

**Blessed from the Beginning**  
**based on Gen. 1-2, David Jahnke, 10/11/15**

I want to start this week by giving honor to and thanks for the gospel of Mark. We have read almost every passage in Mark in worship over the last year and today we say good-bye. I want to sum up a few important things about Mark. He has the distinction of being the first to write an account of Jesus' life. He was a source for Matthew and Luke and was thus hugely important in that regard too. And he succinctly and powerfully presented Jesus' healing the sick, his love for sinners, his challenge to the powerful and his mysterious victory over death. It's also the shortest gospel so please read through it again before too long as we will not hear from Mark again for at least two years.

Over the next year, we will turn to the gospel that fills the Old Testament which may sound puzzling to you as we usually associate gospel or good news with Jesus and the New Testament. Many people even have the idea that God in the Old Testament is filled with anger and wrath as opposed to His love and mercy in the New...as if God changed because of Jesus. The only theological change that came with Jesus is our understanding of God who has always been a God of *Hesed*— the Hebrew word meaning steadfast love which is applied to God over and over again in the Old Testament.

The root of this misconception goes back to our understanding of the beginning of humanity. Protestants have focused on Original Sin and the Fall of Creation. But God was full of blessing prior to and after the Fall. God called the world good and the goodness of the world did not change to bad because of sin. God called human beings very good because we are all made in God's image of love, grace, peace and truth. The Spirit breathed life into all of us and we still receive the Spirit with every breath. So we should begin and always go back to Original Blessing, rather than Original Sin.

Because a focus on original sin being passed from one generation to the next leads to us a sense that we are cursed rather than blessed. Now God is pained by our sin and its negative consequences, but curses come from Satan, not from God. God loves and pours out blessings upon all humans. And when we fall, blessings do not cease. In some ways, they are more lavishly poured out upon us in order to wake us up to God's unconditional love. The apostle Paul says, "Where sin increases, there Grace abounds all the more." He quickly adds that this does not mean we should sin more. That would be absurd. The cleansing and correction of God's grace and truth simply must increase according to the frequency and severity of sin. Why? In order to stop sin...not promote it.

When I was in my late teens and early 20s, the world seemed to me to be an absolute mess. And I could see no way to clean it up. Humans were just too bad, too selfish, too uncaring, too violent, too stubborn. And as a white male-- the group most responsible for the mess-- I felt particularly guilty. And I knew we would not sacrifice our power and privilege in order to make things right. So the world, in general, and my personal life, felt cursed and on an unstoppable path of destruction.

It is not just young and somewhat lost people who believe the world is going to Hell in a handbasket, as the phrase goes. Even our small groups talk a lot about how crazy things are in our world and we wonder why and what God is up to. And that's fine as long as we do not become cynics or fatalists. Because when you combine cynicism with beliefs about God condemning the unbeliever and wicked and God eventually condemning and destroying the world, you end up with a terrible faith cocktail. And the more we drink this, the worse our hangover becomes.

The world is not going to Hell. Humanity is not a hopeless cause. And God is not cursing you or anyone else for anything. That is not how God works. Adam and Eve suffered the consequences of their sin but the text explicitly says that only the serpent whom we associate with Satan is cursed, not Adam and Eve.

I think we are prone to feel cursed because life is hard and can be very lonely and then we die. We all experience a kind of existential angst and isolation— a feeling of no one really knowing or understanding you because no one has experienced precisely what you have or what is going on inside you. This is especially true for those who are different or are not particularly successful or struggle mentally or emotionally.

This is represented by Adam's being explicitly described as 'alone' in Eden. He had this paradise all around him which other creatures seemed to be enjoying but something was not right with him. God saw this was not good so God created Eve out of Adam in order to be a partner to Adam-- to know him and complete him. So we humans seek the person who will make us complete again.

I was talking with someone whose loved one recently got married. And she has concerns about the marriage though she, of course, hopes for the best. And I mentioned a loved one of mine who has been divorced a couple of times and has been with a few different friends since the last one. They are good people who are lonely and want someone to fill that empty spot inside.

But I do not think this ever happens, at least to the degree which God intended. If you have found the one whom you sense really completes you, thanks be to God. But we know what happened with Adam and Eve. Eve tempted Adam with the apple and he then blamed her for his own action. Sin entered in and the unity and partnership they were meant to share went sour immediately. And that broken-ness has been a part of all human relationships ever since.

We studied this Tuesday night at session. And we considered how there is only one person who can complete us. One person who became bone of every human bone and flesh of all human flesh. Jesus...and the Bible says that he is the new Adam and we, the church, are his bride. He shows humanity that we are known inside and out and loved no matter what, forever and ever.

So yesterday would have been John Lennon's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. And the night before I posted a video of the person I believe was my generation's Lennon and McCartney. His name was Elliot Smith and like John, he was always seeking and never quite finding. This is represented in his Waltz #2 in which he sings "never gonna know you now...but I'm gonna love you anyhow..."

We can never completely know or be known by others and yet we press forward in loving them anyway. And we best persevere only as we become aware that we are known and loved by a presence and a person who never leaves our side.

My best friend from high school has been bugging me about finding a board game group in the area. As an introvert who has discovered online games, I have been putting it off. So he finally sent me a link to a New Jersey game group and I learned they were meeting that night at Mara's café. I felt like I had no choice. And I went and there were a couple of people and I taught them a game and we chatted a bit.

I told them it was so good for me to discover things like this because I am an introvert who needs motivation socially. And one confided that she was actually on the Asberger's syndrome spectrum, which surprised me. The game was slow but the night was such a blessing.

As the body of Christ, we are called to be a part of Jesus' completing humanity— bringing wholeness to them, making known his friendship. So go out into the world, even if you are an introvert, and make new friends whom you will help complete and who will help complete you. For we all come from the same ancestors and are all made to be one body by the one who calls us all into eternal union with God and each other—Jesus Christ to whom belongs all the power and

the glory, along with the Father and the Spirit, now and forevermore. And God's people say...