Sunday December 1, 2024
Advent Series: The King
@ FGBC
30 minutes

Jesus' True Story

- Have you ever had the chance to wander through a cemetery?
    - That is really not something that most people find to be an enjoyable way to spend some free time that they may have.
        - A few years ago I was reading a book, and in it was a suggestion to go to a cemetery to wander and ponder who God is.
            - I did, and I felt a little bit weird, especially since the only time I had available to get it done was after dark, so here I am in my black coat wandering aimlessly through a cemetery.
            - But this experience awakened an interest in cemetery wandering…I don't want you to hear this as Brad is a really weird person who likes cemeteries way too much.
                - As true as my weirdness is, it isn't tied to cemeteries.
        - Wandering through cemeteries has awakened a sense of wonder in me.
            - If you go to the Memorial Park Cemetery, there are some people laid to rest over a hundred years ago…there are people who have passed away recently…many of them without stone markers and many without.
                - Each of those people has a story attached to their lives.
                    - That story may not always be a good story, but it is the story of who they are and how they lived their life.
                    - So as I find myself wandering through the cemetery (and yes, sometimes it is as part of my job working at a funeral home) I can't help but wonder about who people are and what their story is.

- We are going to begin a series today, and then continue that series over the next number of months looking at the Gospel of Luke.

READ Luke 1:1-4

- The gospel of Luke is unique compared to the other 4 gospels and how they begin.
    - Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus
    - Mark starts with a couple words about John the Baptist and then jumps straight to Jesus…there's no room for the Christmas story in the gospel of Mark.
    - John gets philosophical…"in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God."
    - Luke wants to get at Jesus quickly and he even, like Matthew includes a genealogy, but he begins talking about the importance of the stories that follow…with these first few verses, Luke is setting us up with knowledge of where we are going to go throughout the gospel.
        - One theologian writes that with his first few words "Luke is claiming a place for Christianity on the stage of world history."
            - In other words, Luke is leveraging this true story to allow Jesus' followers a seat at the big kids table

- Luke wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus.
    - Luke didn't run in the same circles as the other gospel writers
        - Matthew and John were two of Jesus disciples, so they had an occasional eye witness account of Jesus.
        - Mark joined Paul on one of his missionary journeys.
        - Luke was a contemporary of Paul, but Luke was a doctor…Luke's job wasn't overt ministry the way others were.
    - Yet Luke was very careful about proclaiming the truth of Jesus well, even if he was taking second and third hand sources.
        - In many ways, Luke was like a reporter trying to figure out the true story.
            - The other day, I was sitting in my office at about 11 at night and looked out the window and saw a huge brigade of snow clearing equipment…some sort of large plow type thing followed by 8 or 9 trucks, not doing anything.
                - I could, probably incorrectly, deduce that there was a huge dump of snow on the east end of PG, and that is

where the equipment was heading…to clean up that huge amount of snow.
        - Or, I could have done some digging, and investigated where this brigade of equipment was headed.
            - I didn't, so I have no definitive answer of where this equipment was heading, but if I am going to share something that I say is true, I should probably make sure it is true, instead of spreading false information.
- Luke was never one to accept things at face value…he investigated…he did his homework.
    - He read those peer reviewed journal articles to make sure the things about Jesus were true and not merely fabricated stories.
    - Luke didn't want to be a spreader of false information.
    - Once Luke had discovered the facts, listened to the eyewitness accounts, and came to the realization that it was true, he decided he needed to do something about it.
        - He wasn't just going to sit on this information and store it away in his private information bank that is his mind but he wanted to share it.
            - And Luke's goal wasn't just to share the information with anyone and everyone…he was going to share it with a guy named Theophilus….helping Theophilus know the truth of Jesus was Luke's goal…we have the luxury of reading someone else's mail
                - We don't know much about Theophilus, but there are a few approximations that we can make based on the information that we are given:
                    - 1) Theophilus was a Gentile, which we can figure out by the fact that Theophilus is most definitely not a Jewish name, but a Greek name
                    - 2) There is a good chance that Theophilus had some sort of official government background, which we can guess based on Luke's greeting to Theophilus, "Most Excellent/Most Honorable Theophilus"

    - It could be that Luke just wanted to say some nice things about Theophilus, calling him most excellent, more likely, it could have been that it was a cultural requirement to call him by that title because he held a role of some prestige in Roman culture
- 3) Theophilus was someone who had some sort of faith that he was exploring.
    - He may have begun to follow Jesus earlier in his life, or he may have been at the very beginning stages of faith…we don't know
        - The reality is, that is where each of find ourselves…somewhere between the bookends of birth and death.
        - We have a faith that is mature, vibrant, and has been a part of our lives for decades or we have a faith that is brand new as we have just recently met Jesus and begun to explore what it means to follow Jesus…or we may be somewhere in between…or maybe even somewhere outside of those boundaries
        - Theophilus had had an encounter with Jesus, and had at least one person in his life who had taught him about Jesus.

        - Luke had done his digging and research and wanted to give Theophilus the information as well so that Theophilus could make an informed decision.

