

Sermon Transcript from March 6th, 2016
Act 6: Staying in the Story
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If you have a Bible, would you please turn to 2 Corinthians 5? I know we've prayed 150 times this morning, but let me pray 1 more time before we get into this. Is that cool? Alright.

God, thank You for the Church, Lord. Thank You for this church. Thank You that this church is not about – well, I pray that we would not be about sermons and songs, Lord. We want to be way more than that, Lord. Everything that went on so far at our gathering, from standing collectively and saying we will be people of generosity, not people of greed, to where we said we're witness to parents saying that they want to raise their child in the Christian faith and we want to help, to saying thank You for installing ministers to minister to us and lead us. All of this stuff is Your Church, Lord.

And now, as we open the Scriptures and we glean from them, we ask this morning that You would teach us. I submit all of my mind, heart and soul, I submit it all to You, Lord. I ask, God, that You would use this very weak vessel to somehow encourage and build up and exhort and correct the church today. We look to You, Lord. Lead us now. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, we are in the last – the very last – Sunday of a series that we are calling "The Story of God" and this is what the story of God looked like. This is the sixth week and we kind of broke it up in six different acts, the story of God. Basically the story of the Bible. Act one was creation. The Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, a New Creation. Now, this is really important because the things I say today are predicated on the fact that you know this story. So, you've been here during this time. If not, let me give you like a two-minute overview of what this means.

What we're saying is in act one that God created everything good. That if you think at all that the world is good, you could thank the Bible for that belief because that wasn't always the belief. Especially when the Bible was written. The ancient Near Eastern belief was not that the world was inherently good. God created the world good and it didn't say "perfect," it said "good."

"Perfect," biblically, means the word "complete." And God didn't create the world complete, He created it good. There was a lot still to be done. It wasn't complete. He gave humanity charge to rule and to care and to spread the good in the garden out over the whole world. He said, "I want you to subdue the earth and rule over it as my image-bearers."

And that "rule," don't think of it as like we get to kill animals and destroy the planet, but you care for the world. You care for it. In God's economy, ruling over something isn't crushing their will. That's not God's economy. So, to rule over in good. And then, act two is The Fall. It is that we didn't trust God for good. That theme of "good" keeps repeating itself over and over in chapter 1 and 2 in the book of Genesis. And then, in chapter 3, it says that Adam and Eve saw for themselves that the tree that they were not supposed to eat from was good and so they took it themselves and they ate. And now, where there was integration – in the Bible, the Hebrew word is "shalom."

There was shalom in chapter 1 and 2 of the Bible. That means everything was integrated. I was integrated with myself. Like, my body didn't turn against itself with things like cancer or sickness. I was integrated with humanity, with other people, we were integrated with the planet, we were integrated with animals and, most importantly, we were integrated with God. Everything was in harmony. And, in chapter 3 of Genesis, there was disintegration. Everything started to unravel. And then, right in chapter 4, 5 and 6 you have murder and then, all the way to chapter 11, it keeps spiraling down, down, down and down. And then God is set after to save the world.

And what God does is He flips the script. He tries to save the world through all of humanity, but then all of humanity rebels against Him and tries to build this huge Tower of Babel up to Him saying that, basically, it was a big middle finger to God. If you've watched the Story of God videos, if you're watching the Bible Project videos, they call it a big "F you" to God.

And so God says, "I'm going to do something different. I'm going to call one family and, through this one family, I'm going to save the world."

So, God calls this guy named Abraham. And he was a Pagan. He worshipped some form

of the sky. We don't really know. He could've been a moon worshipper, a star worshiper or whatever. But, God called him and God said, "I'm going to vow myself to you. I'm going to promise myself to you. I'm going to covenant myself with you and I'm going to save the world through you."

And Abraham says, "Okay. Let's do this."

And God promised Abraham a few things. He said, "I'll be with you. I'm going to bless you. I'm going to give you land and I'll make you a nation. And then, when I do these things, I'm going to save the world through that."

So, basically, the whole rest of the Old Testament is God doing the promise – trying to do the promise with Abraham's family. He tries to make Him a nation and they do. In Genesis, God makes them a nation. But in Exodus, this nation's in captivity in Egypt and God hasn't given them land yet. So, the Exodus story is God taking them out of Egypt and bringing them into the land. And so, finally, God gives them a land and He also gives them His presence because God's tabernacling among them and the whole story is a repeat of God saying, "I've made you a nation, I've given you land and I'm living among you. Now, be a people of blessing."

