

“Full Circle”
 Genesis 3:8-13
 John 20:11-18
 June 6, 2021
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If something has “come full circle”, we mean that it is now, as it used to be.

Events have run their course, and are now similar to how they began.

For example:

I used to work as a bus boy and now I own a restaurant. OR...

The family sold the farm, but now a great grandson bought it and lives there.

Things have come “full circle”.

The expression goes back to Shakespeare and King Lear.

At the end of King Lear, pretty much everyone dies.

But before the character Edmund dies, he repents of his crimes.

And as he does he says “things have come full circle”.

The play is - - shall we say - - pessimistic - - about life.

Justice may or may not triumph, but it costs us dearly, and then we die.

Suffering, for King Lear, just is a part of it.

It is different for people of faith.

But the difference - - for people of faith is NOT - - with the idea of the circle.

We see life going in circles too - - just differently.

Nor do we quibble with the idea that life is full of suffering.

After all the center piece of our faith is Jesus - - suffering.

The difference is that the suffering - - ultimately - - leads to something better.

Suffering - - for people of faith - - leads somewhere.

Suffering - - shows us that life has meaning.

Suffering - - though it is a big part of life - - is not the END of life for people of faith.

For us - - the end - - and the beginning - - of the circle - - are a garden.

The Bible is designed to be a circle.

The Bible begins in a garden - - called Eden - - where everything is ideal.

Then a lot of suffering happens to Israel, and Jesus and his followers.

And THEN the Bible ENDS - - in the book of revelation - - in a garden.

AND - - the tree of LIFE - - is in BOTH gardens!

In the middle of all that - - just after Jesus dies - - at his TOMB - - he is mistaken for a gardener - - by Mary. / Jesus the gardener. / The resurrected Jesus - - alive.

So - - things come full circle in BOTH King Lear and in the Bible.

But in the Bible the place to which everything returns - - is a place of hope.

Today the worship service is designed to reflect that circle.

It was easy to design things that way.

We just followed the outline of the church year.

The church year is ALSO designed to go in a circle.

Our first hymn today was a Christmas hymn.

We will sing our Easter hymn after the sermon and conclude with Pentecost.

Part of what we acknowledge by doing this is that it has been more than a year since we met in person. / This is our first time in person in this sanctuary in more than a year because of the restrictions and safety concerns around the Covid virus. / But I don't have to tell you all that! / So let's hear it for being in person again!

We missed not only Easter - - but we missed a whole cycle of the year. / Which maybe -
- can make us a little more attentive to the circle today.

In order to try to experience the connections between the seasons and particularly between Christmas and Easter - - I will share an extended series of reflections by the poet Ann Weems. / Listen for the connections between Christmas and Easter - - between Bethlehem and Jerusalem - - between the child and the adult Jesus...

“Just when we were beginning to enjoy the play...

the stagehands came out, and dismantled the manger.

From its wood they built a cross. / What kind of a drama is this anyway!?

The happy ending wasn't an ending after all - - just ACT 1!

Before the play is over most of the audience has left but the director goes on...

...content with the remnant - - to whom is promised - - a smashing finale.

Shall we go home early too - - before we get stuck in traffic?

We can always read what the critics have to say later, and if it's really good we can be assured - - that it will be repeated.” //

“When Lent comes you have to put away the tinsel.

You have to take down your Christmas tree and stand out in the open - - vulnerable.

You either are or you aren't

You either believe or you don't.

You either will or you won't.

O Lord - - how we love that stable and the star!

When Lent comes the angel's voices begin their - - lamenting.

We find ourselves in a courtyard where we must answer...

...whether we know him or not.” //

“If there is no cross in the manger - - then there is no Christmas.

If the baby doesn't become an adult - - then there is no Bethlehem star.

If there is no commitment in us - - there are no Wise Men searching.

If we offer no cup of water - - there is no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh.

If there is no praising God's name - - then there are no angels singing.

If there is no spirit of alleluia - - then - - there are no shepherds watching.

If there is no standing up, no speaking out, no risk - - then there is no Herod...

...no flight into Egypt.

If there is no room in our inn then saying "Merry Christmas" - - mocks Jesus.

And then - - the Holy family is just a card in the mail...

To call Christ the "Prince of Peace" - - we need reconciliation.

Can Goodwill - - really be packed away in a box for another year.

If there is no forgiveness at all in us - - then what's the cause for celebration?

Go to the cross at Golgotha - - and discover Christmas.

Because... If Christmas is not NOW - - and if Christ is not BORN and

RESURRECTED into every present moment of our lives...

Then - - what - - is all the noise - - about?" //

As I think about Ann Weems words - - I think the noise is - - about - - this circle.

This HOPEFULL circle - - that CONNECTS - - Christmas and Easter - - with LIFE.

And in case you were wondering about Pentecost...

I think that IS what Pentecost DOES.

Pentecost is the forgotten cousin of Christmas and Easter.

We just celebrated it by wearing red.

But we don't usually have a family dinner or travel on Pentecost.

We don't send Pentecost greetings.

But Pentecost is the CULMINATION of the story of God and Jesus - - in our lives.

We know that after Jesus died his followers were traumatized.

He had been unjustly accused and the trial was a sham.

His followers went into hiding at first.

But on Pentecost - - they started to tell the world.

On Pentecost they connected - - Jesus life - - with the eternal life of God.

And the Holy Spirit - - IS - - Jesus presence - - still among us now.

So to answer the question: HOW does the story of the Bible come full circle?

And to answer the question: HOW do we connect God's creative act, and Jesus BIRTH and his DEATH and resurrection - - the answers are... The Holy Spirit - - the Pentecost Spirit.

Letting the Holy Spirit live in us means - -

- - making that noise - - that Ann Weems wrote about.

Connecting the shepherds and the angels with our OWN praising.

Connecting the actions of Joseph to stand up to Herod - - with our own standing up.

Connecting the "Prince of Peace" with our attempts at reconciliation.

How will you do that?

How will I do that?

I can't answer that for you right now.

I can only hope to encourage you - - to try to do it yourself.

Think of all we have been through!

All the sacrifices and sadness of the past year.

All of that was NOT - - for nothing.

Coming full circle - - for people of faith - - is about change.

That is a fundamental difference - - between faith and despair.

When people of faith come full circle - - we change.

When people of faith come full circle - - we hope.

Think of all you have been through in your life.

And now - - here we are.

We can be more ready for whatever is next - - as an act of faith.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve are in this amazing garden.

But they are afraid. / They are afraid of God.

And they feel guilty.

THAT is NOT the end of the story - - and it is NOT the beginning.

The beginning is God saying how "GOOD" everything is.

In the New Testament, Mary weeps at the tomb of Jesus.

She is confused because of his death.

She is in grief. / But her grief is not the end of the story.

The tree of life - - in the last chapter of the Bible - - is in the middle of all kinds of fruit.

And the leaves - - are healing leaves.

It says they are for the healing of the nations.

Our story as people of faith begins and ends with LIFE.

And it is a story of healing and of hope.

So - as we move forward to whatever is next - may that hope come full circle in your life.

Amen