

The Gospel According to You and Your Neighbor

John 21:17-25

Pastor Peter Hiett

November 5 and 6, 2011

Opening Prayer

Sermon

Movie Clips

The Little Mermaid – end of movie after Ariel's wedding to the prince. On the boat Ariel is saying good-bye to her father, King Neptune.

Ariel:

I love you daddy.

King Neptune forms a rainbow over the sea.

Cinderella – end of the movie when the Prince's designee goes to find the owner of the glass slipper and is at Cinderella's "home." The glass slipper drops and breaks.

Cinderella:

But perhaps if it would help.

Prince's designee:

Oh no. Nothing can help now. Nothing

Cinderella:

But you see I have the other slipper.

Slipper is placed on Cinderella's foot and it fits. Church bells are ringing in the next scene and Cinderella and the Prince descend the stairs of the church. They ride off in the carriage. Last page of the book has phrase, "And they lived happily ever after."

Snow White – the end of the movie when Snow White is thought to be dead and the Prince comes to her side and bends down to kiss her. She awakes after his kiss. Snow White and the Prince kiss. The Prince carries Snow White to his white horse and he leads them both into the sunset. The castle and kingdom is lit up in the sky. Last page of the book has phrase, "...and they lived happily ever after."

That's the way a story should end and today we get to the end of the Gospel, according to John. "Gospel" means good news.

That's the way a story should end...

- A covenant rainbow
- Deliverance from the deep
- A new body in a new world
- No more poverty, suffering and servitude
at the hands of a wicked stepmother
- The coming of the Prince
- A curse broken by love's first kiss

- A sleeper rising from the dead
- All creation rejoicing at the sight (set loose from bondage and decay)...
mermaids, mice and forest animals
- A city descending from Heaven
- A “happily ever after”
- The end...a good end

That’s the way a story should end, don’t you think?

When I was the Youth Pastor in northern California, a young woman started attending our college group, named Susie.



She was very attractive. She’d done some modeling...right clothes, hair, at least for 1986. She was at the point, when a little girl’s dreams start coming true...

handsome prince

fairy tale castle

happily ever after.

But she’d been diagnosed with an auto-immune disease that was destroying her central nervous system. Her biological mother was already committed to a nursing home somewhere in the Mid-West with the same thing. Susie lived with her father and stepmother, who didn’t seem to want her around. Soon Susie began to show up to group with a walker. Not long after that her father put her in a nursing home. The government would pay for the nursing home and he would hardly ever have to visit.

And so, Susie, at the age of 19 or 20 found herself confined to a bed, in a shared room at a nursing home...surrounded by senile and incontinent elderly patients. But Susie was not senile. Her mind was sharp as a tack. And, her heart was filled with hope...her body just wouldn’t cooperate. Her body began to contort and grow stiff. It became a prison of tortured flesh.

I remember one visit she cried out, “I was made for love and I want a lover, but I can’t move my legs.” Susie just ached for the touch of some young prince. And yet, she never really complained...not really.

After we moved to Colorado, Susan and I would go back to California to do weddings for other Youth Group kids and we'd usually go see Susie.

If I asked Susie how she was doing, she'd say, "Hey Peter, don't you know what happened on a certain date?"

And at first I would say, "No."

And then she'd say, "That was the day you baptized me." It was. I'd gotten the privilege to baptize her in her wheelchair in front of the congregation.

Baptism is the sign of the covenant of Grace...like the rainbow. If I asked Susie if she was afraid, she'd say, "No. what's to be afraid of?" She was always full of hope and she would always want to know how she could pray for me.

Once she called me here in Colorado and asked me that question. I said, "I was struggling; feeling down." We'd had low attendance at church or something. About half-way through her prayer I realized young, crippled, bedridden Susie was praying that I'd trust Jesus more.

And I used to pray for her, in fact I'd pray hard. Susie believed she'd be healed. She even had a faith healer visit her from England. She believed she would be healed and I believed she could be healed.

Just a few years earlier I had felt and watched in absolute amazement as one of my legs grew during prayer. I'd gone forward for prayer 'cause my back hurt. And believe it or not, my leg grew....

wasn't yanked;

wasn't manipulated.

It shot out.

I mean it was so shocking, so not subtle, and so powerful; I immediately thought it had grown way too far and we'd have to grow the other.

I'm just saying I know God could heal Susie's body...but for years she lay in that nursing home, usually alone; curled up in a ball; slowly losing her ability to move or speak; and in the end...even think.

