

“The Magnificent Story: Living the Magnificent Story”

Asbury United Methodist Church

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By Pastor John Vick

- Well friends, this is an exciting time in the life of our church. We are continuing on in our current sermon series titled, “The Magnificent Story.”

-In this sermon series, we’ve looked at God’s good, beautiful, and true story that we are all invited to be a part of. We’ve been using Jim Smith’s book *The Magnificent Story* for this sermon series.

- So last week, Jim Smith was here and shared about the hope we have as Christians. How we have a glorious, magnificent future ahead of us. A new heavens and a new earth.

-And, next week, we are having Dr. Ben Witherington III, a world-renowned New Testament scholar from Asbury Theological Seminary coming and sharing the sermon with us.

-But, in between these two first-class theologians and authors and speakers, you’ve got me today: the associate pastor still in seminary!

- Let me ask a question: What is coming up in a couple of weeks, on October 31st? Halloween!

-It’s also Pastor Tom’s birthday, so we’ll make sure to wish him a happy birthday that day.

-But do you know what the top 4 Halloween costumes are for children this year, in 2021? If you were to guess, what would they be?

-According to one survey, here are the four most popular Halloween costumes for children this year:

-1. Spiderman, 2. Princess, 3. Batman, 4. Superhero

-So, when we're handing out candy this year, we apparently should expect to see a lot of little spidermen and princesses running around.

- But I think it's really telling that these four costumes are the most popular. See, I think these four costumes all have something very big in common:

- These characters, the people who wear these costumes, they are a part of a big and extraordinary story.

- Think of all of the superhero stories out there. You have these people who have special powers and they're fighting the bad guys and saving the world! A pretty big story.

- Or the princess that come from royalty and have these big adventures and make a meaningful difference in the land.

- Yes, all of these characters are part of a grand story.

- And all of that simply goes to show the truth of this statement: "We were made not just to enjoy stories but to enter them." Jim Smith

- Inside of us, deep within our bones, we have a longing, a hunger, a yearning to be a part of a story that is so much larger than we could ever imagine. I'm sure every person here today has experienced that.

- We were designed to be a part of a truly magnificent story. That's the reality of it all.

- And so, I've got some good news for you, church: By grace, God invites us to participate in His Magnificent Story.

-The story of God and His redemptive love isn't just a story we hear and are entertained by. It isn't just some irrelevant, philosophical speculation. It isn't just rules telling you what to do.

-No, instead, we are actually invited to be a part of the most glorious and magnificent story of them all. A story that has no end.

- That is good news. But then, we run into a problem. We can define this problem in many ways, but I think this may be one of the most accurate ways to describe it:

- There seems to be a disconnect between God's Magnificent Story and our daily lives.

- In other words, we come here on Sunday mornings and get fired up in worship, and we read about God's beauty and goodness and truth, and we go to community and get encouraged... but then Monday rolls around, and all that we had experienced the day before, seems to have flown out the window.

- So, a couple of weeks ago, my fiancé and I were having dinner with another couple. They just got married back in June.

- It was such a lovely night of friendship and fellowship. And, as we were about to leave, I said something like, "So, how could we best be praying for you all right now?"

- Of course, they asked for prayers as they continue navigated the newly-wed life. But then, the husband said this:

- "On a more personal note, please pray that I would experience God. It's been a while since I've experienced God and I am longing to do so."

- And as he shared that, I realized that I've been there before too. Longing to experience God in a mighty way, longing to experience more of the Magnificent Story, but not getting to.
- I don't want to make any assumptions, but maybe you've been there before. Maybe you're there right now.
- You come and here about the great works of God, but then Monday through Saturday, you're just going through the motions.

- See, Monday morning rolls around, and at 6:00am, you hear this (alarm clock noises). And you've got kids to get ready for school. And traffic to drive in. And meetings to attend. And groceries to pick up after work. And dinner to cook. And on and on and on...
- And, in all of that, we seem to overlook the Magnificent Story we've been talking about.

- And so, what's our solution? What can we do about that? How can we be immersed in God's Magnificent Story in a world of alarm clocks and rush hours and deadlines and distractions?
- Well to address that question, we're going to look at a passage in 2nd Corinthians.
- Now, 2nd Corinthians just happens to be my favorite of Paul's letters. Not only does it use such great rhetoric and have such rich and practical theology in it, it is also extremely personal!
- Paul, in a strikingly transparent fashion, describes the weaknesses and insults and hardships and persecutions and calamities that's he's experienced in ministry.

