

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
25th Sunday after Pentecost
10 November 2013
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Exod 3.1-15; Lk 20.27-40

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

I had an English teacher in high school who said there are only 7 basic plots to all stories.¹

There's the one about *overcoming monsters* —

like Beowulf, 'Little Red Riding Hood', and all the James Bond films.

Then there's the *Rags to Riches* story —

our girls' favorite is 'Cinderella.'

There's *The Quest* —

a hero with sidekicks, like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Odyssey*.

Similar to the quest is the one where the hero must return home —

the Kansas favorite is the *Wizard of Oz*.

A *Comedy* is another —

here there's some silly confusion that results in love. Think of Shakespeare's many comedies.

Then there's the *Tragedy* —

these show the consequences of sin on humanity. *Julius Caesar* and *Anna Karenina* are a couple examples.

Lastly, there's the *Rebirth* —

Ebenezer Scrooge is one; so is *Beauty and the Beast*.

All of these are found in the Scriptures—and I suppose you could say, come *from* the Scriptures.

Satan is described as a dragon—you can't get more monstrous than that!

Christ's humanity is a rags to riches story, in a way,

as He moves from weakness and humility to strength and exaltation—

Joseph would be a type of this as well.

The Quest is seen as Joshua and Caleb lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

And the return is a return to Eden, the Tree of Life.

Comedy's a bit harder to find in the Scriptures, but appears in the book of Judges,

or even in today's Gospel, where the Sadducees keep trying to trap Jesus in His words, only to be trapped themselves.

Tragedy is almost synonymous with Job.

Lastly, the entire Scriptures could be summarized as a story of death to life:

the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

It's this basic plot-line, running throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, that the Sadducees just don't get.

For them, there's life and there's death. That's all.

For them, Scripture's nothing more than a tragedy, or a dark comedy.

There are many like the Sadducees today.

¹ My teacher was Dr. Patricia Martin. There's a book written about this: *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* by Christopher Booker.

Marriage is being attacked severely by our society.
 But like the Sadducees, it's not marriage that's really at stake—
 it's who God is and what life in Him is all about.

For the Sadducees, life, as we know it, is all there is.
 So live for the moment, seize the day—or more popular today: *yolo* [you only live once].

This is the doctrine of those without hope.
 It's the teaching that comes to our children with evolution, and other myths like that.
 And when they go off to college—this is so-called *higher learning*.

Now this sort of thinking isn't just among secular society today.
 You can find the hopelessness of evolution and the false urgency of *yolo* even in the Church.
 How many mission programs are built on the model of *carpe diem*?

It's nothing new.
 The Sadducees denied the resurrection as well, claiming to be religious all the while.

But Jesus doesn't fall for their trap.
 He won't be persuaded either by their learning, or power, or even by logical argument.

Jesus knows the *story*.
 He knows what God is like: who He is, what He's all about.
 And knowing God's story, He knows what life is.
For God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. (Lk 20:38)

Now, to prove His point, Jesus takes them back to the story.
 And not some obscure reference—
 as if the doctrine of the resurrection could only be known by the scholars—
 but Jesus takes them back to the basics, where God reveals Himself to Moses,
 to the burning bush.

This was a story every Israelite would know—Sadducees especially.
 It's here that Moses was first commissioned,
 here that the inspiration of the Exodus was revealed,
 here that God came and physically dwelled among His people—
 though, admittedly, in a fiery bush that didn't burn up.
 And best of all, it's here that God gave His name to His people,
 to call upon in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

*“Moses said to God,
 ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them,
 ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me,
 ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?’*

*God said to Moses,
 ‘I AM WHO I AM.’*

*‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’
 ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and
 the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’
 This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.’”*

God wants to be known by His name, by His living presence among His living people.

And the Sadducees don't see it.

Now, to be fair, there are plenty of times we don't either.
 There are times that *carpe diem* seems like a great idea.
 We've all secretly got a bucket list, whether it's actually written, or just up in our heads.
 Some things on the list are wholesome—wanting to see Yellowstone or delight in a grandson.
 But for some, that list also includes things you'd only do if getting caught wasn't an issue.

In any case, our lack of self-control is another symptom of the Sadducee in us.
 We can't wait.
 We've got to have it now—
 whether it's another brownie, another beer, or one more lustful image.

Repent.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.

Life isn't short, or transitory.
 Life isn't only lived once.
It's eternal.

Jesus shows this by how God confesses who He is at the burning bush.
 He doesn't say "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,"
 but "I AM."

That's what's going on with the cover of your bulletin, by the way.
 The God who spoke to Moses from that burning bush was called *Yahweh*—
 or, as we see in our Bibles: "the LORD" (with all caps).

And Jesus—whose name means: "Yahweh saves"—
 is the one who appeared to Moses.

Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 "Before Abraham was," Jesus says elsewhere, "I AM"!

Jesus is the God of the Living.
 In Him is life.
 And any idea of life apart from Him,
 whether seizing the day, or checking your bucket list,

or tweeting some crazy thing you've done, hashtag: *yolo*—
 all of that is simply trying to have life apart from Christ.
 And then you're no better than the Sadducees.

But you are in Christ.
 And just as Yahweh appeared within the bush as a fire, but the bush wasn't consumed—
 so also does Yahweh dwell within you, and neither are you consumed.

In fact, it's just the opposite—
 in Christ you live!

His presence among you isn't to destroy you, but to give you life far greater and more fulfilling
 than anything this world has to offer.

And the story of that life begins and ends in God.
 It includes tragedy and comedy,
 a quest and a return,
 the defeat of all your villains, even sin itself,
 and it ends in life everlasting.

That's the story of your salvation—it's all in Christ.

For God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit