

‘The Story That Must Be Shared

Acts 2:22-41

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at the West University Church of Christ,
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Good morning, everyone. We are so happy that you have chosen to be with us today. Thank you so much for accepting our invitation to share this good day of worship and fellowship.

We’re glad we can be together. Sometimes it’s even hard to get families together. The story is told of a man in Texas, in his 80’s who called his son in New York. The father said to the son, “I hate to tell you this but we’ve got some troubles here in the house. Your mother and I can’t stand each other anymore and we are getting a divorce. I’ve had it! I want to live out the rest of my years in peace. I’m telling you now, so you and your sister shouldn’t go into shock later when I move out.” He hung up the phone and the son immediately called his sister. The sister said, “I’ll handle this.” She called her dad in Texas and said to him, “Don’t do anything tell we get there! We’ll be there Wednesday night.” The father agreed, “All right. He hung up the phone, and hollers to his wife, “Okay, they are coming for Thanksgiving. Now, what are we going to tell them to get them to come for Christmas?”

Sometimes it takes some strong measures to get people together, doesn’t it? Well, we are glad you have made time to worship the Lord with us today. It’s good to be together with friends and family to worship the Lord and to enjoy a good lunch together. And I hope that you have a blessed and joyful Thanksgiving this week, and that you don’t have to resort to the extreme measures that man and his wife did to get your family together.

I hope you are doing well today. You know, when we meet each other, we say, “How are you?” and we answer, “Fine.” Everybody says that but what does that mean. For some, F-I-N-E means “Frustrated, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotionally Unstable.” Let me tell you today that in Jesus Christ there is a better way. As Christ followers, we can be perfect in Christ. Not perfect in ourselves, of course, but perfect in Christ. It’s like the bumper sticker that says, “Christians aren’t perfect---just forgiven.”

Today, we all have a story of how we got to be who we are. Sometimes these stories are sad, sometimes glad, and most of the time, a big

mixture of both. Everybody has a story. One of our fascinations is listening to each other's story. Did you know that God has a story? Its here in this book we call the Bible. From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, this is God's story. It's important for us to know God's story and to weave our story into God's story and to let God weave his story into us.

The important of us knowing our story was pointed out to me when I read what a professor of literature in Southern California, a Kiowa Indian, spoke about when he learned his story.

When he was a small boy, his father awakened him early one morning and said, "Boy, get up. Come with me." His father took him by the hand and led him sleepily to the house of an old squaw. As he left, his father said, "Son, stay here for the day. I'll come get you this afternoon."

All day long, the aged woman of the Kiowa tribe told stories to the boy, sang songs, described rituals, and in the telling and singing, recounted the sage of the Kiowa.

She described how the tribe began out of a hollow log in the Yellowstone River, how the people migrated southward, and how the fought their wars with other tribes.

She spoke about the great blizzards, the buffalo hunts, the capture and the taming of wild horses and the skill of the braves as riders. She told about the coming of he white man, depression, the war with the soldiers, the moving southward again, Kansas, privation, starvation, the diminished tribe. Finally, Oklahoma, Fort Sill, the reservation and confinement. She told it all.

About dark, the father returned and said, "Come on, Son, it's time to go." The professor of literature commented, "When I left her house, I was a Kiowa. The story shaped his life. He knew who he was and where he came from and where he belonged in the big scheme of things.

To be a Christ follow means enrollment in the story of God, a story as ancient as the stars, but as up to date as this morning's newspaper. It's a story with a cast of characters stretching from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David to Daniel to Luke to Paul, and to Peter, James and John. It's a story whose cast will ultimately involve men and women from every tribe, culture, and language and ethic group on earth.

To be a Christ follower is to have our story merge with God's story. Each of us has a personal story that is part of the Great Plot. Anyone who has no story to tell knows nothing of what it means to belong to God, to Jesus Christ, and to his people. People without the story of God are lost in

space without ultimate meaning, without a lasting hope, and without eternal life.

Our society today is rich in money and prosperity but bankrupt spiritually. We have everything to live with but not much to live for. Through our research we know more and more about less and less so soon we will know everything about nothing. But we have not found the answer for our heart hungers. God's story in this book provides all the answers we need.

What is God's story? God's story is in this book, the Bible. God's story is far bigger than you and me. It is far bigger than the church or tradition we represent. God's story transcends all countries, all continents, all cultures, and all centuries. God's story can be summed up in twenty-five words: the twenty-five words of the golden text of the Bible, John, chapter 3, verse 16: say it with me, please, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

God's story centers and focuses on Jesus of Nazareth. He was born in the first century but he belongs to all centuries. He was born in Bethlehem but he belongs to all countries. He was born a Jew but he belongs to all races. He was born a man but women love him just as well.

The story is big enough, powerful enough, simple enough, and attractive enough to reach every human being who lives on the earth and has ever lived on the earth since the beginning of the message.

The story transcends race, color, nationalities, and governments. The story transcends the denominations and divisions of men, which all end at the grave.

