

Text: Genesis 5

Title: "Keeping His Word" (8<sup>th</sup> in a series of sermons in Genesis 1-11: "The Story That Makes Sense of Our Stories")

What a text! Just what all of you have been looking forward to hearing today. Right? Not!

I have to confess that, although I believe every part of Scripture to be the living Word of the Living God, when I am reading the Bible and come to a genealogy, I am tempted to skip it, so I can get on to the "good stuff." In more duty-bound moments I might at least "speed-read" the genealogy, again, so I can get on to the "good stuff." Surprisingly, when we understand what the Biblical genealogies are doing, texts like Genesis 5 are "good stuff."

If you have read widely in the Bible, you know that this is not the only genealogy inspired by the Spirit of God. We find a number of them in Genesis 1-11: in chapters 4, 10, and 11. We find a number in the rest of Genesis: in chapters 25, 35, 36, and 46. The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles are one very long genealogy! Matthew begins his Gospel, his life of Jesus, with a genealogy. And Luke follows his telling of Jesus' baptism with a yet different genealogy.

In texts like Genesis 5, we are dealing with a unique genre, a unique literary form. In the Bible we have poetry – like the text of Genesis 1, and like the Psalms and the Song of Solomon. We have what I have been calling picto-graphs – like the story of Genesis 2-3. In the Bible we have historical documents – like 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, the book of Acts. We have wisdom sayings – like Proverbs and James. We have prophecy – like Isaiah and Micah and Amos. We have the Gospels, a very unique literary genre – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. We have parables – like those Jesus told to open up the reality of the Word of God. We have the epistles – Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews. We have apocalyptic – my favorite genre – like Daniel, and the most magnificently crafted document in human literature, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And we have genealogies.

Read all the genealogies in the Bible, and you discover that each of them is slightly different... Not only, of course, because they have different names...but because they are assembled in different ways.

- Some are in the simple "a" gave birth to "be" who gave birth to "c" who gave birth to "d."
- Some are in the form "a" gave birth to "b," "b" gave birth to "c," "c" gave birth to "d."
- Some periodically add a comment. We see that especially in 1 Chronicles 1-9 comments like: "Now Jabez called on the God of Israel...and God granted him what he requested" (4:10). Or, like when speaking of Reuben the first born of Israel: "...but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel" (5:1).
- Some simply list the names.
- Some "play it forward": A father of B, B father of C, C father of D. They begin with the originator of the line and move to the son, and to the grandson, etc.

- Some “play it backwards”: D son of C, C son of B, B son of A. They begin with the last person, and trace back through the line, parent, grandparent, etc. to the originator of the line.
- Matthew plays Jesus’ genealogy “forward”: he begins with Abraham and leads through David to Jesus (1:1-17).
- Luke plays Jesus’ genealogy “backward”: he begins with Jesus and goes all the way back through David and Abraham, through Noah and Adam...all the way to God! (3:23-38)

Now, although the genealogies give the names in chronological order, they are not necessarily giving strict chronology. “A” son of “B.” The phrase can mean that “A” is literally the son of “B.” But it can also mean “A” is simply an ancestor of “B.” Between “A” and “B” there can be other literal sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters. That is, genealogies can skip generations.

For example, in Ezra (chapter 7, verse 3) we read: “...Azariah, son of Meraioth.” But in 1 Chronicles (chapter 6, verses 7-10) we learn that there are six generations between Azariah and Meraioth. Matthew says (chapter 1, verse 8), that “Joram begat Uziah.” But in 2 Kings (chapter 8, verse 25) we learn that Joram begat Ahaziah...who begat Joash...who begat Amaziah...who begat Uziah.

All the genealogies give names in chronological order; but the genealogies are not necessarily giving us strict, continuous chronology.

Which, in particular, means that we cannot add up all the ages of the persons named in Genesis 5 and work backwards to the date of the birth of Adam. Bishop Ussher, a gifted scholar in his day – 1648 – a historian of some renown, assumed strict chronology, and used Genesis 5 to argue that creation took place October 23, 4004 BC. Maybe. Maybe not. Genealogies alone cannot give an undisputed answer: they often skip generations.

