

The Story of God and Us: Completion

Westheimer Sermon: <https://vimeo.com/441806124>

Gethsemane Sermon: <https://vimeo.com/441809102>

Pastors' Discussion: <https://vimeo.com/441714504>

Sermon Workbook: <https://www.stlukesmethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GodandUs-workbook-web.pdf>

Before we jump into this final week of the Sermon Stretcher, let's review what we've learned this summer.

God **CREATED** the world and everything in it because God desired a relationship with us.

We have free will and our **SIN** moves us away from God so decidedly that we cannot overcome the separation on our own.

But God reaches out to us to overcome our separation by creating **COVENANTS**—agreements to take care of us that God will uphold no matter what.

Through the **INCARNATION** of Jesus, we were brought into the deepest possible intimacy with God.

Jesus entered the world to lead us back into the harmony from which we had fallen away, to **ATONE** for our sins on the cross, overcoming the powers of evil.

Victory over sin and death was achieved when Jesus was **RESURRECTED** after the crucifixion.

God dwells in each Christian to guide, strengthen, and comfort through the **HOLY SPIRIT**. The Spirit assembled a community of believers to become the church that worships and fulfills God's mission: to inaugurate the Kingdom on Earth.

You might be memorizing the Story of God and Us as it's written in the sermon booklet, but it can be helpful to take the bold words – the elements of the story of God and us – and put them into your own story. What does it mean to you to be created by God for relationship? Are you aware of the sins that separate you from God? How do you understand the at-one-ment you now enjoy with God through Jesus? What does being a part of the community of believers assembled by the Spirit mean to you?

This week, we'll look at the final component of the Story of God and Us:

One day God will **COMPLETE** the new creation. There will be no more evil or suffering, and everything in the world will be restored and set right.

As Charles Wesley wrote in the classic hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling":

*Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be:
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee*

As Christians, we look forward to the day when creation – both humanity and the created world – is renewed. In the Sermon Stretcher video, Dr. Pace quoted Rev. Adam Hamilton who says each Easter, “we don’t just believe it, we’re counting on it!”

So, what do we know about what completion will be like? The imagery in scripture of the new creation is from Revelation, mostly chapters 21 and 22. The message of Revelation is not one of death and destruction, but of hope and victory over evil. The judgement of God that is anticipated is a good thing because it means that God is going to restore order.

The original project was a union of divinity and humanity. In the Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam and Eve. But it was their sin that drove a wedge through the perfect union, and our sin continues to separate us from God. But when God sorts things out and we are resurrected to the new creation, that perfect union will be restored and we will experience the full life that God originally intended.

In Romans, Paul writes that the whole of creation is groaning as if in labor pains while the new creation is being brought about. When we look around the world, it is easy to see all of the ways that we are currently living in an unfinished creation – there is war and sickness and oppression and abuse and slavery and bullying and cruelty and loneliness.

The markers of this full life will be:

Life and Healing

Death is currently a reality of the created order, but that will not be the case when we live in the new creation. We won’t be separated from people we love. As John wrote in Revelation, “there will be no more mourning or crying or pain, for the first things have passed away.” The “first things” that he referenced is this version of creation that we are living in now – the way things currently are. In this time, there are folks that die without experiencing healing – emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual healing – but in the time that is to come, that will not be the case.

Justice

NT Wright explains it this way: “Israel’s God is coming to sort everything out at last. He is coming to put things right, to right wrongs, to straighten what has become crooked, to repair and rebuild what has been torn down. ‘Justice’ means *making things right again at last*, getting the original project back on track.”

Worship

The idea of non-stop worship may bring to mind an interminable church service, but the picture that God wants us to have is of our whole life being consumed by the presence of God. When you’re in someone’s physical presence, they stay in the front of your mind in a way that doesn’t happen when you are separated. When we live with God in the new creation, all of our thoughts and actions will revolve around God.

Peace

We often think of peace like beauty pageant contestants: in terms of world peace. That is important because God doesn't want us to live in conflict with one another. Isaiah prophesies that there will be a day when we beat our swords into ploughshares and we put aside all fighting and war. But there is another component of peace, which is peace between individuals. The grudges – both large and small – that stand in the way of healthy relationships will be gone.

Inclusiveness

One of the greatest pains on earth is loneliness. Whether it stems from being left out or being marginalized or being judged as worthless or losing the people you love, the feeling that you're alone in the world is excruciating. When God renews creation, we will all live in harmony and no one will ever feel alone.

Questions for discussion and reflection:

1. After this series, how would you tell the story of God and you?
2. Do you think it's naïve to believe that God will set everything right and restore creation?
3. Before this week, did the idea of never-ending worship excite you or make you groan? Do you look at it differently knowing that it is based on the constant physical presence of God?
4. What do you think the role of your work is now in the eventual new creation?
5. What are you most looking forward to in the new creation?