The story is one that God conceived from eternity past. In his fathomless mind and divine wisdom, God dreamed of a world knowing his Son Jesus Christ.

The story of God is so simple, so easy—I could give it to you in ten words on ten fingers: "Man's complete ruin in sin/ God's perfect remedy in Christ." Here it is again: "Man's complete ruin in sin/God's perfect remedy in Christ." Can you say that with me, please: "Man's complete ruin in sin/God's perfect remedy in Christ?" This is the core message of the Bible, God's story.

This story centers in Jesus. The apostles of Jesus said, "We preach Christ Jesus and him crucified." The early proclaimers of God's story said, "We preach Christ." In our reading today from Acts, chapter 2, we read a synopsis of the first gospel sermon preached after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That sermon spoke of these world-changing events

and began simply with the words, “Jesus of Nazareth.” The apostles were bold to proclaim, “There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Jesus commanded his disciples to go and preach this good news to every creature of every nation under heaven. The good news is summarized by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter fifteen. Hear what he said: (read I Cor. 15:1-6).

Did you hear those words, “of first importance”? What we are talking about here is more important than anything else in the entire Bible or in the world. This is the story of Jesus, God’s Son, who died on a Roman cross on a hill outside Jerusalem, and on the third day God raised him from the dead. For forty days following, Jesus gave them many convincing proofs of his resurrection, and then he ascended into heaven to sit in spiritual glory at God’s right hand in the very bosom of God. He is now king of all kings and lord of all lords.

The story of God is that Jesus died for our sins, a five-word that says that God acted in real space-time history. “Jesus died,” is history; “for our sins” is salvation.

In another place, the apostle Paul wrote, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” This tells us why Jesus came. He came to save sinners—that was his primary purpose in coming. That’s what God’s story is all about—freedom and deliverance from the guilt, presence, power, and penalty of sin.

The good news is that God loves us and saves us before he asks us to serve him. Remember the story of the prodigal son who ran away from home, spent all his money living in pleasure and sin, and ended up slopping pigs, and desperately wanting something better in life. Can you imagine someone saying to him, “Prodigal son, you can’t go home until you clean yourself up? Your hair is too long, your clothes are filthy, and your sandals are a mess from plodding through the mud. You smell like a hog. The father will never accept you like that. You need to clean yourself up. Get you a clean pair of sandals, put on a clean robe, get yourself a shower, a shave and a haircut, then you can go home and the father will accept you.”

But the prodigal son did not do that. He went home just as he was. He left the pigpen with the muck and the mire on his feet wearing the dirty robe and the worn-out sandals. His hair was long and stringy. When he got home, he said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”

The father saw him coming from a distance and ran to meet him. The father immediately kissed him, hugged him and welcomed him home. The father then helped him change so he would look like his son. The son did

not change in order to be accepted by the father but the father changed him because he was his son. The father ordered new shoes, a new robe, and gave him the ring of sonship once more. The father said, "Son, I want you to look like you belong to me." The son did not change so that the father would love him. The son went home like he was "just like he was." The father loved him and accepted him and began to change him into the son the father wanted him to be.

God is the father in that story. He loves us not because of who we are but because of who he is. But the prodigal had to make up his mind to come home. A person who will not admit to being a sinner will never be forgiven. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and if you are not a sinner, Jesus has nothing for you.

Jesus did not die for good people. There is nothing in the Bible that offers salvation to those that trust in their own good works or merits, their own strengths and personalities to be saved. God saves us by his grace, not by our goodness; by his mercy, not by our merits; by his atonement, not by our achievement. Only those who admit they are unworthy are worthy of the cross.

That's what the apostles preached in our reading today from Acts, chapter 2. The apostles preached about the love of God in Jesus. They described how that Jesus Christ died for our sins, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension to glory. The apostles plainly told the people that they were sinners who had disobeyed God and that Jesus was God's way of putting people right with himself. These people realized their sin. They recognized that they were responsible for the death of Jesus. They cried out, "Men and brothers, what shall we do?" Now that's a very important question, isn't it? What shall we do? We are lost, we are sinful, we are in a state of condemnation, we are separated from God, we need help, and we need it now. "What shall we do?" they cried.

The apostles said in the next verse, "Repent." That means turn from your sin and turn back toward God, seeking him, desiring him, making a u-turn in life. "Repent and be baptized." Baptism is an immersion in water, a burial like the burial of Jesus and a resurrection from the water like the resurrection of Jesus. "Repent and be baptized every one of you." All of them without exception were to obey these two commands. "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ." The very one that God sent, the one they had rejected and crucified, that Jesus of Nazareth is the savior. He that we turned away from, that we sought to destroy, is the very one in whom God offers us forgiveness of the past and hope for the future. "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins."

God would do something when they responded in saving faith, God would forgive their sins. Jesus died for sins at the cross, but sinners appropriate the benefits and blessings of that death for them when they personally appropriate it and accept it. “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” God would not only take away their sins, he would give them an added spiritual presence, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would strengthen them, help them, assist them, and assure and insure God’s presence with them. They would not be alone but always with God.