And they don't. They're unfaithful. There's some righteous, but mostly they're unfaithful over and over and over again. That's the story of the Old Testament Israel. But then, Jesus. Jesus steps into the vocation of Israel. He steps into the Jordan River, we talked about a few weeks ago. He steps into Israel's vocation. And then what Jesus does is He actually goes after the serpent in chapter 3 of Genesis. He goes after the devil. He goes after the thing that set this whole thing in haywire. And, through the whole process of Israel, Moses even – you've read this in Deuteronomy – Moses said, "There's something wrong with our hearts."

You want to obey God, but your hearts are messed up. You need to circumcise your heart. Later on, that would be developed by the prophets to be like, "You need a new heart. You need a new covenant with God. That means that God gives you a new heart. Your heart of stone needs to be turned to a heart of flesh."

So Jesus comes, He gives us a new heart under the new covenant and He destroys the works of the devil. Yay. That's awesome. And then He empowers the Church. We learned this last week. And He says, "Now, take this story on and be the Church in the world. Spread the good news that Jesus has come and Jesus has given us new hearts and He's called us back to our vocation as image-bearers of God to being true humans under the righteous rule of God."

So, the Church is like this little outbreak of the Kingdom of God. So, wherever the Church is, there should be almost like a reverse of the curse that everything has gone on. So, there should be peace, there should be righteousness and holiness and love and justice. There should be all these things happening in the Church and the Church is supposed to take this and spread it out all over the world.

And then it ends with New Creation. So, we did a series on this last fall. So, I won't repeat most of this. But, the Bible, at the end of the story, has this great symmetry. It has progression. It starts with a garden and it ends with a garden city. It starts with a tree of life but then it ends with like two trees of life or many trees of life. At least two. It starts with God's presence walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day and it ends with God living, tabernacling, with men and women. Humanity is called to rule in Genesis 1 but at the end it says that humanity is reigning or ruling forever and ever.

There's a marriage at the very beginning of the Bible of Adam and Eve and there's a marriage of Christ and the Church and heaven and earth at the end of the Bible. There's like beautiful symmetry and beautiful progression. So, that is the story of God. Okay. So, you heard that story. That's what you've heard over the last six weeks. The question that I want to ask today in this story is how do we stay in the story? How do we live in this story? How do we live according to this story? And, to explain what I mean by this, let me share with you an illustration.

Imagine we just recovered a lost Shakespeare play. Okay? Let's just say – I don't know how. We just did. We were digging around Golden Gate Park. It somehow got over here and we found it and it's authentic. It's one of Shakespeare's five-act plays. And when we uncovered this, we had act one, two, three, and five. We didn't have act four. And we looked for it. We scoured the world. We went on a treasure hunt and no one could find it. But, we only had four of the five acts. And, as we're reading this play, we know how the story starts,

we know how the story builds, we know how the story climaxes and how it resolves, but we don't have that very important act four to show us the consequences of how act three plays out.

We don't see how the tension of act three gets played out in act four and gets heightened by the hopes and the fears caused by what happened in act three. And let's say that we have all this stuff but, because we don't have act four, but we still wanted to stage this play. We wanted to do it here in San Francisco. We're like, "We found it. It's ours. We want to stage this play. But, we only have four of the five acts."

Now, a couple things we could do at this moment. We could write act four. We could go, "We'll just write the fourth act ourselves."

But, that might feel a little inappropriate since Shakespeare himself didn't write it. It would commit Shakespeare to things that he never said or wrote. So, I don't know if that would be really – we'd have all the Shakespeare scholars getting angry at us. We don't want that. Probably a better thing to do would be this: it might be better if we gave this play and the key parts of this play to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearean actors who would immerse themselves in the first three acts and the fifth act, immerse themselves in the language and the culture of Shakespeare and the time of the play and then they would be tasked to work out the fourth act for themselves.

Because they knew how it started, it built, it climaxed and then how it ended, they were tasked to improvise the fourth act themselves. And let's consider, let's just imagine for a moment that we did this. We actually did this thing. What would happen? What if we did this? What would happen is the first three acts of the play and the final act would undoubtedly be the authority for how the actors were supposed to live into the play. They couldn't change the story. We would all know the story because we would have read it. Everyone would know the story so they couldn't betray the storyline and they couldn't betray the characters in the story. They had to live into the story.