Two things all the Biblical genealogies teach us: the nature of history, the value of individuals.

All the genealogies teach us that history is linear. History moves. It is not the endless repetition of the same pattern. History is not cyclical. This is the unique contribution of the Judeo-Christian faith to our understanding of time. History moves. Moves forward. Sometimes “down,” sometimes “up,” sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left; but always forward. History is heading somewhere. Good news to people caught in religious philosophies of monotonous repetition. And good news to people who simply see history as “a conveyor belt of corpses.” History is linear, not cyclical, not stuck in meaninglessness.

And all the Biblical genealogies teach us that individuals have value. History is not driven by great ideas alone. But by great ideas embodied in individuals who think, who make decisions, who act out their ideologies in real time with real people in real communities. The God of history values individuals.

Indeed, the genealogies declare that God remembers!! God remembers individuals!! God remembers names! People matter. Names matter. Our names matter. We count in the unfolding of history. Which is why it is appropriate for cultures to have "Remembrance Days."

God's regard for names exacerbates a distress I am experiencing: I am having trouble remembering names! I used to be so good at it. I could hear someone's name once or twice...and remember it. Now I have to hear it three, four, five times! And still might not get it. It matters to me that I cannot remember all your names because you all matter to me. I envy Ken Shigematsu, senior pastor of Tenth Ave Alliance: he meets a person...and remembers their name...and the names of their spouses and children.

God remembers! Indeed, God has a Book in which He writes the names of those He claims for Himself. The Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27), as it is called. Your name and my name may never appear on the list of Who's Who in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. No matter. What matters is that they are written in the Big Book...in God's "Who's Who."

So all the Biblical genealogies help us "make sense" of our stories by teaching us that history has meaning, it is linear and not endlessly cyclical. And that individuals matter. Seth. Enosh. Kenan. Methuselah. Whoever they were, whatever they did, matter. So do Sally and Jose and Magdalene and Hussein and Ingrid and Klaus...and you...and me.

Ok. So what does the genealogy of Genesis 5 uniquely teach us? How does this chapter of "The Story that Makes Sense of Our Stories" make sense of our stories?

"Keeping His Word." If I had to give a title to the genealogy of Genesis 5, it would be "Keeping His Word." God...the Creator and Redeemer, the God of justice and mercy...is keeping His word.

We see and hear this in four terms the author of the genealogies uses. The four terms are: "begat," "died," "rest," and "took."

1) First term: "begat." The version we read this morning uses the longer phrase "became the father of..." The Hebrew uses a single word, the verb "begat." "He begat"...and he begat...and he begat. Nine times. Begat.

The point? Huge. God is keeping his first creative word.

Which is why the genealogy begins the way it does. Genesis 5, verses 1-2. "This is the book of the generations of Adam." Then, "In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created." Where have we heard those words before? "Likeness," "Male and female," "Blessed"? In Genesis 1. The genealogy of Genesis 5 is returning to Genesis 1,...where God started the flow history. The genealogy is re-stating this original creative word. After the sad, dark story in Genesis 4, the story of Cain the murderer and his line deteriorating into Lamech who boasts in murdering a boy, Genesis 5 goes back to the beginning, and re-affirms God's decision to make a creature in His own likeness. The point being: God is not going to give up. No

Cain-to-Lamech family line is going to thwart God's desire to have creatures alive in His image!

"He blessed them" echoing the original, "God blessed them...and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (1:28). And they did. In spite of human sin, humanity has multiplied. And still is...multiplying. "Male and female" He created them. With the capacity to be fruitful and multiply. God is going to have His way. "Male and female" alive together, becoming His likeness in the world. Begat.

Not only keeping the original creative word. But also keeping the original redemptive word.