- Luke wants Theophilus to know that this story about Jesus isn't just fiction and it isn't just a feel good story, but it is a story of truth…a story of a man who changed the world and is continuing to change the world…it is a story that is true, verified by numerous eyewitness accounts, including people who did not fall into the category of "Jesus' follower" like Jewish historian Josephus who writes that Jesus indeed existed and did what everyone saw him do.
    - Luke shares what he shares so that Theophilus may know.
        - This is similar to what John writes about 20 years later in his letter which we know as 1 John… "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life."
            - You can hear and listen and study and research all you want, but at the end of the day, you have to make a decision about what you are going to do with this information, just as Theophilus did.
                - In reality, we don't know what happened to Theophilus, and whether or not he began or continued to live his life in complete surrender to Jesus or whether he walked away.
                - We do know however, that Luke valued Theophilus enough to share the truth of Jesus with him.

- As we journey through the Gospel of Luke in the months ahead, we are going to explore this true story of King Jesus.
    - We are going to explore who this man is that changed the world…who Jesus is, the one who is God and man at the same time…the one who brings new life to those who are living in darkness and lifelessness.
        - Even though we may know where the story goes and how the story ends, we are still going to be able to explore how Jesus helps us to recover abundant life when humanity often draws us towards a temporal life away from Christ.

- And then, after this prelude, Luke tells the story.
    - This is the story that many of us know about Jesus…

        - The story of Jesus performing miracles…
        - The story of Jesus inviting broken people into a renewed life…
        - The story of people finding out who Jesus is as they hear him teach…
        - The story of many unpackings of the Kingdom of God as Jesus and the disciples wandered…
        - The story of the parables and lessons that Jesus told so that people may know the fullness of God…
        - The story of Jesus betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion…
        - The story of life as the King raises from the grave conquering sin and death.

- Now we are going to jump to the end of Luke, after all of the action has transpired and the stories have been told.

READ Luke 24:18-27

- At this point, the reminiscing begins…there are two of Jesus' disciples who are chatting about the good old days.
    - They are trying to fit everything that they have experienced and seen and witnessed into a single conversation.
    - They are talking because what they have experienced and heard and known meant something…it wasn't merely a fairy tail…there was some sort of truth.
        - Luke 24:32 – *"Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the scriptures to us."*
        - I think that is what the disciples were feeling as they were talking to each other…there was something that was stirring inside them that they needed to get on the table.
            - There was some truth that they needed to unpack.
    - One of the disciples is another person who we know very little about: Cleopas.
        - According to Luke's gospel (Luke 24:13), Cleopas is one of the two disciples who are making their way down the road to Emmaus…this doesn't mean that Cleopas was one of the 12, but he knew Jesus at least relatively well in order to be called a disciple.
    - Jesus approaches the two disciples and has some fun with them…
        - Cleopas retorts, "You must be the only one who has been living in a cave the last few days…it's been crazy around here."

- Jesus response is along the lines of, “I have no clue what you’re talking about.”
    - Then the two disciples jump in and start describing what has happened.
        - Jesus’ “cluelessness” seems very reminiscent of a conversation that he had had with his disciples earlier.

READ Luke 9:18-20

- Jesus wants to hear what people have picked up on without getting in their way…he wants them to speak honestly and openly.
    - I have been in pastoral ministry for most of my adult life…I have been in some great conversations with people I have met that are raw and honest and people simply say what they want to say…and then the question comes up, “So what do you do?”
    - “I’m a pastor.”
    - Then the tenor of the conversation changes…the honesty and openness disappears as people feel they need to reign in their feelings and their language and pretend that they are something that they aren’t.
    - Jesus wants Cleopas and disciple number 2 to simply share the truth they have experienced.

- After these two disciples had shared their experience of truth, Jesus shared…at this point they still don’t know it’s Jesus.
    - I kind of imagine this as a Superman/Clark Kent situation…Superman without the glasses, Clark Kent with the glasses and nobody can differentiate between the disguise.
        - I can only imagine Jesus disguise is similar…he went to the dollar store in Jerusalem and picked up one of those goofy glasses and nose “disguises” and that is why the disciples can’t recognize him.

            - At least that's what I would like to think, but in actually God was doing something here in causing these disciples' blindness
        - Jesus went through the Pentateuch…the writings of Moses, the books of the prophets, and all of the scriptures and shares the truth with these two disciples…and they still didn't know it was Jesus.
            - They simply figured that it was a guy who knew stuff even though they figured that he had been living in a cave over the last while.
            - Just as Luke didn't want to miss out on an opportunity for someone (Theophilus) to hear the truth, Jesus didn't want someone (disciples, who likely knew a fair amount) to miss out on an opportunity to hear the truth.

- Each of us finds ourselves as people who have some sort of knowledge of Jesus…no knowledge, some knowledge, all the knowledge.
    - Count it a privilege when someone shares the truth of Jesus with you, just as Luke did or just as Jesus himself did
    - At the same time, take the opportunities you are given to share the true story of Jesus with those around you…this could be someone who knows Jesus well or doesn't know Jesus at all.
- Take time to pursue the truth yourself…don't always rely on others to do the heavy lifting.
    - We wont always have someone like Luke to investigate and unpack the truth.
- Treasure the opportunities to sit around and talk about what God is doing around you.
    - Like how the two disciples spent time and unpacked all that happened, take time with someone you trust to unpack and discern what God is doing and where God is leading you.
    - Let the true story of Jesus ever be on your lips…this story is hope…living hope to each one of us.