

First Christian Church of Leavenworth Kansas

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Wed, 11/10 9:14AM • 18:33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

origin story, tenses, patmos, god, eschatology, learned, life, etiology, future, moment, imagine, history, congregation, light, origin, john, transformation, vision, paper, lesson

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Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, my rock and my Redeemer, amen.

If we look at life in just the right way, it is one extended opportunity to keep learning things, whether we are two months old, 102, or somewhere in between, all of life offers an opportunity to learn things if we would but pay attention. And what we know about life is that some lessons come easily and joyfully, and some lessons are harder learned. One of the most uncomfortable ways to learn is when you realize that, somehow, your learning up until that point was deficient, or you had an ignorance, or you didn't know what you didn't know, so to speak. There is a rare joy in getting your first paper back in college and finding out that your high school didn't teach writing and citation very well. With red marks all over the paper that says, we will consider this a rough draft. This was a lesson that I learned the hard way my freshman year of college. And an additional lesson I learned is that there are different ways to tell a story. And actually, the most powerful way to write is in the active voice. And that a person needs to be cautious writing in the passive voice. And a person needs to be even more cautious, flipping back and forth between the various tenses that you write in.

And it's interesting to note when you're reading a biblical passage, the tenses of the verbs that are used. Because sometimes the tenses that are selected (in fairness, we have a translation of a translation), but when you notice the tenses of the words that are used, its own kind of sermon is being preached and left there, if we care to pay attention. And tenses are important in this scripture, today, the Scripture by John of Patmos. Now, the interesting thing is, in most of our lives, we like origin stories--where we have come from, how is it we got to this moment. We look back over our shoulders. In fact, the Bible is filled with origins stories, Genesis is an origin story. It is the origin, literally, of

creation and God's relationship with us. When we read the Acts of the Apostles, when we read the gospels, they are the origin story of the Christian faith and the Christian tradition. This is how we got here. And even in our world, we like origin stories. You remember that times when you sat around the family dinner table, talking about family memories and reminiscences, or how Mom and Dad or Grandma and Grandpa first met--origin story. There are some people who are particularly interested in genealogy, and people who like to see how far they can trace those family members back. And what we are dealing with his origin story. Even in our public school system, history is a prominent part of the curriculum. Origin Story--how we got here.

Now the interesting thing is, sometimes we don't want to read the history that puts us in less than a favorable light. Sometimes we airbrush the origin. Consider in Oklahoma, even just now, they're learning about the Tulsa race riots or race massacre. They didn't talk about that, because not everybody looked to be in a favorable light. And even now, that's one of the hot debates. Should we talk about stuff that makes us uncomfortable or look less than perfect? And the fancy 10 cent word for origin stories is etiology. We're dealing with etiology. And we know that, and we have a handle on that. But where things get hazier is when we start dealing with eschatology. Etiology is how we got here. Eschatology is where we're going, where we're going to end up, where our destination is going to be. And we're not comfortable with it in any format, because when we begin to think about future, it seems gauzy and unclear. It seems like it's written on the wind or written in the clouds, or it's ephemeral. We can't see it. History we can see, we know it. It's iron clad. Even in today when we remembered our saints, we were doing etiology--they led us to this place. And we can be captured by that history sometimes, but the only danger is, time is the ever-present mistress. Time is always moving forward. Even if an article of our faith is entrenchment, we will be left farther and farther behind because time keeps moving forward. And that's what takes us to eschatology, looking forward and wondering what will be. And you have to put this in the context of John of Patmos.

John of Patmos was writing this letter, ideally, to seven churches, and the seven churches were being oppressed and marginalized, and under the gun. They were desperate. And have you ever been in that place when you are so desperate, when it seems to be one darn thing after another? When the room is so very dark, and you just need a bit of hope, you just need some glimmer of light that will keep you on the road, that will keep you from giving up and keep you moving forward. So John offers this vision of what God will do. Because as bad as things, look, now, there is more, much more on the horizon. Much more that is coming. Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't stop. Don't lose the faith. I know it looks dark. I know it looks impossible, but God has new things in store. See, that is one of the reasons that we deal

with eschatology. Because where we are now is not always where we are going to end up or where we are going to stay. And imagine if you are under the gun, hearing John of Patmos say that what God is going to do is so amazing. It's not simply going to be to perfect the world that we live in. No, it will be so different, that it will be a new heaven and a new earth. The old order will pass away. It will be so outside of our comprehension; it will be so wonderful that it will literally be a new heaven and a new earth. And what is more, we say that God is with us and God is present, but it's hard to get close to a God that doesn't seem to have skin on it. But in this new Heaven and this new Earth, God will be really and truly present in some form, that God can truly wipe the tears out of some persons' eyes.

You know, we pat people on the back and say God is with you, or Peace be with you. But imagine God really being with you and wiping the tears of pain and suffering out of your eyes. Imagine, if you will, a runaway child. A child has run away because he or she knows their sexuality isn't accepted by their parents or perhaps even the church that they have attended. And in that moment of deepest isolation and abandonment, imagine God reaching down, wiping the tears and pain out of that child's eyes. Imagine someone at the border who is running for their life, who doesn't have the official papers, who is scared and doesn't know what to do next, possibly hungry, and imagine in their deepest moment of distress, God physically reaching down wiping the tears out of their eyes. That is powerful. That is something that might give you something to go on--that glimmer of light and that glimmer of hope. And what we can say to people is that we aren't God, but that we so believe in the vision that has been told, in the vision that has been offered, that we are going to act upon it. While God is not yet here to wipe the tears out of your eyes, we, as an article of faith, will do it ourselves because we know that is what the world needs. That's powerful stuff.

See, the importance about having vision for the future is that if you do not have a vision for the future, you surely will wind up there. That is, you aren't going anywhere without a vision for the future. You know. and every now and again. congregations enter into the "visioning thing," and when you mention doing visioning, congregations complain that "we tried that before. All we did was write some things on paper. I hate that process." But every congregation, every people, every organization has to live for more than this moment. because if we do not have some overarching vision for the future, it is not enough simply to live in the present moment. We have to have some guideposts, something leading the way, leading us in a visionary direction. It is the act of eschatology. Just as it was important with John of Patmos, it is important for us, too. Where are we going? Who do we want to be? And if our "Where are we going" is that we'd like to pay the bills and keep the lights on, that's not eschatology. That is just responding to the present need. And the reality is, though, that this story gets better, because we move

into the present tense. And John of Patmos says, "See, I am making all things new." See, I am making all things new, not, I will make all things new when the time is right, not that I did make all things new, I am making all things new. These words are trustworthy and true. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

So, the question is not will God do this, but the question is, are we willing to be a part of what God is already doing? Are we willing to give our lives and our all to participate with what God already has inaugurated? Are we ready to put our hands in God's hands, knowing that God has already started the process? And if the answer is no, by default, we are saying that God has not started the process. That we do not believe that the words are trustworthy and true. Because what I have found in every circumstance is that as much as we would like the world to get right with itself, for congregations to fix their problems, for those people who need to be set straight to be set straight, transformation begins with every individual consenting to the fact that they need to be transformed. Transformation is never something that is always located outside of ourselves. Transformation always begins with the self. And if you are doing a self-inventory today, 2021, November 7, Saints Day, are you ready to participate with what God is doing? Even if that means acting in new ways, inhabiting new modes, and new deeds, even changing what our prayer life or worship life looks like, as individuals? I trust that God has a vision for you, that that God has a vision for me, and a vision for this congregation. That the words are trustworthy and true. That even now in this present and active tense, it is breaking forth. Amen.