Why would God heal my silly sore back, in such an astounding and miraculous way, when I didn't even think He would or could?

Well...He did it because He loves me, perfectly and absolutely.

And, why would God not heal Susie's body as she lay there in Elm Manor, year after year, singing His praises and putting her faith in Him? The politically correct answer is "I don't know." But I think I do know....

It's because He loves Susie perfectly and absolutely.

This morning we come to the end of the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is a love story. If we take John seriously, all creation is a love story and you are a love story. It's John that tells us "God is Love" and creation is the story He's telling. John chapter 1:

"God creates all things with His Word...His Word that became flesh."

That means...

You are a story that God's telling, with His Word...Jesus

You are Love's story...You are a Love story.

And yet, we don't always love...we sin.

God can't sin, by definition, for sin is what God will not do and yet we sin...

We do what God will not do...

In other words, we write ourselves out of His story...

By refusing to trust His Word.

"All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God." We all write ourselves out of His story and into darkness, death and chaos. We write ourselves out of His story, history, out of His story...that's Sin.

But God writes us back in...that's Grace.

Salvation is surrendering to His story by trusting His Word such that

His story becomes your story...a Love story.

The Gospel according to you.

- A. If you refuse the Word of Love, all your life, a door is shut and you descend into the deep and perhaps you are even consumed by eternal fire and destroyed. And then some would say, "There is no hope left for you."
- B. But I don't buy that for Jesus descends into the deep. And even things destroyed, like Sodom and Jerusalem...God makes new. (Ezekiel 16:53-63)
- C. And God's ability to write a story of Grace is stronger than your ability to write a story of destruction. And God is Love...so He only writes Love stories...and Jesus is the end...So even if the Love story contains hatred, death and despair...

The end is Good.

I'm just saying there is a Gospel according to you and you can begin to live it...all of it...past, present and future...the moment you believe.

There is a Gospel according to you.

Just as there is a Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Gospel of John ends with this statement:

"But there are many other things, which Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books."

You are one of those books...a Gospel according to you and me....love story for me in my nice house, with my beautiful wife and four children. And a Gospel for Susie, lying trapped in disease in Elm Manor. One for John on the Island of Patmos and one for Peter, naked and crucified upside down.

A love story...your circumstances and experiences...even your sin (once it's surrendered) are critical events in that story and the context for one question...

"Do you love me?"

"All things have been arranged by God, in Christ Jesus, that He might hear this answer, spoken in freedom, 'Yes Lord, You know I love you.'"

...That's Gospel from God, returning to God.

John 21:17, where we left off last time...The resurrected Christ sits by a charcoal fire, with His disciples, on the edge of the sea. The sun is rising. Jesus has turned to Peter and asked him 2 times and now He asks him a third.

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God." And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

²⁰Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus love following them,

["The beloved disciple" ...That's how John refers to himself. He doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't love the other guys. He means that his whole identity (who he is) is entirely dependent on this one fact...Jesus loves him.

In fear, we think Jesus may love one more than another. And you know Peter and John were old friends...they were partners in a fishing business. And you know it's our neighbors, our brothers, and companions. It's our neighbors

With whom we must often compete

With whom we must often measure ourselves

With whom we most often judge ourselves

With whom we most often compete

And so desire to beat

And so end up hating

Our neighbors whom we're told to love.]

the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" so the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be

written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21:17-25 (ESV)

Well Peter found out how he would glorify God...He would be crucified...He found out how he was going to die. He looks at John; looks at Jesus and says, "What about him? How come John doesn't have to die on a cross?"

I used to hear those kinds of questions all day long...

"Daddy, how come Jon got to ride in front twice in a row?"

"Daddy, how come Elizabeth got to go to Wal-Mart and I didn't."

"Daddy, that's not fair and you should love us the same."

"The Constitution says we're created equal. So if you love us the same, you should take me to Wal-Mart now. You love Elizabeth more than me!"

And then I'd get mad, because I love each of my children the same amount. I think I do...I love each with all I've got. But that means I love each a different way. Each has equal value but each is not the same...each is utterly unique.

Loving my 17 year old son, Coleman, means slugging him hard in the chest.

Loving my daughter, Becky, is not a punch in the chest but a kiss on the cheek.

Loving Elizabeth is a kiss and a discussion of social injustice in the political system.

