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Zombie: The Day of the Living Dead

Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-25; 3: 1-7

Last Monday, Zombies invaded New York City. They were protesting corporate greed in this country. Zombies—as I’m sure we ALL know—are the “living dead.” And right now, they are all the craze. As a Washingtonian you’ll be proud to know that last July, Seattle hosted the largest gathering of zombies ever. 4,522 of them lurched into Fremont. ZAICO, Zombie Apocalyptic Insurance Company, offers policies to protect you and your family from “Class 3 zombie outbreak losses.” In 2000, ten zombie movies were produced. In 2010, 67 zombie movies were produced. In 2009, a rewrite of Jane Austen’s novel called, “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies” hit number 3 on the New York Times bestseller list.

So how do you spot a zombie. One web site has some helpful information: They are “uncommunicative, unable to form a sentence, may groan, have poor bodily hygiene, bad breath, frequent flatulence and an insatiable urge to grab you.” For some of you wives, a light bulb is going on inside your head. “I’m married to a zombie!”

With this cultural obsession it seemed a perfect opportunity to preach a sermon series called, “Zombie.” But what in the world does that have to do with anything in scripture? Turn with me to Genesis 2:4. I am going to read part of the story of the Garden of Eden. And if you are really sharp, you’ll find the zombies. Ready? (Genesis 2: 4-9; 15-17)

So...did you see it? Where do zombies show up in this story? V. 17: “...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” We know the end of the story, don’t we? Adam and Eve DID eat the forbidden fruit. So... did they die? Well...no. And yes. They were still breathing...but everything started to deteriorate in that moment. Their bodies, their relationship with God, their relationship with each other, their relationship with the world and with their work. In that moment...they became the living dead. Zombies.

Gig Harbor is full of zombies. Not like the ones on videos. They aren’t that easy to recognize. On the outside, they look alive. They might even look pretty good. But something entered the world that day in the garden, went viral and is gnawing away at the most important parts of every human life on earth.

So...what is this enemy called? "Sin." For most of our culture, "sin" is a churchy word that means nothing. And even inside of the church, we think more of "sinS"...that list of fun but naughty things that we aren't supposed to do because God said so and because God is a big killjoy. Christians are accused of being narrow and judgmental because we are so obsessed with all of this "sin" stuff. "Just get off my back. Let me live my life the way I want to. Stop being so critical." Isn't that the cry of the world?

But what if sin were more than a list of naughty things we ought not do? What if sin is a deadly disease? What if we changed the word from "sin" to another word that we know well and take seriously: "cancer. Soul cancer." There are a lot of you in this room who have had a brush with cancer. When you got that awful news...when the mammogram came back or the PSA test came back or the biopsy came back and someone said, "You've got cancer"... did you think that was a big deal? Did you get a little obsessed with it? Searching the web, doing research, finding the best doctor, the best treatment and then attacking that disease because you knew that it was a deadly enemy? Did any of your friends say, "Lighten up! You're taking this cancer thing way too seriously! You're freaking out over nothing. It's no big deal?" Probably not.

When it comes to "sin," however, our friends say, "Lighten up. It's no big deal." This is a mistake. Sin is deadly. More deadly than the big "C." If we don't face it...if we don't get help, do you know what the mortality rate is? 100%. So, beloved, I want us to face sin. Look it square in the eye. Because only when we know that it is there...and understand how destructive it is can we take the Good News cure that God has offered.

So if you want to understand what is wrong with the human race, we need to go back to the beginning. That's what Genesis is about. The beginning of all things. In chapter 2, we read how sin came into the world in a garden called Eden. And when we read this story we might say, "Wow...what a bummer that Adam and Eve did that. Disobeyed God, got kicked out of paradise...sucks to be them."