And what we'd also see is that the story would lend accountability and transparency to how the actors would act. And anyone could object at any moment to an improvisation that was out of character if they were behaving inconsistently with the story arch of the play because they knew how the play ends. We could all say, "You can't do that because that's not the story that we inherited, that's not the story that we found and that's not where this story is going."

And what would be required of these actors is to enter into the story as it stood and then try to move on to its written conclusion. What would be required of these actors would be imagination, innovation and consistency.

Okay, so, I think you know where I'm going with this story. I hope you do. This is what we have with the story of God. We know how the story starts, we know how the story builds with Israel to learn who God is and what God is trying to do in the world through them. We know how the story climaxes in Christ being the suffering servant who takes away the sin of the world and goes out to destroy the works of Satan. We know the first bit about the Church that is called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the people of God for the world. We have that first bit. And then we know how it ends. We know the Revelation. We know how the story ends. It ends almost like a renewed story of the beginning.

What we're missing in the story of the Bible is this very large bit from the early Church to New Creation. We're missing this very large bit right now. We know how the Church started, but what we're missing out on are all the consequences of how the Church, empowered by the crucified and risen Jesus, how this story plays out. In the Biblical story, the reason why we're missing it is because that part of the story is us. We are – to use the five act model – the fourth act of God's great story and the Church has been this for centuries. And what we are tasked to do if you are a part of the Church and, after last week, you came up for prayer or on the carpets or something and asked, "How do I live into the story? How do I have more from God?"

This is what we're tasked to do: we are tasked to continue to live in this story well. What you and I are tasked to do as followers of Jesus is that we are tasked to live into the story, to take up our part in the story, to move it along from where we inherited it and do the best we can to move it towards its resolution and we have to stay in the story. This is our story. We can't change it so it looks like nothing that we have in the original. What we can't do is this: we can't take the story of Scripture and change it so much that it doesn't even look like this anymore.

We can't have a version of Christianity or a version of the Church that looks nothing like

the Bible. What we have to do is live into this story and carry it on and go, "We know how it ends and we know what God's going to do when He brings the restoration of all things. We know what that looks like. Let's move it towards that."

That is our task. That is what the Holy Spirit desires to do. This is the irony of Jesus at the end of the story of Matthew where, after the resurrection, He gathers the group of disciples together and He says, "All authority on heaven and earth have been given to me. I just crushed the serpent's head, I just rose from the dead, I have justified the sinner, I've made humanity right before God to live into their vocation, to live into what God's called them to be, what God's called us to do. I've done it all. I have all authority because I've done it and now you go."

That's an ironic statement. I have all the power. Go. Now, He wasn't saying I have all the power to tell you what to do. I mean, that's kind of implied there. But what He's saying is this: "I have all the power and you are going to be agents of this power. I have all the authority and you're going to be agents of this authority. Go and tell the world."

And this is ours to take up. We have to stay in this story. We have to stay in this story. I know every one of you, most of you, probably not all of you, but I would – no, all of you. All of you want to live your very own cool, adventurous, world-changing story. That's what you all want. I want to live my story. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is your story. This is the one you inherited, this is the one that you're to live into, this is your story. And you have to stay in this story. And I would argue that what we are all really looking for, even though most of us in here are looking for our own very cool, adventurous, world-changing story, I would argue that most all of us, what we're looking for, why we're looking to be a part of some world-changing story is that what we are really looking for is the bigger, truer story that which we can give ourselves over to. That's what we all really really really want. Even if you don't want to admit it. You're like, "No. I still want to live my story."

No. We want the true, bigger story that we can lose ourselves into. I think I've shared this with you before. Fleet Foxes has this song called "Helplessness Blues" and in this song they say:

"I was raised up believing I was somehow unique
Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes, unique in each way you can see."

That's basically how all you were raised. Your mom and your dad like, "You are unique. There is no one like you."

"And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be
A functioning cog in some great machinery serving something beyond me..."

I've done the "me" thing and it's so empty. I've tried to live my big, awesome, adventurous story and it ends up with me, alone, on social media and it's just not – it just doesn't ever go over well. I can't keep giving myself that high over and over. I would rather just serve something beyond me, and that something is the story of God. It's God and His story. And I know that this can be disorienting. Sometimes, when we first here this, this is so disorienting for us. When we're like, "I just want to be a part of – I just want to live my story."