Loving Jon is an episode of *South Park* and a beer.

But I shouldn't drink a beer with anyone; drinking a beer with an alcoholic might be the meanest thing in the world.

Well, each of my children is unique and each of you is unique. And no one knows the uniqueness completely, except God, who writes each story with His Word...Jesus. Jesus who says, "To him that overcometh, I will give a white stone; and in the stone a new name; which no man knoweth, save him that receiveth it."

See? You are utterly unique and living your story is how you come to know God's unique love for you and who you uniquely are. So, when you answer the one question, "Do you love me?" your answer will be unique in all creation. "You will" (not "you should") "will love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself."

You will love God out of the unique story He is writing...the story that is you. Lovers always look to stories to define their love...not numbers, charts or figures. Once when Becky was about 3 or 4, I asked her, "Becky, how much do you love me?" And she said, "I love you 12." Ask a stupid question and get a stupid answer.

We tell stories to define love. Lovers tell stories like:

"I parked the car and watched her in the distance...walking in the rain...weeping over me. She loved me."

Or

“Every night I sat by her bedside and I felt every ache...I shed every tear. We shared something no one else will ever know. And, every night I whispered into her heart...I will come for you. My Glory is dying for you and suffering with you. Your faith glorifies me Susie. I love you.”

Or

“Peter I died for you and Peter you died for me...we love each other.”

Have you noticed that stories lovers tell to define their love always include pain, separation, temptation, affliction and loss? And actually the more struggle in the middle, the greater the glory in the end

...and Jesus is the end

...and He shares His Glory with you.

His story includes lines like this...

“by the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Zion”

Or

“Then Peter began to invoke a curse and to swear ‘I don’t know the man’ ...the cock crowed and Peter went out and wept bitterly.”

Lines like this...

“My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?”

Paul wrote, “These slight momentary afflictions prepare us for an eternal weight of glory...beyond compare.”

Everyone’s afflictions are different...

Maybe their eternal weight of glory is different.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

The mold in which a key is made would be a strange thing. If you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you – you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith.

[Susan Livingston – Peter Hiatt – Bill Baldrige]

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

Each one of you...like a particular key with a particular cut and the cut of the key makes no sense

until it unlocks the particular door

to your particular room

and you receive your particular name

on a white stone.

Each day of your life is like one notch in that particular key. Each day of your life is like one page in your particular love story and that page won't make sense until you come to the end.

Perhaps the page reads like this...

"The woman took and ate and was exiled from the garden."

"The maiden bit the apple and fell asleep."

"The wicked stepmother locked her in the tower and would let her go to the ball."

"The witch imprisoned her in the depths of the sea."

"She lay alone in a nursing home...8 years...suffering under the curse."

"When you are old, you will stretch out your hands; another will dress you and take you where you do not wish to go."

"And they rolled a great stone over the entrance to the tomb and went away."

Each of us is a love story

A story Love is telling.

Each is a love story and not the same story as any other story...

Except Christ's story

All stories are contained in Him.

But if you say,

"Jesus where is my Fairy Godmother and glass slippers like Cinderella?"

Or

"God, I'll never eat an apple 'cause it might be a poison apple, like Snow White."

Or

"Daddy I think you love Elizabeth more than me..."

That makes God mad...you're doubting His love for you...

Not living your story

Trying to live someone else's story.

You're following them. You're judging your story with their story and likewise you'll judge their story with yours. You'll compete and in that process you'll wish all stories worse than yours.

And you'll end up rejoicing in bad stories...rejoicing in evil and wishing everyone to Hell. You'll end up hating your neighbor...your neighbor.

See? It's no problem for me, if a lady in France wins a beauty contest. But, if a fellow pastor in my neighborhood has a church that thrives; I get insecure and jealous and ashamed and hate the neighbor I am to love.

All because I'm judging my story with his story...

And his story with my story.

And if I live his story, it's not my story. And so I can never say to God, "I love you for that 'I' is not 'me.'" I am lost. I'm not me.

God loves you in particular and wants you in particular to love Him. He doesn't want one more Billy Graham...or one more Mother Teresa...just one more Vanilla Saint sitting on a cloud with a harp.

I don't want one more Jonathan or one more Elizabeth...

I want one Jonathan...one Elizabeth...one Becky...and one Coleman.

There's one "me" but four different ways I give "me" to them. So there's four unique and wonderful responses to my question, "Do you love me?"