Problem is that's not the end of the story. This isn't just about Adam and Eve, the first human beings. Who else is it about? Us! The moment Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and eat of that forbidden fruit...the moment they introduced disobedience into creation ...they were infected. Or maybe I should say "defected." Sin is a genetic defect! It is passed down through the blood from one generation to the next. Every single human being is "defected." Every one of us. Paul puts it this way in I Corinthians 15: For ... in Adam ALL die....." In Romans he says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Later on he adds, "And the wages of sin is death." That is a bad verdict!

We are the descendants of Adam and Eve. The Bible says so. But interestingly, now, so does science. Most scientists, according to John Lennox, agree that we are descended from a single human pair and that we carry their original genetic

material within us. Science and Paul agree on this...which means...every one of us is "defected" with sin...we all have Soul Cancer...we all fall short God's glory...and we all will die because of it. So, as it turns out, it not only sucks to be them...what? Sucks to be us, too!

So...what happened? How did we get into this mess? How did we become zombies...the living dead? All because of one lousy apple? The popular impression is that the story of Genesis portrays God as a grouchy, demanding killjoy who picks on helpless human beings. Is that right? Let's do a little detective work.

In Genesis 1, how did God create? By his word. He spoke it...and it happened. But now in Genesis 2 comes the most tender moment in the creation story. God leans down and scoops up some dirt and plays with it. How many loved to play in the dirt when you were a kid? When God plays in the dirt, watch out! He shaped a man out of the stuff that already existed, leaned over and breathed life into him. God animated man with his own Holy Spirit. Wow. Humankind was God's crowning creative achievement!

But God is not done. He makes him a home. He plants a garden and makes trees grow in that garden. And what do we learn about those trees in 9? They were "pleasing to the eye and good for food." It isn't enough that God sustain the man. God makes Adam with the ability to enjoy beauty...and then he gives him a BEAUTIFUL garden that is pleasing to his eye. And he gives him food that tastes good. If any human beings ought to appreciate the beauty of God's creation, it is we who live in Gig Harbor...and God gave this to us to delight in! Like a parent watching a kid open Christmas presents!

God places man in this beautiful, luscious garden, and then speaks again in verse 16. And the moment we read the first words we say, "Oh, oh...here it comes... the grouchy God stuff." "And the Lord God commanded the man..." There God goes. Bossing us around. Commanding us to do stuff. So...what is this first burdensome command that God gives? Watch it now: "And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden..." All those beautiful trees I gave to you? And all that luscious fruit...that looks so good and tastes good...those juicy peaches and beautiful papayas and sweet cherries and crisp apples...YES apples...I COMMAND you to eat them. All of them. Eat up. Enjoy! I COMMAND you to take delight in this world that I have created."

What an ogre God is! How awful and demanding! To boss us around like that...to order us to ...what...to enjoy life? To eat and drink and look and smell and taste and find pleasure in life. Horrible! Monstrous.

Wait a second...this doesn't seem right, does it? Isn't the story of Eden about what they WEREN'T supposed to do? About what was forbidden? But notice where the story starts. It begins with a gracious, generous God who is having fun creating humanity and then having fun preparing for them a glorious garden that is beautiful

and tasty and aromatic and delightful in every way. And God says, "Take. Eat. Enjoy! I give it all to you! For your pleasure."

God creates us, gives us a beautiful place to live...and then floods us with permission. Permission to live and eat and marvel and smell ...permission to soak up this good world that he has created for us. It is only then that God gives one prohibition. "...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." There was one tree in the middle of the garden. The Tree of Knowledge. It was the ONLY thing that was forbidden Adam. He was warned, "If you eat of THAT tree, on that day you will die. But it's just that one. All the REST of it is for you to enjoy! Bon Appétit." That's not the way we remember the story, is it? We only remember the prohibition. We only remember the "no." We forget that before God ever said, "No," he first said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

That's where the story starts. And that's where I want to start in this series. Many would say that you can sum up Christianity with one word: NO! That's certainly the world's view of us. A big list of all the things we are forbidden to do. A joy-stealing, life-sucking list of prohibitions. But in fact, some Christian folk see themselves in this way, too. Their Christianity is about keeping the rules. About being good. About behaving in a way that will make God happy and earn brownie points and get them to heaven.