The word spoken in the Garden that had become a cemetery. To the serpent, who had twisted God's good command in the direction of raising suspicion about God's character and intention, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the head" (Genesis 3:15). "Begat," "begat," "begat." God is keeping His word about bringing that "seed of the woman" into the world, who would crush the head of evil. In Genesis 4 it becomes clear that the first born child of humans, Cain, is not the seed. If anything Cain is dangerously close to being a "seed of the serpent." Cain's ancestor Lamech clearly has fallen into the serpent's ways. "Begat," "begat," "begat," "begat." God will make sure the seed is born!

2) The second term where we see and hear God keeping His word: "died." In the genealogy of Genesis 5 we have the sober refrain: "And he died, "And he died," "And he died." Eight times. "And he died."

The point? God is also keeping the original word of judgment.

In the only command God gave humanity in the Garden, God had said, "you will surely die." "Of any tree in the garden you may eat freely. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). And they did. And so did all their subsequent offspring. "Died," "died," "died." God is keeping His word. No other text in the Bible puts it as forcefully.

This tells us that God means business. The Living God is not like a parent who indulges the child, giving idle threats. God said that "in the day" we declare independence from Him we would not be able to make life work on our own. We would die. And we did. And we do.

We were not supposed to. When God created humans they were not supposed to die. Which is the point of the large numbers in the genealogy, the long years people lived. It is hard to get our minds around said numbers! I know, Adam – lived 930 years! Seth – 912 years. Enosh – 905. Kenan – 910. Mahalalel – 895. Jared – 962. Methuselah – 969! Lamech – 777. Noah – 950. They lived so many years because we were originally created to live...a long time...like forever. Again, I know it is hard to imagine. I know. The whole idea raises all kinds of questions. I know. But this is what Genesis 5 brings to the table as we seek to make sense of human existence. We were not supposed to die.

Whether the numbers in the genealogy are literal or symbolic, or both, the point is that we were not supposed to die.

In Genesis 11, after the flood, the genealogy will have smaller numbers, showing that slowly, but surely, God's word is being actualized. Shem, son of Noah lives 600 years. Arphaxad – 435. Peleg – 230. Nahor – 148. "You shall surely die."

"And he died." "And he died." "And he died." Yes, depressing. I know. But the genealogy does not want us to live in a "make-believe" world. The genealogy wants us to face the reality of judgment. Yes, death is not going to have the last word... as we will see in a moment. But death is here and now lives.

Psalms 90, attributes to Moses. Verse 1-2: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or you gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." Then Verse 3 and 7: "You have turned man back into dust, and you say, 'Return, O Children of humans'. For we have been consumed by your anger, and by your wrath we have been terrified." Indeed. All of humanity under the righteous wrath of God. We all die. As God said we would.

So Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian-pastor of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, regularly contemplated the reality of death. In 1722, living in New York, at the age of 19, he set out a number of resolutions. He read them each week for the rest of his life.

Resolutions he knew he could only keep by the by the grace of God. Resolutions like:

"Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live." (No. 6)

"Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge." (No. 14)

"Resolved, to examine carefully and constantly, what tat one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to double of the love of God; and so direct all my forces against it." (No. 25)

I like that one! Then,

"Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life." (No. 7)

One written a year later than the others:

"I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again; Resolved, that I will live just so, as I think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age." (No. 52).

And then this:

"Resolved, to think much, on all occasions, of my dying, all of the common circumstances which attack death." (No. 9)

Every week... "to think much... of my dying."

Morbid? No. Facing reality. Edwards knew how fragile life is. And did not wait to live naively in denial. We all die. And when we truly face that fact, we live differently. More simply. More gratefully. More generously.

"And he died." "And he died." "And he died."

It is right to lament the fact of death, because it did not have to be. It is right to cry out in protest, because it did not have to be. Jesus' weeping at the grave of Lazarus was His "this ought not be."

Genesis 5 is reminding us that "death is" .... "and he died", because we humans did not believe God when God told us we could not make it on our own. "He died." "He died." "He died." God keeping His word.

3) A third term: "rest." Lamech calls his son Noah, for, verse 29, "This one shall give us rest." "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed." How Lamech knew this we are not told. The Lamech of the Cain-line in Genesis 4 accepts the fact of violence as normal; he even celebrates it. The Lamech of the Seth-line in Genesis 5 understand that sin has resulted in a curse and longs to just rest from it.