- But in chapter 5 of 2nd Corinthians, we get an excellent picture as to what a life lived in the magnificent story contains.

-So, if you have your Bibles, we'll be in 2nd Corinthians 5:16-21.

-If you don't have your Bible, there are pew Bibles underneath you. This passage is on page 1,148.

-Out of the reverence we have in our hearts for God's Word, let's stand together as we read...

(Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

-Alright, there is a lot of truth to unpack there. Today, what we'll do is look at three essential aspects of what life in God's Magnificent Story looks like.

① Life in God's Magnificent Story Includes... A Prevailing Identity

-The theme of identity is a strong theme in our passage of Scripture. Just based off of what we read, what are some particular things said about who we are?

-We are a new creation. We are reconciled to God. We are ministers of reconciliation. We are the righteousness of God. We are ambassadors for Christ.

- Think about that for a minute. We are ambassadors for Christ. Meaning, wherever we go, whoever we're with, whatever we do, we are representing Jesus, the King of all Kings.

-And to represent someone, it's pretty important for us to know them. Right? It's hard to represent someone you don't know very well.

-The good news is, Jesus is the most magnificent and brilliant and glorious person. When we're with him, when we're living as His disciples (or apprentices), we are going to want to know him more. We are going to want to spend more time with Him.

-And from there, out of our knowing Jesus, we will represent Him to the rest of the world.

-I don't know about you, but I think those make for a pretty big story.

- When I drive to work, I'm not just driving to earn a pay check. I am a new creation, who has been reconciled to God, engaging in the ministry of reconciliation at my workplace.

- Or, when I am going to the grocery store, and I encounter people in the aisles and check-out lines, I am an ambassador for Christ. God is making His appeal through me, here at Reasors.

- Or, when I'm driving and I don't yell at the slow person in front of me, the righteousness of God is apparent.

- Again, all of that makes for a pretty good story. We have a prevailing identity in Christ.

- And Paul wants to emphasize that, with this new prevailing identity in Christ, our old identity is done away with! It's dead! It's passed away!

- A few weeks ago, I had the special privilege of meeting with a young adult here at Asbury, Kyler Duvall.

- He is a junior at TU, and he is on fire for the Lord. However, all of that is fairly new.

- So, we recorded him sharing some of his story of becoming a new creation. **Let's watch...**

- Friends, in Christ, we are a new creation. We have a good, beautiful, and true identity.

- And something that I've found to be foundational in life and in ministry, is that our identity comes before our doing.

-We don't go out and do good deeds, and then become a new creation. Instead, we are a new creation, and we go out and do new creation things.

-Let's say this together: **"New creations do new creation things."**

-Again, it's not "Do these good deeds, go out and be a good person, and then you'll be a new creation." No, instead, we are made into a new creation, and we go forth to do new creation things. Like loving our neighbors. Like sharing the Good News of Jesus with others. Like being there for those who are hurting.

-Yes, new creations do new creation things.

- Paul says this in Galatians 6:15 – "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!"
(NRSV)

-Friends, participating in God's magnificent story isn't about earning a special identity from doing. Instead, it's about living into the good identity God has given us by His grace.

② Life in God's Magnificent Story Includes... A Community to Share Life With

-And what are we referring to here? The church! The church is the community God has given to us in order to do life with.

-Let's look back at this text, at verses 19-20.

-How does it go? **(Have verses 19-20 up on the board)**

-"... and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

-The words used here are plural! Paul isn't writing about one person receiving this ministry. He is pointing to the church!

-He uses words like "we, us, and our" in this passage.

- The early church really understood this. They really understand that our story isn't truly magnificent if it's lived out alone, all by ourselves.

- And so, from the very birth of the church, Christians would do life together. Eat, worship, serve, and play, together, and so on together.

- We get a great glimpse of that in Acts chapter 2, a wonderful chapter in the New Testament. Here's verses 42-47 (**Up on the screen**)

- “And they **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were **together** and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And **day by day**, attending the temple **together** and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number **day by day** those who were being saved.”

- Pastor Tom often talks about doing word studies when you study a passage of the Bible. What words or phrases stood out to you as we read this?

- Here are the words and phrases that stood out to me: devoted. Together (X2), “day by day” (X2).

- You know, these folks weren't playing church. Coming together wasn't something they did in their free time.

- It was something that was essential to each of them. It was something they devoted themselves to.

- Friends, life is so much more glorious and full when we are in community. We weren't meant to do this life all alone.
- That's a key component of God's magnificent story that we are all invited to be a part of.

③ Life in God's Magnificent Story Includes... A Purpose to Life

- We aren't given a new identity and a community to do life with without also being given a purpose. Participants in God's story have a purpose. So what is our purpose? Well it's the redemptive message of Christ.
- In our text, we read that God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.
 - Alright, so today, we've talked about what living in God's magnificent story involves. It involves a prevailing identity, a community to share life with, and a purpose.
- Whenever we live into those things, our lives are going to look radically different. Even in a world of alarm clocks and rush hours and meetings, our lives will reflect God's goodness, beauty, and truth.
 - And let me just say, that is such a powerful witness to the world. A world searching for identity, a world searching for community, a world searching for purpose.
 - Yes, living into God's magnificent story is such a powerful witness. People are going to see and notice something different about us... and be drawn in to Christ.
- That's one of the primary ways the early church grew! Through simply living into the magnificent story and watching those around them be drawn in.

- And it's happening here today still.
- Last week, I had the opportunity to attend a luncheon in downtown Tulsa. With me from the church was Steve and Paula Berry, Lori Nichols, and Dana Harrison. There were also churches from all over Tulsa in attendance.
- The luncheon was celebrating the ministry of Care Portal. Our church is actually a Care Portal Church.
- So, **what is Care Portal?** Well it's a ministry that supports churches with a heart to help children and families in crisis.
- Whenever a family needs something (whether it be something big or small), child welfare workers can send in a request through the care portal.
- Then, that request is mobilized to the different churches that are on the email list. And, if someone at the church feels the Holy Spirit leading them to meet that need, they can do so.
- Again, it's a very powerful witness. If you are interested in getting more involved with the Care Portal at Asbury, I invite you to call the church's main office this week. We'll get you on the list to receive those emails.
- Here's the impact just this church has made over the past 5 years...**
- Well at this luncheon last week, a young woman named Zoe shared her story.
- She didn't grow up in church and wasn't a believer. However, she had a heart for helping children in need. So, she went to college and became a DHS case worker after graduating.
- She shared about how she had these perceptions as to what Christians are like... and how she wasn't interested in becoming one.

- However, once she started working at DHS, she saw all of these needs come through in the Care portal.
 - One would come in, and then a Christian would respond and meet that need. And then another request would come in, and a Christian would meet in. And another, and another, and another.
 - And that really caused her to think. “Maybe my understanding of the Christian faith isn’t as accurate as I thought.”
 - And so she began to warm up to the faith a little.

- Well, she began talking more with her Christian friends, she eventually came to church, and after a month of attending, she gave her heart to Christ. She is a new creation!
 - Now, she is advocating for foster care and the Care Portal in African American churches across the state. And, she’s married to a pastor.

- That’s an inspiring story for so many reasons. But what really stood out to me, was how the extravagant compassion of Christians was what drew her into the faith.
 - It was Christian after Christian, living into their identity, seeking community, and following their purpose, that compelled her to go to church and eventually give her heart to Christ.
 - Friends, the way we live matters. The way we live witnesses to the world. The way we live shows what kind of story we’re a part of.

- But maybe meeting needs through the Care Portal isn’t for you. I have another opportunity that you can participate in.
 - Before you leave today, I encourage each person here to stop by any of the guest services stations and pick up one of these. It is

an Asbury doorhanger that you can give to your neighbor or hang on their door.

-On the front...

-On the back...

-You know, we've talked a lot about God's Magnificent Story over the past two months. This here is an opportunity to get to know our neighbors, and invite them to participate in the story with us. So, take one home and pray about which neighbor you'd like to give this to.

- Alright, so going back to where we started, the stories of Spiderman and Batman and princesses are good stories.

-But you and I, we were created to be a part of a much larger, much more glorious, much more magnificent story than one in a comic book or fairy tale.

-And the thing is, we don't just put on costumes and pretend.

No, we actually get to participate and live out God's Magnificent Story. In our daily lives. In our families. In our homes. In our schools and workplaces. Here at church.

-We are participating in God's magnificent story.

- And we proclaim and celebrate this magnificent story, every time we come to the Lord's Table for communion. We remember Christ's body broken for us, and His blood poured out for us.

-As we prepare our hearts, remember this: In Christ, we are a new creation. We are a part of a church that loves us and prays for us. And we have an eternal purpose. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.