So...both inside and outside of the faith, Christianity is viewed as the religion of "No." But what does our story tell us? The foundational story of the creation of humanity is not first of all about No. It is not even MOSTLY about no. It is about Yes! God's big YES. His gracious creation, his delight in us, his particular attention to us and his permission to us to take delight in and enjoy the gift of life.

Of course, we know the rest of the story. The minute God says, "This one little thing is forbidden. Everything else is permitted...but there is one No..." ...where do they turn? To the No! With disastrous results as we will see.

But let's start here: How do we live in God's Yes? After all, we have the defective sin gene in our blood? Isn't it too late for us? We've been kicked out of the garden, right? We've missed our shot at real life, thanks to our screw-up great, great, great to an order of 1000, grandparents... haven't we? Didn't Adam and Eve blow it for us? Well...yes. But the good news is, we have a second Adam. That's what Paul calls him. Our second Adam came and lived in perfect obedience and purified our blood stream. Removed our defective gene. Who is this new Adam? Jesus, of course.

Do you remember what Jesus said he wanted to give to his followers? "I came that you might have life...and have it abundantly." Remember that promise? Doesn't that sound good? "I want to give you another shot at the garden. I want you to taste of the goodness of God's intention for you."

So how do we do it? Work harder? Be better? Follow all of Jesus' rules? How do we live in God's Yes? Paul says something very interesting in II Corinthians 1:20: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." Just listen to that. All of the promises God has made to us are YES in Jesus.

Beth Burgess was part of our group that went down to the EPC presbytery meeting this week. She was telling me one of the Burgess family traditions called "Just Say Yes Day." On the first day of summer vacation, whatever her kids ask for, the answer is "Yes." There is a rule. They can't treat her like a slave. But if they want to play video games for two hours, the answer is Yes. If they want to go to Kelly's, the answer is Yes. If they want to go to a movie or have breakfast for dinner, the answer is Yes. Her kids can't wait for that day and she just enjoys saying "Yes" to the children she loves.

What would happen to our life...to our witness to others...if we lived life as if every day was "Just Say Yes Day." Not making God into our slave. Not bossing Him around with a giant wish list. But living in the pleasure of God's Yes. What if we assumed that God is actually tickled with us? Actually enjoys hanging out with us. Is excited to show off the paradise he has created for us. Really wants us to experience all of His promises. Can I live a life that has purpose? Can my marriage really thrive and not just survive? Can I really be satisfied with the way I look? Can I really be delivered from guilt over my past? Can my work really have meaning and purpose? What is God's answer? Yes!

Christian zombies live their life and witness as if God is one big fat No! They are gloomy, hopeless, pessimistic, bleak. They assume God is out to steal their joy; that his limitations are meant to make us miserable. They seldom experience the abundant life Jesus promised because they never really believe that in Jesus Christ, all the promises of God are Yes!

I'll be honest with you; there is a part of me that lives that way sometimes, too. I told you that anxiety is one of my spiritual gifts! When I get anxious or stressed out, I can mope around like Eeyore. Who wants to hang out with Eeyore? What kind of good news can Eeyore possibly have to share?

Here is the good news. Yes, we have the sin issue to be dealt with. But that's neither the start of it nor the end of it. Jesus wants to get the sin issue out of the way so that we can live in God's Yes, Yes, Yes! In this Year of Good News, what is the good news out of this story that you would share with others...and maybe even with yourself? Here it is: God's word to us is YES! It is positive. It is permissive. It is extravagant. And it is good. What's God's word to us in Jesus? YES!

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. God said that, on the day they ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. What happened? Was God lying? If not, how did they "die?"
 2. Why does the story of the Fall matter in this Year of Good News? What are the implications of it for your life?