Now, is this the response God wants from us today? Yes, look at v. 39. “For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off.” That’s us. We’re all included. God wants to forgive our sins, he wants to give us the Holy Spirit, and he wants to take us eternally to heaven to be with him. God wants to include you and me in his story. This is the message that God wants preached and this is the response that God wants from all of us.

So what happened that day? The Bible says, “Those that gladly received the word were baptized, and that day about three thousands persons were added to them.”

This message was preached throughout the book of Acts. In every case, the story of Jesus was preached and people were commanded to respond in faith that included repentance and baptism. It was always faith in Christ, repentance of sins, baptism into Christ, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is salvation by God’s unmerited grace accepted by means of our obedient faith.

This is God’s story in the Bible. No one has the right to change the story or the response God requires of that that accept it.

We must tell God’s story. Our world needs to hear God’s story and yield obedience to him. Our society is much like the society of Jesus and his apostles. We have the same gods of materialism, success, pride, power and selfishness. We are experiencing the same emptiness, loneliness, alienation, dysfunctions, disintegration, sins, and death.

No matter where man is, how long he lives, where he goes, what language he speaks, or what he does, he needs to hear and obey God’s story.

This story is too good to keep to ourselves. It must be shared to benefit others. If cures for the world’s dread diseases were discovered, it would do no good as long as they were kept in the laboratory, the warehouses, the pharmacies or the doctors’ clinics. Thousands would continue to die daily until the treatments were given to the people.

The only message in the world that will save man from his sins is the good news of Jesus Christ. We must not keep this story in our church buildings, in our bibles, or locked in our hearts. We must share this story with people who need it the most. To share this story it will take our time, our energy, our resources, and our involvement.

Liberia is on the west coast of Africa. It is hot and humid and was once known for great poverty and disease. Several years ago, a man named Dr. George Harley, at the age of 35, felt that God was scaling him to the mission field. Harley had five earned doctorates. He was a medical doctor, he had a degree in disease of the tropics; and PhD's in sociology, anthropology and theology. He and his wife, Winifred, went to Liberia. They went to the end of the road where no white man had ever gone before. They walked for seventeen days and nights. Winifred was seven and a half months pregnant. One night as they were setting up their camp, she said, "George, don't look now but there are painted faces behind those trees." George said, "Don't worry about it, we will be all right."

They went a little further, and then by a bend in a river, George decided that he would establish the mission station. He worked and built with his own hands a little dispensary. He built a little place for a school and a little chapel. No one helped him. People came for some treatment but no one volunteered help. For three years, no single soul came to church. Every Sunday he went out there, and only Winifred, and his little son, Robert, came. Every Sunday morning and night it was the same.

One day he was looking out of the window watching his son play, and he saw him run and stumble and fall. He would get up and run and stumble and fall. He cried out, "Oh, no, not my son, Robert. The tropics have gotten to him." He brought him in and put him on a table and said, "Don't worry, your daddy has five doctorates and your daddy will find out what is wrong." George Harley said, "I reached back for everything I knew. But I presided over the death of my own son, 10,000 miles away from home in Norwood, North Carolina. I went to the carpenter's shop and had him build a little box for me. Winifred put in some African leaves and made a mattress. I put our son in the box, and we started down through the jungle by the blacksmith's place."

"What have you there?" asked the blacksmith. "My boy," I said, "I'll help carry him," replied the blacksmith. For three years—and that was the first offer for help that we had received. Together we dug the grave. I tried to read the Scriptures there beside the little casket. It was more than I could take. Suddenly I fell to the ground and started sobbing and crying like a child. I could no longer control the depths of my sorrow. The old

blacksmith looked at me and then turned and started running through the woods, screaming at the top of his lungs, “White man—White man—White man! He cry like one of us! He cry like one of us!”

George Harley said that on Sunday morning when it came time for church, Winifred walked down to the little chapel and you would never believe it—but every member of that village was there. Everybody. Sunday night came and everybody was there. Wednesday night came and they all came back and that was the way it was from that time. He was telling a friend this story, and the friend replied, “The thing that bothers me was that you had to give up your son in order to break through to the people.” George Harley looked at him with piercing eyes and said, “That is what God had to do, too!”

God had to give up his son in order to break into our lives. Remember, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

God wants us to give up ourselves, too. First, we give up ourselves when we surrender our lives to him and believe and accept the gospel. Then we continue to give up ourselves as in order to break into the world so they can hear of our Jesus. God has given us a story that must be told. God has given us of his Spirit and himself. He has told us that he will be with us as we go and tell every body everywhere. Our work will not be finished until Jesus comes again, the last trumpet blows, and the angels shout, “Time will be no more,”

Today, you can share in God’s story. God loves you. Jesus died for your sins. You can become a new creation in Jesus today. All of this and more is yours if you will repent of your sins and be baptized in Jesus’ name today. We are here to help you. The baptistery water behind this screen is warm. The towels and clothing are prepared. Whosoever will may come, come now, while we stand and sing.

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