

OUR SHARED LIFE

**SERIES: ONE KINGDOM.
INDIVISIBLE.**



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Genesis - Creation
First Message
Paul Taylor
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We are in a crazy time in the world—months into a global pandemic where we are restricted to our homes. Then in the midst of that, millions of us watched the horrific video showing the graphic murder of George Floyd. What we saw was pure evil. Violent racism at its worst.

But of course, George Floyd isn't the first unarmed black man to be killed by police. He is only the latest in a long string of similar cases, from Trayvon Martin to Eric Garner to Ahmaud Arbery and literally hundreds more.

And here we are starting a preaching series on unity.

Yesterday I attended a rally in downtown Palo Alto to support the movement toward racial justice in our country. Thousands of people were gathered in unity to ask that all people be viewed as equal before the law. It was powerful and emotionally moving.

But they are only gathered because we aren't unified. The events of the past several weeks have made it obvious how divided this country is. Listen to part of a statement released by Tony Dungy, a football player and coach.

Today we are a divided country. We're divided racially, politically, and socio-economically. And Satan is laughing at us because that is exactly what he wants. Dysfunction, mistrust and hatred help his kingdom flourish.¹

Our nation is divided. People are coming together. That is a great thing.

But it isn't just our nation that is divided. The church is divided as well. The community of people who follow Jesus are split. We are split by racial lines. We are split by political lines. We are split by socioeconomic lines. And we are split by how we respond to the things that happen in our culture. We are split in our response to the pandemic. We are split by our response to the murder of George Floyd.

I may have already said something that made you upset with me. Tony Dungy's words are even more right when applied to the church. We might expect the world to be divided. But when God's kingdom divides, Satan laughs in victory. Divisiveness is everywhere. It is a scourge within our churches, and it tarnishes the name of Jesus in the world.

In January of 2019, the elders and pastors started talking about a preaching series to address divisiveness. In December, I sensed God leading me to invite other churches to preach together about the unity we have as the kingdom of God. What made me most excited was that the sermon series itself would be a living application of our unity. We'd be concretely demonstrating our unity in action as we preached about it with our words.

For the next six weeks, we'll be joining twenty other churches for this preaching series called One Kingdom. Indivisible. I'm incredibly excited to be doing this, and a bit terrified. I can't believe how the series has come together. I'm eager to see how God uses it in our church and other churches.

The approach will be to focus on the story of the kingdom of God. You see, the stories we tell end up shaping our identity. And that identity, in turn, shapes how we relate to people. Story leads to Identity, which leads to Relationship.

We have all sorts of stories that we tell: the story of America as a Christian nation; the story of America as a nation of immigrants; the story of America as a place of opportunity; the story of America as a system of oppression.

Each of these stories has elements of truth. The particular story we tell shapes our identity. They tell me who I am and how I fit into a complicated world. Once I have that identity, it changes how I relate to others.

Our purpose is not to understand our identity as Americans or immigrants or members of an ethnic group. We want to understand what it means to be part of the kingdom of God. We cannot let those other stories

give us our primary identity. If you are a follower of Jesus, your story is the story of the kingdom of God.

We'll trace the theme of the kingdom of God throughout Scripture. We'll start in Genesis, end in Revelation, and cover a lot of ground in between. We need to know the story of the kingdom of God because it is our story.

This morning we begin by looking at the shared life that God intended for us to build together. In the book of Genesis, we'll see the whole story of the kingdom of God in miniature. We'll see God's purpose in creation, how sin tore us apart, and the solution God has to bring us back together.

I don't always give away the big ideas of the sermon before I introduce them, but we have a lot of material to cover this morning, so I want to make sure to keep the big picture in front of us. There are three big ideas we recognize this morning:

- We were created with a shared purpose to bless the world.
- Our sin divides us and thwarts our purpose.
- God will unite us and restore our purpose.

Let's start at the beginning to find out what the kingdom of God is really all about.

Creation with a shared purpose

How do you feel about group projects? When I was in school, we had a lot of them. Some people loved them. Others hated them. And while this wasn't always a perfect assessment, it seemed like the people who loved them were the ones who never did any work. The people who hated them were the ones who ended up doing everything.

My teachers always said there were two reasons we did group projects. First, we were supposed to learn how to do something practical. Secondly, we were supposed to learn how to work together. Group projects were meant to teach us to accomplish something as a team.

Apparently, God is a fan of group projects as well. Read the first instruction that he gave his creation.

Genesis 1:27-28:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and

female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Notice that when God created people, he seemed to have the same goals in mind as my teachers when they assigned us group projects. God gave people something to do. The man and woman were meant to steward this incredible creation—fill it, subdue it, manage it. Bring life to every corner.

Secondly, they were supposed to do it together. God blessed *them*. He said to *them*. All of this is one big group project. The people were created in the image of God, whom we find out later is a Trinity of three persons working perfectly together. And these people were meant to work together in the same way.

