

Liturgy: The Dialogue of Worship: Preaching

Scripture:

Read Psalm 19:1-10 and James 1:19-25

Introduction:

We all love to listen to good stories—from young to old, from campfire stories to those shared around the dinner table with loved ones. To be human, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, is to be a “story-telling animal.” But stories do more than tickle our imaginations. The best stories *orient* our imaginations. They reveal the best stuff of life—where meaning can be found, the purpose of things, and the beauty of a life well lived. Yet it’s not as simple as only telling a good story, is it? That story, first, must be a *true* story – a story which finds its uncton and impact from a broader narrative that guides our interpretation of purpose, beauty, and truth. Theologians might call this the “normative narrative,” the proverbial North Star which guides both our telling and our understanding of the stories we absorb and live.

James Smith writes, “*The Scriptures function as the script of the worshipping community, the story that narrates the identity of the people of God...and the fuel of the Christian imagination.*” What Smith is saying is that the story articulated through the Christian scriptures is intended to be our North Star, the way in which we make sense of life, this world, and our place in it. Smith goes on to say, “*Though the entirety of Christian worship inscribes the story of God in Christ into our imaginations, the moment of Scripture reading and proclamation of the word through preaching is the most intense or explicit moment for the articulation of this story.*”

The Bible is too often misunderstood only as a guidebook for right living. If the Bible were simply a field guide for morality, it’s no wonder that people have such a difficult time submitting their life to the God who wrote it. Lists of do’s and don’ts generally do not capture our affections. *But stories do.* The Bible is first a story about God—what He’s like, and what it means to know Him and be known by Him. And second, the Bible is a story about us—what we’re like, why we’re here, and what we were created for.

Preaching, then, not only illumines parts of God’s story but it highlights the Author himself. According to Christianity, amazingly, God wrote himself into the narrative by sending Jesus to be part of the human story. Jesus, then, is the true North Star of the Christian narrative. He’s what the story has always been about. We find our place in this world because we understand our place in *his world*. And week-by-week, as the word is preached and Jesus is amplified, we’re shaped into the sort of people who live out of a story bigger than our own.

Reflection: Take personal inventory of your life, heart, and spiritual journey. Use these prompts as a way to prepare for group discussions, or for personal times of prayer.

1. What serves as your “North Star?” Where do you look to find the trajectory for and guide to life? (Hint: When things hit the fan, where or who do you turn to for help?)
2. How do you relate to God’s word? As a “how-to” for behavior and morality or as the story of God’s grand rescue? What difference could it make to view scripture as a [true] story?

Discuss:

1. What about the sermon stood out or impacted you the most? Do you have any follow-up questions about the sermon?
2. Re-read Psalm 19:1-10. These verses describe the two primary ways that God speaks—through creation and then through his word. Verses 1-6 describe what is commonly called *general revelation*, an understanding of God, visible to all, in what he made. Verses 7-10 describe what is commonly called *special revelation*, an understanding of God that can only be found in his word. Discuss these verses and how you experience God in both creation and his word.
3. Take a moment to re-read the James Smith quote from paragraph two. What is the primary force shaping your understanding of self and identity? What are the barriers you experience in allowing God and his word to shape your life and story?
4. Re-read James 1:19-25. James lays out a distinction between *hearers* and *doers* of the word. Are you more hearer only, or are you a doer too? How would you know? What might it look like to be “gospel-saturated” doers of God’s word in modern day SoCal? What role should community play in all of this?

Apply:

We live in consumeristic culture. Even something as good and biblical as a sermon and preaching can become a commodity to consume. Instead of approaching preaching from the perspective of “did it tickle my ears?”, approach Sundays at Redeemer from the perspective of did the sermon “warm and orient my heart?” What did I learn about the Father, Son, and Spirit? What did I learn about myself? And if I truly believed and embodied what I learned from God’s word, in what ways would my life be different?