

September 7 & 8, 2024

Lost in Translation | *At the Heart*

Genesis 1:14-19

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This past January, to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, my wife Heather and I took a trip to Europe. We went to Prague, Nuremberg, Brussels and Paris. Our first stop was in Prague and the hotel we stayed in was on this quaint cobblestone street with small shops and offices. Our room had a window that overlooked the street, and it was just high enough to see partially through a window that was across the street. It looked like an office, but I was curious what kind of office it was. The problem was that our hotel window was not lined up so we could only see partially into what we thought was an office.

However, while I was curious, I didn't think anymore about it. That was until our last evening in Prague. We came home from some sightseeing and dinner and the light was on in what I thought was an office and there were shadows moving in the room and all of a sudden it didn't seem like an office. It looked like there was a circle of people, moving in a circle; maybe dancing, maybe yoga, maybe none of those things. But something was happening. There also seemed to be a leader that was directing but I could see partially and to this day I think I had a glimpse of what was going on but there was a lot that I didn't and couldn't know. What I needed was a glimpse from several angles into that room, through multiple windows to really get a good sense of what was going on. Or I needed someone to tell me what was going on.

For us, in our western Christian culture, that is how we know our bibles and the scripture texts and stories. It is like looking through a window and seeing only part of the room. The reason? Our holy scriptures are an eastern, pre-modern collection of stories and events, that were written by very different people in multiple languages, dialects and traditions. We are immigrants to the language, to the culture and the mindset of our biblical writers.

Now there is nothing wrong with being immigrants to the story. God welcomes us all. We are all grafted into the vine of God's story. However, a problem occurs when we forget that we are immigrants and mistakenly read these ancient texts as if they were written and originally revealed not to an eastern pre-modern culture but to a modern western culture. And, yes of course we believe that God's word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is revealed to humanity in every culture and in every era. But just like looking through a window and seeing only part of the story, if we ignore the other windows, the other angles, or those voices of people who have been in the room, we lose some deep rich and incredibly impacting parts of our story and God's story if we ignore. Things can get lost in translation.

Another very important part of our biblical journey is to also recognize that there are just some stories that we have heard over and over again and because of the repetition we can simply miss their richness, because, well, we already know those stories. Right? It's called the lullaby effect. We hear these stories over and over and over again so we must know everything there is to know. Or to put it into a pre-modern biblical context, we must have experience everything there is to experience.

And it is right there where we will stop and sit for a bit. Here is one of the differences between our western modern culture and the eastern pre-modern culture. In our western modern reality, we primarily engage our scripture by absorbing knowledge. We focus on the nature of God, who is God, and then we come up with doctrines and dogmas to support what we think.

Our pre-modern eastern biblical folk's primary engages though experience. Their focus is on the nature of the relationship with God. How does God relate to and with us? That is why a group of Jewish rabbis can sit and discuss, even argue through the meaning of scripture and then go have coffee and everyone has learned something, remaining friends. While we westerners debate, shout down and proof text and then go off and start our own churches with people who think just like us.

A second difference that will get us right into our scripture text for today, is the use of numbers. In our western mind we see a numbers as quantitative. A number is a hard stop. If you say 3 then the quantity is 3. If you say 7, then the quantity is 7. For our premodern eastern biblical folks numbers way more than quantitative. Numbers are symbolic and used as signs that point to something else. This phrase that we use, "If I told you once, I've told you 100 times..." illustrates the difference. You didn't really say it exactly 100 times, maybe more or maybe less, but the number in that phrase is not quantitative. It points to something else, like exasperation, frustration or disappointment. And we all get it. No one needs to explain that to us. Well... as we look into the windows of our bible, especially with numbers we will need to explain some things.

And a third difference, that will also bring us deeper into our well know scripture text, is the use of a very particular writing style that is used in multiple places in our scripture, but our English just simply leaves us in the dark. This writing style is called Chiasm and the writer is hiding, in plain sight, the center, the gem, the treasure, the point.

Here are a couple of examples:

Genesis 1:27

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image
of God he created them; male and female he
created them.

John 1

In the beginning was the word
the word was with God,
and God was the word

Do you see the center? Pretty easy with those texts. But now let us see how all three of these views through the window: how we experience God, numbers as signs and the Chiasm writing style, gets us to the point or the center, help us realize the deeper richness of our well known story for today.

Genesis 1:1-3

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

And then the writer continues this poem that we call the creation story. Well, there are two creation stories, one in Genesis 1 and the other in Genesis 2, but for now we will unpack Genesis 1. And it is a poem whose purpose is to explain God's relationship with the world. Genesis 1 is not a scientific lab report. And here is where some of our modern westerners get caught up in numbers. Specifically, the number 7. Did God really create the world in 7 days? Again, the quantitative part is not the point, and with the help of chiasmic writing – a chiasm- the number 7 is a sign and is pointing to something way bigger than a science lab report. But what is it?

There is a middle, there is a center to the number 7, and that center is the number 4. So, let's ask more questions. What is going on the 4th day of creation.

Genesis 1:14-19

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights-- the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night-- and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

So, what is going on the 4th, what is the center? Well, on day 4 God creates time. Sun and moon. God creates time, creates days. God creates a mechanism for us to know days, nights, and seasons. And why would God do that? Why do we need to know time? Why do we need to know the difference between night and day? God is going to

give us some very clear direction why. God is going to tell God's people over and over again that God desires, wants, I would say even commands us, to rest. And if we don't know what time it is or what day it is, we will never know when we should rest.

At the center, at the heart of the creation story is sabbath. God even takes a sabbath – we will talk about that in a couple of weeks. God knows that what has been created will continue to create, will continue to do... and God desires God's creation to rest. God already knows what our modern scientific studies reveal to us.

Every study I have found from work life balance, sports performance, psychological, emotional and just general health all reveal that people who rest are more satisfied with their lives and experience fewer symptoms of psychological strain.

Certainly, we have been created with the urge to create but sabbath is a time to reflect, time to see the bigger picture that can elude us in our day to day.

Sabbath is time to quiet all the noise around us. I have a coach, and his advice to me every single time is the questions I ask of all of us today.

- Have you taken time for rest? Not sleeping but time to find clarity and renewed focus and purpose.
- Have you found time to sit and be grateful even when you don't feel very grateful?
- Have you taken time to reflect on how and where God is guiding you?
- How is your relationship with your wife, your kids, your family and friends? Have you made time?

And then:

- Do you know that you are worth more than what you do or what you produce?
- Do you know that the world's expectations are not God's expectations?
- Do you know that at the very center, at the very heart of all creation is rest?
- Do you trust the story or has all of that been lost in translation?

Matthew 11:28 – 30

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."