

Jeff Paschal

“The Story” GPPC 12-25-16  
Psalm 98, John 1:1-14

Someone once wrote, “People often think that the basic command of religion is ‘Do this!’ or ‘Don’t do that!’. It isn’t. It’s look and wonder! Learn to give attention to the world around you.” (Esther de Waal quoted by Keith Beasley-Topliffe in *Weavings*, Jan/Feb. 2005, 43.)

The fundamental command of our faith is “look and wonder.”

So it’s Christmas morning. Luke, and to a lesser degree, Matthew, have had their say about the birth of Jesus. They’ve told us about an emperor, a king, government registrations, Mary and Joseph, an amazing birth, visitations by angels, shepherds, and wise men (Matthew), declarations about who this Jesus is and what he will do. Luke and Matthew have had their say and they’ve told us a lot.

But now this morning John has his say. Luke and Matthew are straightforward. But John, John is a mystic who sings in a different key and a higher octave. “Look and wonder” sings John.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Beautiful. Majestic. Mysterious. But what does it mean?

Chaplain and writer Kate Braestrup tells about her time as a seminary

Jeff Paschal

student. She says, “. . . we students of Greek learned what so many before us had also learned, the Word is a slippery thing.

“My favorite example is the word *word* itself. The Gospel of John begins: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος (‘In the beginning was the Word’) . . . it’s a good and reasonable [translation], given that English doesn’t really have a word that means precisely what λόγος . . . means. Still, there are other, equally plausible cognates for Logos, including *discourse, speech, message, theory, motive, reason, wisdom*, and—my personal favorite—*story*: In the beginning was the *story*, and the *story* was with God, and the *story* was God.”  
(Kate Braestrup, *Here If You Need Me: A True Story*, vi.)

In the beginning was the Story. John says God decides to communicate with us, with humanity. And the way God communicates is with the Word, with the Story.

But what kind of story does God tell? John says this Word, this communication, this Story was with God from the very beginning, before creation. And through this Story everything came into being. So this Story is a creative story. This Story brought life and light. And God even sent John the Baptist to tell about the Story, to prepare the world for the Story and the

Jeff Paschal

light that was coming into the world. The Story created the world but so much of the world didn't understand. The Story called together a people but some of them did not accept either. But those who received the Story, believed the Story, lived the Story were empowered to become children of God, images of God, vessels of God's love, born not of human doing but of God's power.

Do we catch just how radical this story is? One biblical scholar says, "This is to be a story certainly not of John, not of 'Jesus Christ' only (v.17), but of a new race of humanity. Just as Genesis starts out, 'In the beginning' (1:1) to tell the origins of the cosmos and the human race, this Gospel of John will be a story about fresh beginnings, a new human race." (Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation Commentary Series, 14-15.)

The Word is made flesh, the Story is made flesh in order for God to create a new humanity. The Story is made flesh so that this new humanity might be born for God's new heaven and earth that are coming. The story is made flesh. And purely by "grace upon grace" we too are born as children of God.

Presbyterian poet and author Kathleen Norris used to live in a small

Jeff Paschal

town on the plains of South Dakota. She says, “Not long ago I visited with a gentlemanly old cowboy in a tavern. He was in town, ‘buying provender,’ as he put it, and he sought me out as a member of what he termed ‘one of the old families,’ to tell me about a sidesaddle he owns that his great-grandfather made as a wedding present nearly 150 years ago. We mused a while on the subject of our ancestors, who traveled from many places—England, Scotland, Connecticut, Virginia, Iowa, Kansas—to settle on the Plains. Suddenly he said: ‘Who are we, and where do we come from? That’s the real question, isn’t it?’ Before I could reply, he smiled slyly and said, ‘And here we are, telling each other lies.’ ‘Stories,’ I said, laughing. ‘Call them stories.’ ‘Stories?’ he nearly shouted back. ‘That’s who we are!’ Slapping the bar, he repeated, ‘*Who we are!*’” (Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, 86-87.)

Stories, that’s who we are, you and I. And the Story, God’s Story, has come in flesh, the tiny, vulnerable flesh of a baby. The Story, God’s Story has come down to us and we’re invited and empowered to become children of God. We’re invited and empowered to become imperfect reflections, but reflections nonetheless, of God and God’s justice, mercy, and love. Our stories a part of God’s grand story that is good news beyond words to tell.

Jeff Paschal

The Story, God's Story, became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, full of the utter generosity and dependability of God's love. And each one of us is invited to be a part of it all, to take our part in the story, to be a part of God's love reaching out to a needy world.

Look and wonder. Look and wonder. Amen. ©Jeff Paschal