Bob Benson dropped his son off at college and someone said, "Don't be sad. You still have four at home...plenty at home." And Benson writes,

Plenty...except Mike. And in parental math, five minus one just doesn't equal plenty. And I was thinking about God. He sure has plenty of children – plenty of artists, plenty of singers, and carpenters, and candlestick makers, and preachers, plenty of everybody...except you and all of them together can never take your place. And there will always be an empty spot in His heart – and a vacant chair at His table when you're not home.

He leaves the 99 in the wilderness and goes after the one
...and you are that one.

He loves each one with all he's got...

Himself on a cross

Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

He loves each the same amount but in at least seven billion different ways. This week the global population topped seven billion.

That's seven billion love stories

For God is Love and

God made each unique.

Rejoice in your story and don't covet another's...don't be intimidated by another's...don't despise another's.

So Peter looks at John and then at Jesus and says, "What about this man?"

And Jesus says, "If he lives till I come again, what is that to you?"

"If Cinderella gets glass slippers, what is that to you Snow White?"

"What is that to you Peter?"

"Follow me. Follow me. Follow me."

"I am the Alpha and Omega...your beginning and end. I am your judgment. I tell you your story; follow me."

"What is that to you?"

What is it to you...

this morning that some worship with hands in the air and others choose to sit in silence.

What is it to you...

that some speak in tongues and some don't;

that some see visions and some know Greek and Hebrew;
that some are miraculously healed and some live all their days in chronic pain;
that some struggle with profound sorrow and some can't help being bubbly all the
time;
that some are tempted by a slew of sexual perversions and some seem to not
even be tempted at all;
that some wander in the wilderness and some are always at home;
that some are slaves; some are free; some are Jews and some are Greek; some
are male and some female;
that some win the lottery and some sleep under the bridge;
that some write books, like John and some get crucified like Peter

What is that to you?

A Blessing...seven billion great love stories
Or a Curse??

If you doubt that God is telling your story with His Word; if you doubt that Love is telling your
story with Grace...well then you'll judge your story with another's story...and judge their story
with your story. And to you...

their story will be competition, fear, arrogance or shame...
their story will be a curse to you.

And you will have already written yourself out of your story and into outer darkness and
despair and death.

"What is that to you?" asks Jesus. What is another's story to you...
a curse or a blessing?

Or

Do you want all the stories to be just the same?
Like a million bad sitcom episodes...
Do you want all the instruments to play just one note??

The best thing in this world is stories that reveal persons. Heaven will be billions and billions of
stories – gospels – that all glorify God in Christ Jesus.

That all harmonize in the Great Symphony of Worship before the Throne...
And you must sing your part in that symphony,
or it is incomplete.

Our quest for equality and sameness and uniformity...out of fear, envy and arrogance
Destroys the symphony
and blinds us to all blessings.

And so sometimes I buy unequal presents for my equally loved, but unequal, children...on
purpose

So that none of them miss the symphony.

Don't be frightened, envious, or intimidated by the events in another's story...
And besides God isn't telling you their story...
He's telling you your story.

In C.S. Lewis' fairy tale, *A Horse and His Boy*, a mysterious voice (a Word) speaks to the Boy Shasta; explaining all the adventures in Shasta's story and all the lions that Shasta fell so unfortunate to meet along the way.

"Don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions?" said Shasta.
"There was only one lion," said the Voice.
"What on earth do you mean? I've just told you there were at least two the first night, and –"
"There was only one: but he was swift of foot."
"How do you know?"
"I was the lion." And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the Voice continued. "I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."
"Then it was you who wounded Aravis?"
"It was I."
"But what for?"
"Child," said the Voice, "I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own."
"Who are you?" asked Shasta.
"Myself," said the Voice, very deep and low so that the earth shook; and again "Myself," loud and clear and gay; and then the third time "Myself," whispered so softly you could hardly hear it, and yet it seemed to come from all round you as if the leaves rustled with it.

The entire universe is a prop...it's the set for your love story. God is always telling you your story and the entire universe vibrates with this one question:

"Do you love me?"

Say, "Yes, I, (Peter, John, Mary, Susie)...I Love You."

Say, "Yes I Love You" and your answer is unique in all creation –

Unique

Irreplaceable

And priceless to God.

An utterly unique story. So, I can't judge another's story – and yet I know every story is a love story. For God is Love, and God is telling it with His Word, and His Word is Jesus, and I know Jesus.

