

“The End of Life as it Should Have Been”

Reading: Genesis 2:4-15, 6:11-22

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

One of the reasons that I personally was excited about our church-wide focus on *The Story* is that I thought it would be nice to have my sermon texts all planned out for me for 31 weeks. But what I quickly realized as I started looking through our chapter for this week is that I’ve still got to choose my text; these chapters in *The Story* only narrow things down for me. This week, for example, has so many different things that could be said about this opening chapter of God’s story among us. The beginning of the story of God’s work with humanity is literally the beginning of the entire cosmos, so we’re dealing with some of the grandest questions humanity can ask. These first few chapters of Genesis prepare us for literally everything that follows. This part of the story doesn’t only set the stage for the story that follows, it also tells us how the story should have gone: this was meant to be a very different story, but things have gone horribly wrong.

I’m sure every one of us has had the experience of watching as something you’ve put time and energy and care into has gone completely awry. It’s just human; we all make mistakes. Many of you know that Pastor Carey and I enjoy cooking and that we love good food, and I take baking in particular very seriously. We don’t fool around when it comes to dessert. Many of you like to either bake or eat pies, so you probably already know something about pies I had to learn the hard way. When you’re making a pie with a filling that is not baked, like a pudding pie or a fresh fruit pie, usually you’ll bake the empty crust by itself first. But what I didn’t know at first, or I didn’t think was that important, was that you have to put some sort of weight in the pie shell while it’s baking, or else it will probably shrivel and shrink up and be worthless. So there were a couple of times early in my baking career when I was all excited and prepared to bake a pie, and I’d put my crust in the oven only to watch, helplessly, as it shriveled up into a lump of pastry.

We’ve all been there. We’ve all felt that twinge when we realize that something we planned and prepared and worked on and crafted slowly but surely got scratched or dented or marred or used up or dirty or torn. Our story with God begins with the story of His act of creation, a good and beautiful and bountiful creation that was meant to be very good. The whole first chapter consists of this beautifully poetic description of how God gives order to the chaos. He puts everything where it ought to be, places it within its bounds, and in so doing, He crafts a space where life and health and goodness can flourish. And, of course, at each step along the way, as each part of creation is brought to its fullness, God declares that it is *good*. No more description, nothing more needs to be said about it: it’s good.

Everything is in its place, and chaos is simply ordered away. And therefore, every need is provided for. We’re given the picture of a bountiful creation. Humanity’s place is in a garden that God has planted, and the garden has water flowing in every direction and bringing life everywhere, and the trees are loaded with good things to eat. It’s not a place of leisure, though, it’s a place of purpose: God gives these humans the mission of caring for the creation He’s made. They have work to do, but it’s not wasted work. It’s fruitful and effective work, and this magnificent creation is in harmony. Everything is provided for. Everything is purposeful. Everything is as it ought to be, where it ought to be. And God is there in its midst, enjoying it with the people He has made.

But we've all watched as something we've created hasn't turned out according to plan. We all know that feeling of anguish when something we've planned for and worked for and carefully crafted doesn't work like it's supposed to. But this story of creation isn't just a story of a good creation going bad by mistake. It's much worse than that. As much as I hated to watch my eagerly-anticipated pie crusts shrivel up, it was just a mistake, an accident, and the anguish of an accident doesn't begin to approach the anguish of a creation that deliberately destroys itself. The only thing I can think of that might take us in the direction of what happens next in our story of God's creation would be a parent watching as their beloved child made self-destructive choice after self-destructive choice. It's not an accident, it's a willful act of disobedience. It's senseless rebellion that only ends up doing damage to everyone involved. Sometimes the person making the choice bears most of the damage, but sometimes it's indiscriminate, and innocent others are harmed as well. But it's not an accident, it's a choice, and it's a choice that came after seeing the very good creation as it ought to have been, and it came after being warned against making that self-destructive choice.

And the result is that every generation since then has lived and died in the mess and chaos that have resulted from their choices, without ever really knowing what life should have been like.

As we continue through the story, we hear the agonized cry of a parent, a creator, who sees His child, His creation, make choices that will cause nothing but suffering. I've chosen to focus our attention on three different cries from God that we see in this part of the story of creation, because this first chapter of *The Story* focuses on three different generations of humans near the beginning of God's work with creation, and each generation gives us an insight into the progression of the consequences of this terrible, rebellious choice we've made, and each of these generations is punctuated by a statement or an observation from God about what has happened.

