's love is unconditional; God's love is something you and I never have to question or doubt.

There is a song that I have asked Mike and Jael to sing by Marvin Sapp, that really spoke to me in a time where I had questions in my spiritual journey regarding God's love;

It was a time where I questioned my self worth....

It was a time where I questioned God's love for me when all I could see was my past failures and mistakes...

Now before going into this song, I invite you all to hear this song in a way that might give value to whatever life experience and situation you may be experiencing.

Marvin Sapp stems from the African American tradition where God for him is like a safe loving Father who only sees the best in us.

It is also in the African American tradition that typically views and names sin to be what typically complicates our relationship with God....

As you all know, this is the embedded theological foundation that I have been trained out of;

Furthermore, I am grateful for the constant ways in which God continues to bring new ways of engaging scripture and everyday experiences to my life....

Lastly there is a line in the song where Sapp says, "He's mine and I am his... it doesn't matter what I did, for he always sees me for who I am." This in my eyes lines up with the final prayer that Jesus gave for all of God's children at the end of our gospel in John where it says in verse 11; Holy God, protect them by the power of[your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one;

This highlights the consistent message that I have been preaching week to week that you and I are infused with God's Spirit making us one with God.

This my friends is an unbreakable connection and Marvin Sapp's words reveals an understanding of this reality.

So my hope is that this song gives a new meaning to the way we might view God's love for us;

My hope is that this song may begin to open up the recesses of our hearts that might even dare allow some of us who may struggle with some of

these same things that I have mentioned; to
look into the mirror and appreciate the
appearance that we see looking back at
us....recognizing that we are all a work in
process;

For none of us are perfect, but we can be
perfected by God's love; it doesn't have to be
complicated; if we just allow God to help to
lessen the complexities of how we might see
ourselves and one another; if we just allow
ourselves to re-imagine a love that sees the best
of us at all times!

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