So, I couldn't tell Susie her story. I couldn't tell her what would happen next
...if those legs would be healed any time soon
...or how long she'd live at Elm Manor.

And yet I could tell her the plot; I could tell her the meaning; I could tell her the *logos* (in Greek). I know Him.

I could tell her how her story began and how her story would end.

You see: Jesus is the plot and He is the Beginning and He is The End.



I hadn't called Susie for quite some time. The last time I had spoken with her she seemed rather confused. If truth be known, I'm frightened of the events in her story but I did call her one last time before she retreated into the confusion of her own mind.

She had a hard time speaking and seemed rather confused, but she was still Susie. She showered me with love. She never complained, but she did ask one question:

She asked, "*Peter...do you think...I...Susan Livingstone...will find...a man...to marry me?*"

And I froze...I froze. Then I remembered the Gospel and I said,

"Yes! Susie you will marry Jesus."

It was quite a long time (I thought maybe I messed up and made Jesus sound like a bad consolation prize) and then I heard,

"Oh...WOW...Thank You!!!"

John had a vision before he died.

⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" –

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. It's faith in love.

21 ²...And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

Rev. 19:6-8; 21:2 (ESV)

In 1995, Susie died...

In other words her Prince came.

As she lay sleeping, suffering under the curse

He bent down and gave her a kiss...

And away to the castle they went...

Where she dances with Him on streets of gold

"Happily ever after" and even more "happily"

for she sees He never left her.

He was the one that whispered in her ear,

"Remember your baptism."

"Pray for Peter – he needs Faith."

"And Susie, You are made for Love."

"You are being made for Love."

"So, don't stop hoping...You won't be disappointed;

I am your husband."

And as they dance, she sees the wounds and touches the scars and knows the depths

to which He was descended in order to win her to Himself.

She whispers, *"Jesus you know I love You."*

And the heart of God rejoices –

"Happily Ever After."

That's how her story ends – He is the End.

Jealous??

Don't be.

There is a Gospel according to You.

Communion

For on that night He took the bread and broke it saying *"This is my body given to you; take and eat and do this in remembrance of Me."* And in the same way after supper He took the cup and He said, *"This cup is the new Covenant my blood; poured out for the forgiveness of sins; drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me."*

From the foundation of the world, this is Love's first kiss. And He invites you to come to the Table. And tear off a piece of bread and dip it in the cup. Place it on your lips like a kiss. And as you do, surrender your story. In other words, you're bringing your life, you're bringing your story; the things you're ashamed of, the things you're happy about, the things you're scared about...your whole story. You're surrendering your story and you're inviting Him to be the meaning of your story. And then you see, you become part of His story and there is no better story. So, there's no point in being jealous of anyone else's story – just rejoicing in everybody else's story...because of Jesus.

Let's worship Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You were lifted high
High upon a cross for all to see.

And so that we could say, from the depths of our hearts, we want to follow You. And so, Lord Jesus, thank you for who You are for when we see who You are...
You are the one we want to follow.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Lord God, we thank you. Amen.

And so the Lord says to you, *"Follow me."* Okay, now, I was quoting Him, right? The Lord says, *"Follow me."* The Lord says, *"Follow me."* And then I think He says this, *"Now look around."* Go ahead and look around – there's some funny looking people, huh? I mean some of them are old, some of them are young. Keep lookin, keep lookin. Alright, you know some of them are rich. Did you know that? Some are relatively rich and some of them are pretty poor. Some of them are really smart – I mean if you gave them an IQ test, it would go up really high. And some, not so much. Okay? They all have different stories. Some of them own businesses, okay? And it might be a business like yours and check this out – their business might succeed next year and your business might fail. Some of them may be sick; some of them may die; some of them may be healthy; some of them might win the race; some of them may lose the race. But, look around and look at them. Okay, look at them and keep looking at them 'cuz this is the question Jesus asks of you...

What is that to you?

If you believe that God is telling your story through His Word, Jesus the Christ. If you believe that Love is telling your story through His Word of Grace and will not fail...

What is that?

A blessing

A beautiful love story

The ingredients for an incredible party

That God is preparing...where all of our praises and all of the Love stories join together in this one glorious symphony

Before the Throne forever, and ever and ever. Amen.

And you see when you exercise faith, 'cause that's what that's called, Faith; the party begins right now.

In Jesus' name, love the God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength; and your neighbor as yourself. Amen.