And we're like, no. Your story doesn't end well. But, when you're part of God's story and what God is doing in the world, that does. And hearing that can be disorienting. I just recently watching that movie called "Room" that Brie Larson won the Oscar for. Oh my gosh. I just can't stop thinking about this movie. I just recently watched. But, I don't recommend this movie because it's not for the faint of heart. But, she did win an Oscar for it and it is a great movie.

I obviously won't give the movie away because that would be horrible. But, the premise of the movie – it's on the trailer, you probably know this. Common knowledge. It takes place in a room where a teenager has been kidnapped and lives there for seven years and, in the process, she has a son. And the son just knows the room. And when he turns five years old – and he only knows this room that's like maybe eight feet by eight feet or something like that. Ten feet by ten feet. It's a shed. And this is all he knows his whole life. And his mom has a great imagination to teach him all this stuff.

But, she doesn't tell him about the world. She says, "Outside..." – the have a little skylight – "...there is space. That's it. Just us and space."

And that's what he believes until he turns five and his mom tells him about the world.

"Outside these walls are this and this is this and this is the world."

And he has a panic attack and he starts screaming in his mom's face and he says, "I hate this story. I want a new story. I hate this story. I want a new story."

And she says, "You can't have another story. This is the true story."

That very traumatic moment is, I think, what happens sometimes when we hear the true story of God. Like, "That can't be the true story. I don't like this story. I have this story."

You're reading through the Bible. "I hate this story. I hate this story as my story. I hate this story. I want a new story."

And God would say to us, "You can't have another story. This is the true story."

This is the true story. This is the true story of humanity. This is the true story of what's gone wrong with the world. This is the true story of you thinking that you can save the world yourself or you can save yourself yourself and you cannot. And people have been trying to do it forever and ever and ever and ever and it does not work. This is the true story. But, I can choose to accept this story as a true story because it is and I can stay in this story no matter how hard it is to stay in the story of the Bible, or I can say, "You know what? I don't want this story. I want to be detached from the real story. I want to live my little consumeristic story. That's a way funner story. I want to live my little pleasure story. That's funner. I want to live my little entertainment story. I want to live my little adventure story. I want to live my little 'I have a plan for my own life' story."

You could do that and you can be disengaged from the real world, you can be disengaged through things like sex and drugs and whatever else you do for pleasure to totally disconnect from the real world. You can do that and you can do that as a follower of Jesus. You can say, "I follow Christ," but be disconnected to the story of God and be disconnected to what God is doing. You could do that, but it will ruin you.

And it keeps spinning, cycling down and down. This is the story of humanity. But, there's another way and the other way is staying in this story. And when you stay in the story of God, the one that we've been talking about for five and a half or six weeks, this is where all the tension will be. It is not easy to live into the story of God. It is not easy at all. There will be all this discomfort between living according to the Christian faith, according to the story of God, and not changing the story. There will be all this tension and all this discomfort between living into the story of God and living in the current cultural moment that we find ourselves in. It will be harder and harder – and it is hard – to live as a follower of Jesus into the true story of God and to live in San Francisco in 2016.

It's really really hard to do. And if you've found it to be hard, then it's working. If you think it's easy, then you're probably not doing it right. See, all we have to do to release the tension and release the discomfort and make it all go away and life to ease up is we just change the story. That's all you have to do. Like, I don't like the way that my faith and the story of God grates against my modern sensibilities. I don't like that.

Well then, change the story and you'll be fine. And you can tweak your story and your view on sexuality to be more embracing of today's mood and then it'll release. Like, "Oh, that tension's gone now. I feel good now."

We can tweak our view on Jesus and become more universalist and that will go away. And when we do that, most of the tension from culture goes away and we can walk into almost any place in our city and be accepted. But, the weird thing about the Church is the Church has always been this peculiar people. Peculiar. Like, you're just kind of weird. Not in a Jesusy Jesus Culture way. Like a "I wear a Jesus T-shirt and have Jesus shoes, they're like holy sandals or something, and I listen to Christian rock." It's not that cultural American sort of Christianity thing. But, it's peculiar in the sense that you hold what the world loves and wants and what the world doesn't want in tension. Like, you hold a high value for justice in our city, but so does our city. But, you also have a high value for holiness and sexual purity and they're like, "Why would you do that?"

They'll think you're weird because you'll serve alongside them downtown in the

Tenderloin or wherever and some of you guys will actually go and protest and picket for justice, but then you'll be oriented where you don't get drunk. They're like, "Wait, why? I don't understand you."