The first big idea is: We were created with a shared purpose to bless the world.

You and I and everyone else in this world were meant to work together to fill the earth with life and take care of this incredible creation. We were given one big group project.

What does this have to do with politics?

I like this definition of politics: "Building a shared life together." Politics are the dynamics which take place when people try to build a shared life together. It happens in families, companies, educational institutions, nations, and yes, churches. Politics is just a way to describe the process of working together to build a shared life.

This task that God gave people was always going to involve politics. From day one, we would have to learn how to work together, balance perspectives, and arrive at a great solution. But all of us know that this isn't easy. Sometimes there are no obvious answers.

This dilemma is why Amy Brown, a professor at Wheaton College, says that politics deals with "imperfect solutions for intractable problems." That's a fancy way to say that it's really difficult and you never get a perfect answer.

This is why some of us don't like politics. It's complicated and messy and confusing, and even when you work very hard, you can't get things just right.

Building a shared life is complicated, to say the least.

But this is our God-given responsibility. We were created for this purpose: to build a life in this world and to do it together—all of us.

If the events of the past several weeks have made anything clear, it's that we have not built a shared life together for everyone. Our world is built with systems which do not benefit everyone equally. That's what it means to say that there is systemic racism in our country.

But again, for our purposes here, we're not starting with our country. We start with each other. We start with the family of God. If we can't work together on the group project of being the church, what hope do we have to offer the world?

We cannot opt-out of our responsibility. We cannot step back because our lives are working fine. We need to learn to work together.

The story of the kingdom of God starts here. God gave Adam and Eve this grand, beautiful, incredibly complicated group project to work together and bless the world. At the end of Genesis chapter 2, they were all set to do this. Happily married, with a world full of newly named animals, they were ready to bless the world. But that didn't last long.

Divided and dehumanized

Instead of working together to fulfill their shared purpose, people turned against each other and ignored their responsibility to the world.

This is precisely what is portrayed in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve sin by disobeying God. That sin sets them against each other. They blame each other and divide against each other. Also, their task to bless the world gets more difficult. Thorns and thistles thwart their efforts. Even parenting is filled with pain.

The rest of the book of Genesis is filled with story after story of families divided. Husband against wife. Child against parent. But the most frequent is brother against brother: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the first and most famous: Cain and Abel.

Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to God. For reasons not spelled out in the story, God found Abel's sacrifice worthy and Cain's lacking. This was the result:

Genesis 4:8:

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

This story is about the first murder in the Bible. Let's stop for a moment and see if we can make this feel a bit more real. I don't know about you, but right now I can't say the word murder without thinking of the nine-minute video of a white police officer murdering an unarmed black man. That's what it looks like to kill someone. To stand over someone and cause their life to fade away.

It's horrific and gruesome and unbelievable. This is what Cain did to Abel. To his brother! Some of you have brothers. Maybe sometimes you don't get along, but you don't murder them. Imagine the depth of anger and hatred and jealousy that must have been there to drive the very first son in the world to murder his only brother. It is shocking.

What Cain did here was the take away the humanity of his brother Abel. It's the same thing that Derek Chauvin did to George Floyd. Murder is the ultimate form of dehumanizing someone. But there are all sorts of ways that we dehumanize people long before it gets to murder.

This is what lies at the heart of divisiveness. The problem is not disagreement. We can disagree on how to build a shared life together but still move forward. I have plenty of disagreements with my wife, my colleagues, and my friends. They don't become divisions.

Division happens when we take away the humanity of someone else. That's how disagreement turns into division.

We take away someone's humanity when we think of them as lesser, when we look down upon them with contempt. One of the problems in our churches today is that many of us have categories of people who we think it's okay to look down upon. I think this way and you think that way. You don't just disagree with me. You think I'm lesser because of what I think.

Examine your heart. Isn't this true? It is for me. There are some opinions that I simply can't understand. It's easy to tell myself that I can look down upon those kinds of people because their thoughts don't even make sense. But that's taking away the humanity of my brother or sister.

What about you? Who do you think it's okay to look down upon?

The founders of our country anticipated this. A few years ago, only a few of you would have recognized a reference to the Federalist Papers, a group of documents written early on in our country's history. But the musical *Hamilton* has made us all more aware of them.

In Federalist No. 10, James Madison wrote about his fear of what he called "the power of faction". He described that as strong partisanship or group interest that "inflamed [men] with mutual animosity".²

It's safe to say that we've seen plenty of the power of faction in our country.

But after looking at the biblical story, we shouldn't be surprised by faction. As soon as there were two people in the world, there were two factions. As soon as there were two brothers, there was murder. Over and over again, we see divisiveness in the Bible.

Because that's what sin does. That's what the evil one does. We turn against each other in division, and because of that, our efforts to bless the world are hindered. That's our second big idea.

We were created with a shared purpose to bless the world. But our sin divides us and thwarts our purpose.