The first anguished cry comes right in the thick of the action, right as Adam and Eve have listened to the shrewd whispering of the serpent, have disbelieved God, and have done that which they were explicitly commanded not to do. God confronts Eve, with the juice still on her lips, with the half-eaten fruit in her hand, and says, "What is this you have done?" God is not asking for His own information; He knows exactly what they've done. It's a cry of anguish at coming upon a scene of ruin and desperately wishing that it wasn't true. "What did you do?" It's one of those questions that doesn't really expect an answer, because the answer isn't really the point of the question. But Adam and Eve respond in a way that is so familiar to us because we've all done it and we've all heard other people do it: they start "explaining" what happened. They start passing the blame around. God's not looking for excuses, just like a parent isn't really looking for excuses when they hear a crash and walk into the living room to find their child standing over a shattered family heirloom. "What have you done?" is a cry that doesn't want a story in response, it wants an expression of repentance. It wants a realization of the gravity of what has happened.

I think it's important for us to recognize that this is God's initial cry when He comes upon the scene of our sin. Before He starts pronouncing curses, before He explains to us the consequences of our actions, before judgment takes place, there is this anguished cry: "Where are you? How did you get here? What is this you have done?" And if, in that moment, we stop the cycle of blame and excuse, if we confess the horror of what we have done and the gravity of its consequences, if, in short, we repent, then the story proceeds along a very different track.

But alas, that's not how *this* story proceeds. The excuses tumble out, and the blame multiplies, and that rebellious choice roots itself in that first little human family. Blessing turns to curse, purposeful work turns to wasteful toil, communion turns to casting out. The very good, bountiful, ordered creation becomes diminished, uncertain, and disordered. And in case we, like Adam and Eve, are tempted to think that their rebellion wasn't really that big of a deal, we turn the page and come to the next generation. Their sons, Cain and Abel, choose two different paths for supporting themselves: Cain works the soil, while Abel is a shepherd or herdsman. We don't get many details, but when it came to relating to God, apparently Cain approached God rather begrudgingly. We're told that Abel offered God the best of what he had, and while Cain does make offerings to God, they're apparently not expressions of genuine love. There's a bitterness in his spirit that seems to be growing.

God sees this, and He gives Cain this wonderfully evocative warning: "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." This is in fact the first use of the word "sin" in the Bible, and it's interesting that it's given this almost personal, willful characteristic. We've reached another level in humanity's rebellion against God. The consequences of the parents' choice have powerfully impacted their children. "Sin is crouching at your door," like the wild beasts that prowl in the wilderness around you, Cain, it is waiting for you. These humans had been called to be masters of God's creation as its keepers and protectors, but chaos has broken out, and now the creation is mastering them. God is warning Cain of the extreme danger he is flirting with, the fact that sin cannot be toyed with because it will win that game. In the aftermath of Adam and Eve's rebellious choice, we hear God crying out to us ever since: "Warning! Sin is crouching at your door! Beware of it!"

Cain, of course, did not listen, and he killed his own brother as a result. It's not even entirely clear why he did it; maybe even Cain didn't know why. But then we hear God's cry of anguish once again: "What have you done?" This very good creation is now stained with the blood of murder. The result is that sin crouches at our doors, too, even to this day, and we, like Cain, are faced with the decision of whether we will listen to God's warning.

But again, the story continues to the next generations, and they did not, for the most part, listen to God's warning. Sin crouched at their doors, and they let it master them. And we come to the third, and most painful, of God's observations in this part of the story. This one isn't a cry of anguish to one of the characters; God seems to have stepped back a bit from His troubled creation. This one is a statement of fact from the vantage point of one who can see the whole picture: in Noah's generation, God saw "that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." The exact opposite of what He had created. In place of a very good creation, we see a world that is only evil all the time.

And so we see this progression in the cries God makes as His creation unfolds: "What is this you have done?" "Sin is crouching at your door!" "Only evil, all the time." Sin takes root, and then it struggles for control, and then it completely consumes. It seduces, then it masters, then it destroys. It did so much damage to God's very good creation that He was forced to purge creation with a flood, to wipe the slate clean and start over. "What is this you have done?" "Sin is crouching at your door!" "Only evil, all the time." The damage is done.

But as powerful as those three statements from God are, there's always a fourth statement with God. "What is this you have done?" "Sin is crouching at your door!" "Only evil, all the time." And then another one: "But..." God did not in fact wipe the slate clean at that point in the story. Almost. But... "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." "I am going to put an end to all people," God said, "but...I will establish my covenant with you, Noah." As bad as sin is, and as anguished as God's cries are because of the damage we do ourselves through sin, there is always another word from God. But... Sin does not have the last word. The story does not end with sin's damage. In fact, this story is less about sin's damage than it is about God's grace in response.

Especially now, as we begin our journey as a church through this great story of God's work, and as we continue to bask in the glory of celebrating Easter, when God's grace is so powerfully on display, we remember that God has one more thing to say. But...*grace*. But...there is hope in the face of sin. But...God's goodness is greater than sin. But...the story is not yet over.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)