

Storytime

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Mark 1:9-15

When our children were elementary school age and we were both working, I often felt like we were near exhaustion. I mean we loved the little rascals but they also took so much energy especially at night after a long day. Sometimes after an evening of playing blanket monster and hide and go seek and reading stories, I would put them to bed with the fond hope that they would just say goodnight dad. But often a tender little voice would say, Tell me a mouth story. Not mouse, but mouth. It meant for them a story that was made up on the spot. So I indeed created the character of Reggie Raccoon and told of his fantastic forest adventures. As our children grew in their imaginary capacities, they would occasionally interrupt my stories with a phrase that said No it didn't happen like that Dad. Pretend this happened and they would take Reggie off in a whole new direction. Usually they suspected that I was trying to finish off the story so it would be sleepy time and they would unravel the ending so I would have to create again.

And that explains a key theological piece from the Joel reading. Joel says that if the people change it may be that God will relent. That God will change God's part of the story.

So it is not that God sits up on some mighty throne—dictating how your story or my story should be told—or how the story of a nation or the nations should be told. For too long the minds of many Christians have been held captive by a theology of predestination or providence. We have mistakenly seen God as an absolute monarch sitting in the heavens and dictating history. But we know that evil triumphs way too often for us to believe in that kind of God. Bad things happen to the best of people—Job has millions of brothers and sisters who have suffered evil through no fault of their own.

However, this understanding that God tells part of the story and then we tell part of the story and then in turn God tells the story--Aha!--that works. It is how Joel and in general the prophets understood God working in history and in the lives of people.

So with that context we turn to listen to Mark's telling of Jesus coming into the world and being baptized by John. We remember his going into the wilderness, his identity crisis if you will—then after John is arrested, Jesus steps onto center stage of history and proclaims: God is telling a whole new story for human history. John has announced and I say to you now and forevermore that God's kingdom is breaking into the world, the seeds have been planted and yes there are weeds, there will be drought and disease but the seeds of God's blessed kingdom have been planted. Where you ask? Where have they been planted? They have been planted in your soul and yours and the soul of the earth.

Remember the book of Joel calling us to rend our hearts and not our garments. We rend our hearts in repentance and remorse so that God can plant the seed of the Kingdom within us. In deed, this seed, this word of God, this Christ life within us sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

And so we come to the table rejoicing, delighting in the opportunity and privilege we have of telling part of the great story knowing that in turn the God-Spirit will tell part of the story back to us.