You'll be peculiar and there'll always be this tension and the tension can go away. All you have to do is change the story. But, my argument is you can't change the story. We have to stay in the story. This is the story that we've inherited. This is the story of God that we are called to live into no matter how hard it gets, no matter how hard it is to stay in the story and live in San Francisco. As a mom, as a freelancer, as a single person, a missionary, as someone who lives in the crazy service industry of being in a restaurant. Whatever you do or whoever you are, it is very hard to live into the story and live in this city, but we must.

We must stay in the story of forgiveness. That's hard to do. That's our story. Like, the founder of our faith, Jesus Christ, was wronged and gave His life and, when He was giving His life, He said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

Like, we have to stay in the story of forgiveness even of those who have wronged us and even if those who have wronged us and we think they know what they were doing, we have to forgive them. We have to stay in that story no matter how hard it is. We have to stay in the story of witness to those who need to be reconciled to God through Christ. We have to stay in the story of being a light and witness and salt in this city. We have to tell people about Jesus. We have to stay in the story where we're proclaiming Christ. Like, "Yes, I'm a Christian. And Christ is calling. He's reconciling heaven and earth. He's reconciling San Francisco and I'm a part of that."

Like, we have to witness to that. We have to stay in the story of faith and obedience. We have to be people that are marked by faith. Like, "I trust in God and I do what God says to do whether I read it in black and white in an ancient book or I discern it through prayer. Like, I'm going to be faithful to follow Jesus."

We have to stay in the story of holiness. This one's hard. Like, we inherited a story where God is trying to set apart a people to reconcile the world and, over and over again, these people don't live like that. They live like the world lives. They live like the Canaanites live or they live like the Egyptians live or they live like the Babylonians live and God is saying, "Come out. Come out."

That's the whole point of the book of Revelation. Come out of her. Come out of that whoring world. Come out. Be different. Be separate. We have to live into the story and stay into the story of holiness. We have to stay into the story of service. That Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be the servant."

So, if you think that climbing the ladder of success means more people serve you in this town, don't. Just like, no. If I'm promoted, I'm going down in service. I am continuing going to go down the ladder in service, not up the ladder. I will serve and the greatest among us – we have to live into that story even though it's hard. We have to stay in the story of grace because, doing all of this stuff, we will keep failing. Over and over and over again we will keep failing because, guys, we're flesh. We're weak. And so, we have to confess the gap between where we know God has called us to live as the people of God for the world and how we're living. We have to confess that gap.

We have to stay in the story of love. And not love as in a goofy, weird emotion, but love as an action, love as truth. And we have to stay in that story. I mean, I can go on. I'm going to stop. Like, we could – I keep going.

We have to stay in the story of all of these things. This is our story. You know, I just read over the neighborhood ministers, "And give yourself to the public reading of Scripture."

I love that Paul said that. And, sometimes, I feel like I don't do that enough. So, I'm just going to publicly read this Scripture. I'm not going to exposit it, I'm just going to read it to you as people that are living into this story. It's out of 2 Corinthians. I told you to turn there. It's in 2 Corinthians 5:14. Let me read this to you as we close.

It says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, **"For Christ's love compels us, because we convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.**

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the

new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

I want to close by praying for us and I'm going to ask Pastor Dave Dealy to come out and lead us into a time of response.

God, I thank You that You are – as we just read this, this is who You are. You are reconciling the world to Yourself. That's what You're doing. That's what You've been doing in this city, in San Francisco, long before we ever planted this church, long before the 60s ever happened in this town. You were reconciling San Francisco to Yourself and that You still are right now. And I pray for this church that we would take up our vocation as being ambassadors of that, people that You make Your plea through. Be reconciled to God.

I pray that through the lives of the members of this church that You would make the plea to the city: Be reconciled to God. And that You'd do that through the way they live, through the way they act and talk and spend money and what they do on the weekends and what they do after work and how they wake up. Like, everything. That, through them, You would make Your plea to the world through them. Be reconciled to God.

And I want to pray for anyone who's not reconciled to You. They might've just been tuned out that whole time until that last verse and something moved in their mind or their heart or wherever and they're drawn to You, Lord. They're drawn to be reconciled to You. And just even that last verse, that You, God, made Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

I pray that, if anyone in here has not placed their faith in You today, that they would place their faith in You and, because they're in Christ, they would become the righteousness of God. Move us into a time of responding to this, Lord.