Instead of working together to bless the world, we argue with each other and forget about our responsibility to the world. We shouldn't be surprised by this, but we should be deeply grieved by it. If we are the kingdom of God and we're arguing about the color of our carpet while the world around us tears itself apart, we have failed in our responsibility.

One of Satan's greatest tools to make us ineffective for God's purposes is to get us arguing with each other. Look at Genesis. When the evil one pits us one against another, God's world literally falls apart. As Tony Dungy said, "Satan is laughing at us."³

This series should make all of us uncomfortable. It is about far more than politics. It is about how we see other people, what it means to recognize the humanity in other people. The book of Genesis is filled with stories of people who fail to do this.

But it doesn't end that way. At the end of the book, we see a ray of good news. Our sin may have divided us and thwarted our purpose, but God has a solution.

United with restored purpose

Of course, the solution is Christ. He is the one who died to redeem us. The whole story of the kingdom of God centers on his work in creating that kingdom. We are not united by our religious convictions. We are not united because we believe the same thing. We are united by a person—the second person of the Trinity. We are united by Christ, who was there at creation, saw us broken by sin, and will return to complete the work of redemption at the end of history.

We know that it is Christ who makes us one. But in the story of Genesis, we get a preview of that, and it's a powerful example of what is possible for us. Eventually, after all the early stories of Genesis, we are left with Jacob and his twelve sons. And just like all the other stories in Genesis, it begins with brothers turning against each other.

Genesis 37:23, and 28:

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.

Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

Joseph's brothers are against him. They meant to murder him, just like Cain murdered Abel. Instead, they sold him into slavery. They still ended up stealing his humanity, but in this way, they could profit by it. This is one more tragic case of divisiveness in Genesis.

The story of Joseph is a fascinating one. We're hoping to do an extended study on it sometime in the next year as a preaching series. But for now, we're going to jump ahead to the end. Joseph has obtained a high government position in Egypt which allows him to guide that country through a seven-year famine. His brothers come to him for assistance, but don't recognize him at first.

Genesis 45:4-7:

So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve

life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

I want us to notice that one man has drawn together a group of brothers. He has united them as one. But he doesn't only unite them. He also restores their purpose. He manages to bless the world. Joseph's efforts save Egypt and the surrounding area from a devastating famine.

We were created with a shared purpose to bless the world. Our sin divides us and thwarts our purpose. The third big idea is God will unite us and restore our purpose.

Do you see how God did that with Joseph? The story of the kingdom of God involves one man uniting brothers and sisters together and restoring them to their original purpose to bless the world. This is what Joseph does by the end of Genesis, and this is what Jesus will do. Joseph is like a "mini-Jesus"—he foreshadows Christ and gives us hope that God has a plan.

And so we hope. We hope for a Messiah who will restore our relationship with God, unite us together, and enable us to bless the world. This is the hope of the world.

In the political world of America, everyone claims to be a Messiah. That's what you have to do to be elected. You will solve all the problems of the world. No one talks about doing their best in the complexity of imperfect solutions to intractable problems. They say that they can fix things.

The truth is that none of these figures will save us. It's also true that none of these figures will destroy us. We are right to look for one man to unite us and restore us. But we are wrong to look for it in a president. Jesus Christ is the only one who unites us together.

This is why it's so important to talk about unity within the church. We are the only ones who can truly find unity in a divisive culture because we are unified by the same Messiah. Our Messiah can and does save us and fix the world. With that hope and knowledge, we can build a shared life together, and we can fulfill our original purpose of blessing the world.

Conclusion

The sad truth is that our church—and not just Peninsula Bible Church—but the Church at large in the Bay Area and the world is divided. Just like the tragic stories of brother against brother in the book of Genesis, we turn against each other and dehumanize our brother.

This is why we need to know the story of the kingdom of God. Our story. Three simple ideas here at the beginning:

- We were created with a shared purpose to bless the world.
- Our sin divides us and thwarts our purpose.
- God will unite us and restore our purpose.

This is the overall story. We will see this play out across the whole arc of Scripture. Next week we'll look at the Exodus where God rescues his people from Egypt and gives them their identity.

Our goal throughout this series is to be shaped by the story of the Kingdom of God. That is the story which gives us our identity. With our identity firmly rooted in the kingdom of God, we are prepared to work together as we build a shared life. This is what our God created us to do. As this series progresses, we'll see how he enables us to do that as well. That's good news because we need a lot of help.

Endnotes

1. Tony Dungy, Twitter post, May 2020, 3:25 pm, <https://twitter.com/TonyDungy/status/1266495968742125569>.
2. Jonathan Haidt and Tobias Rose-Stockwell, "The Dark Psychology of Social Networks," *The Atlantic*, (December 2019), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/social-media-democracy/600763/>.
- 3 Tony Dungy, Twitter post, May 2020, 3:25 pm.

