

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

13th August 2017

John

Spirit... in a world that lacks the imagination to dream the future... may you inspire us with such... and in our words and living... live into that future... with creativity and honesty... and a sense of faith... that believes... it is not over yet...

“I know who you are”...

This may come as a surprise to many of you... given my singular inability to remember things... our kitchen colander has greater capacity to retain things than me...

“I know who you are”... rather is a Spanish mystery series with English subtitles that has been shown on BBC Four... Now there are at least three reasons in that last sentence why probably no one has seen it...

It is Spanish... so they talk quick... thus the subtitles flash across the screen... and so you have to watch a recorded version so you can keep rewinding... and it is on BBC Four so hardly anyone watches anything on that...

Except... that channel often offers great programmes from around the world... mostly subtitled... which are the best stories from these places...

The problem with... “I know who you are” is that there have been 10 episodes... (all of which we have watched twice... because we’ve had to rewind that number of times to catch what was being said)... However... when it came out in Spain... there were 16 episodes... so the story isn’t complete... the ending is out there... but it hasn’t yet been subtitled... I’ve even thought of taking Spanish lessons simply to know what happened...

That’s how soap operas keep going... keeping a number of unresolved stories going... but with most of our stories... there comes a climax... a twist... and everything falls into place... How often do our conversations discuss how satisfying or dissatisfying the end of a series... The Loch... Poldark... Fearless... Whether it is resolved to our liking or otherwise... it does give us a sense of completion... it does come to an end...

But here's an interesting thought... the place of our most important stories... doesn't do that... The bible offers a very rare form of story... where there is no ending... and the future remains open... which sits off kilter in our world...

Lets take Abraham... It is as if the story begins as it ends... He's old... 75... he's decided to retire... and God says... "You are going to have children"... Abraham thinks he's imagining things... and even laughs... but every night he is drawn out to look at the stars and remembers what God said... "You'll have more children than stars in the sky"... Except for a further 25 years Abraham has to simply live under this promise... 25 years... and only at 100 is it fulfilled... finally a conclusion...

Except it isn't... that was just the prequel... Isaac his son takes up the mantle now... and his children... and theirs too... and so it goes on... through Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Joshua... and perhaps each one takes a look at the sky and reckons still the numbers haven't climbed enough to match the number of stars in the sky... through Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel... Still there are more stars up there than children down here... through Saul and David and Solomon...

Here's the story that never ends... It is a book that concludes in neither the past or the present... but only by looking forward towards a time we have not yet reached...

The Baptist and then the Saviour... but even then... the story doesn't reach a conclusion... though you'd have thought it might... Jesus crucified... and a tomb prepared... and a stone ready to seal its entrance... but still there are more stars... than children of God...

So at that ending... we come to discover an experience called resurrection... renewal... rebirth... which has tomb stones rolling... and Mary weeping... and the gardener laughing... Jesus is back...

And while that would be a pretty big conclusion... but it isn't a conclusion for God... the full hope has not yet been realised... The story of faith doesn't stop there... in fact it actually only fully begins there...

The destination is yet beyond the horizon...

And you know what... the is one thing that keeps the story going... in each episode... is the possibility of renewal... of reconciliation... of redemption... of forgiveness... whatever it takes to stop what is destructive towards a person... and offer them a new chance...

We mentioned it last week in Joseph... being reconciled with his brothers... It could have stopped there... Joseph had won... the brothers were on their knees to him... but no... he let the story continue... because he chose not to destroy the other... his brothers... but it is true for Abraham... both his sons... half brothers Isaac and Ishmael... are redeemed... Isaac spared from the sacrifice... Ishmael... given food and water in the desert... and both become the progenitors of nations...

Jacob and Esau... again reconciliation eventually on the eve of battle where one would have destroyed the other... Moses... 40 years in the wilderness... and God finally relents with the people... and Joshua leads them into the land of milk and honey... In every story... there is an act of redemption... forgiveness... that turns the main character away from destroying the other or themselves...

A theme central to our understanding of crucifixion and resurrection... not that Jesus did something on the cross that made everything better... but that God showed us there was nothing we could do to stop God loving us... Even if we destroyed God's own son... God still loves us... The ultimate act of redemption...

What enables the story never to end... is the ability to redeem... forgive... to turn away from destroying the other... through fear... hatred... violence... and transforming the human situation from an inevitable ending... to an open future...

Without turning away from destroying the other... without redeeming... or forgiving... Hannah Arendt (Arent) says... our capacity to act... would be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover...

Redemption... forgiveness... gives rise to optimism... to hope... and this never ending story we faithfully give the world... teaches the world... about the capacity to open up the future... and not bring it to an end...

And who doesn't want to shout loudly at Mr Kim and Mr Trump... and all those bullies who seem to care less about consequences than the ego of the biggest threat... this one truth... that when a story ends... the future ends too...

Perhaps this is why the faith story... the never ending story... is so rare in the world... because people still want to destroy... we've grown a worldview that is so black and white... them and us... It's all star wars and make believe...

And people of faith... and that is Christian... Jew... Muslim... along with so many other mainline religions... none of us... across the board of religion... offer the world stories with endings... Together we all offer a radically different way of relating to the universe and life... We express a different kind of story to those who want to destroy and end things... and rather share a way of engaging with each other... that offers an open future...

And is this not the truth we want to give James... Is this not the single promise in the gift we share with him today... and remind ourselves of in baptism... that promise of renewal... rebirth... redemption... that he is one more star... now part of the never ending story...

Jonathan Sack says... When you can turn away from destroying the other... you give the story a chance to continue... There are no ending stories in faith... It is all to play for...

The story continues... there are still more stars up there... the ending hasn't been... and won't be written by God... Allah... Yahweh... or whatever name you give God... mainline faiths don't do endings... because each knows love... renews... and thus opens us hope for the future... so... lets move into the next chapter... with James... with each other... together...

References

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