

What's your Story? When we meet someone new or someone interesting we want to know more about them, we want to know what brought them to this moment, what makes them interesting? So what's your story? What's our story? We all have stories to tell, stories about our family, stories about our childhood, those embarrassing stories your siblings or parents tell at parties that you wish were forgotten many years ago, stories about our college days, stories about friends, stories about the jobs we've had, stories about places we've travelled to and the people we meet. Some will have stories of sorrow or deep sadness, some will have stories of deep joy, some will have stories of success and some will have stories of failure, and most of us will have stories where we can say all of the above.

Churches have stories too, stories of how they were founded, how they grew, of the ministers who came and went, of congregants who come and go, of baptisms, of weddings and funerals, stories of ministries and feast days and choral concerts and everything in between. Today we celebrate three years of being Grace Church, we remember the stories that we have forged together over those three years, the stories from our past at St. Crispin's, St. Giles, St. Georges and Epiphany and we look forward to the stories we will write together as Grace Church Scarborough.

Amidst all of our stories, our individual stories, our communal stories, the stories we celebrate and the stories we wished were never told: there is a story that encompasses all of our stories into one, there is a story that unites seemingly disparate and sometimes opposing stories, there is a story where each of our stories finds their place, there is a story where each of our stories finds meaning. That is God's story; that is Jesus' story. The story that begins at Creation, the story that details God's relationship with humanity, with the Israelite people, the story of God coming to dwell among us in Jesus Christ, the story of God's love for us in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. It is the story that Paul speaks about in his letter to the Ephesians and it is the story where the Church finds its meaning and purpose.

In the passage we read from the first chapter of Ephesians this morning, we hear about what it means for us as individual Christians, but more importantly for us as the gathered Church to find our meaning and purpose in God's story. In this monumental and magnificent passage of scripture we hear that all the stories of this earth, all of the stories of the church, all of our individual stories and all the stories of the past, present and future have their beginning in Christ but also that they find their fulfillment in Christ, or other words they have their end in Christ, that they find their ultimate meaning in Christ.

While God's plan for the fullness of time is **ALL** things would find their purpose and meaning in Christ, for the moment that is not yet true. It is not yet true that the Kingdom of Heaven permeates throughout the entirety of Creation. We continue to see the impact of sin and death, we continue to live in a broken world: we continue to see children orphaned in war, youth struggling to live on the streets, men and women descending into destructive addictions. We continue to see families falling apart, we continue to see friends suffering from debilitating diseases and illness. We know that the Kingdom of Heaven is not yet fully visible here on earth.

While Creation still groans for the fullness of time where all things will be redeemed, restored and renewed our reading today suggests that the Church and we along with it find our place within God's great plan of salvation, in God's great redeeming work of restoring our relationship with him, restoring our relationship with one another and restoring our relationship with Creation. We hear in the Scriptures that one of the identifying marks of the Church is that it is Redeemed, we hear that the Church is offered a foretaste or glimpse of the Kingdom of God, that the Church is to live as testament and witness to the redemption of the whole world in Jesus Christ, that the Church is the primary means by which God has chosen to continue the restorative and redemptive work of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, working in and through us and the Church throughout the world.

Paul uses lofty words to describe this, he writes that we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, that we were chosen to be holy and blameless before God from the beginning of the world, that we were destined for adoption as Children of God to the praise and honour God's glorious grace. That

we have redemption through his blood and forgiveness of sins in Christ. That is a lot to take in and process even for the most experienced disciple of Jesus, so what does it mean for us? What does this tell us about the Church, about what the Church should be and where we find ourselves in God's great redemptive story here at Grace Church?

I think that first and foremost this means that since our own stories and the church's stories find their meaning in the person and work of Jesus Christ we have been restored to right relationship with God, we are able to experience a taste of life here on earth as God intends for us in the Kingdom of Heaven. If being redeemed means that the Church is the place where we most fully experience restored relationship God then it needs to be a place where our lives are oriented towards God, where our lives oriented to the overflowing love of God that we have experienced at the hands of Jesus Christ. The Church needs to constantly be in tune with what God intends for it, we need to be faithfully reading and praying with Holy Scripture to allow the Holy Spirit to wash over us and guide our life together. We need to be faithfully grounding the life of the community in prayer so that we constantly aware of the love, mercy and faithfulness of God. We faithfully celebrating the great works of God through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. As we faithfully orient ourselves and our community towards God, and his guiding love and mercy, we will come to know more and more what it means for the Church to be Redeemed.

Secondly this means that the Church embodies forgiveness: where the redemption that we have experienced spills out into our relationships with one another. The Church is where the members of the Body of Christ seek to reconcile themselves to one another, where we as brothers and sisters in Christ seek peace amongst us, and not just a superficial peace where we hold grudges deep down, a peace that requires sacrifice, a peace that requires us all to seek relationship with one another. The Church needs to be where stories of redemption, stories of reconciliation and forgiveness are the norm, where we enter conflict and difficult situations with grace and mercy for those who might have opposing or challenging views from ours. The church needs to be where we respect the traditions and expectations of those who are different from us, where we seek to truly get to know one another to deepen our community with one another. The Church is where we seek reconciliation even with the most difficult people, the people who injure and offend us, the people hardest to love and even the people who hate us or who we might hate. As we faithfully seek to make reconciliation and forgiveness the foundation of our life together as a Church we will come to know more and more what it means for it to be Redeemed.

Finally this means that the Church must embody redemption and reconciliation with world outside of itself and with the entirety of God's Creation. If the Church is to act as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, and as the primary means that God has chosen to continue the restorative and redemptive work of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, than we must be seeking to share that message of reconciliation beyond the walls of the building. The Church needs to seek to bring the story of God's great redeeming work into the world in loving service: seeking to serve the poor and needy of our communities, seeking to get to know the communities in which we as the Church exist in, seeking to hear the stories of those people around us and seeking to love them. The Church needs to challenge the structures and norms of our society that exploit and endanger God's good Creation around us. The Church should be the place where we take God's call to be stewards of Creation seriously, seeking ways to renew the earth and to sustain what God has given us in the world. As we faithfully seek to make the redeeming and reconciling love of God in Christ known in the world and in Creation we will come to know more and more what it means for the Church to be Redeemed.

On this the third anniversary of four congregations coming together to be Grace Church Scarborough, how will our story be shaped? Will it be shaped by fear of the unknown, or the fear of failure or decline? Or will it be shaped by God's grand story of the Redemption of the world in Jesus Christ. Will it be shaped in the knowledge God's plan for the fullness of time is for all things to find their meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ? As we move forward into our future together as Grace Church let us remember that the Church is Redeemed, that we are a community that is rooted in the redemption and reconciliation of Christ and ultimately remember that God has promised that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is a foretaste of God's coming kingdom that we can experience even today, and for that I say thanks be to God!