Where have we heard the term "rest" before? In the Song of Creation, when God establishes the seventh day, the day of rest. Do you see what Lamech sees? God is going to have his way; God is going to bring us into the blessing of the 7<sup>th</sup> day! God has something to give us on the 7<sup>th</sup> day that he has not given in the other 6 days (Ronald Wallace). And God is going to have his way! He is going to bring us into His rest... freed from the curse.

Noah. "This is the one who shall give us rest." (5:29)

Well... not exactly. Lamech is illustrating the nature of the prophetic word. He sees the ultimate end. But does not see how we get there. Prophets always hit the target... but seldom the bullseye. It takes time to finally hit the bullseye. The target – "rest." The bullseye – not Noah. Yes, after the Flood, creation is re-invigorated... the ground more willingly yielded fruit. But Noah does not bring the rest, the freedom from the curse. A son of Noah will do that. Noah, as righteous a man as he would be, is not yet "the seed of the woman." That "seed" was yet to come... many generations yet to come. But when He comes He will give us rest. "Come to me," he will say, "all you who are weary and have overburdened yourselves, and I will rest you."

But Lamech does somehow see ... and the genealogy of Genesis 5 preaches... that God keeps His word about the seventh day. God will give us rest from the consequences of human sin!

4) Which brings us to the fourth term in which we see and hear God keeping His word. "Took." The pattern: "He died," "he died," "he died"... the cadence "He died," "he died," "he died" is broken by the startling declaration: "he was not, for God took him." Verse 24: "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Amazing! Better – unbelievable! This too is hard to get our minds around! Enoch does not die. Enoch does not have to go through the process of dying. Mercy! He is simply "taken" by God. "Taken into the eternal realm without passing through the grave" as the prophet Elijah would be years later (2 Kings 2:9ff).

Why is Enoch spared the "he died"? The text says: "He walked with God." Twice – Enoch "walked with God" (5:22, 24). Meaning, I think, "in a unique way"; in a

deepening intimate way: all the time, every day, in every event. "He walked with God." In a world seeking to operate without any reference to God, Enoch walked with God.

As God graciously calls all his people to do. Micah 6:8 -- "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to *walk* humbly with your God?" The apostle Paul will echo the call. "Therefore, I entreat you to *walk* in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1). "Walk in love" (5:1). "Walk as children of the light" (5:8). "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Enoch "walked with God" and God took him. Later Jewish documents would go to elaborate lengths speculating about all this (see the apocryphal Book of Enoch, etc.). But all the genealogy of Genesis 5 says is that "he was not, for God took him." Lucky bum!

God choose to spare Enoch the pain of death to show that death will not win in the end! "He died," "he died," "he died." And right in the middle of the genealogy: "he was not, for God took him." As Madeleine L'Engle puts it: "Already... God is trampling on death, telling us that death is not going to have the last word."

God is keeping His word. God created us for fellowship. God created us to enter into life with Him. God created us to enter into His own inner life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And God is going to have his way! Enoch is exhibit A. Death will not have the last word over those who seek to walk with the God of life.

For "the seed of the woman" will come. Begat, begat, begat. He will overcome the power of death. But here is the mystery. He will not, like Enoch, be spared death. He will not, like Enoch, be taken. He will walk right into the face of death, into the jaws of death, into the clutches of death. And let death have it full way with Him. And in so doing deal death a death blow.

Matthew – at the end of his book that began with a genealogy – tells us that in the moment Jesus dies, "Look! The curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened" (27:50-52). The tombs were opened! As He dies, the tombs were opened. In the moment "the seed of the woman" dies, death loosens its grip, its claim, its finality, and has to let the dead go!!! He defeats death by dying! (Hebrews 2:14-15) I never tire repeating what a mentor (Peter Joshua) never tired repeating: "When death stung Jesus Christ it stung itself to death."

"And the tombs were opened." As the speaker told 11,000 young people Friday night at Rogers Arena, "Jesus did not come into the world to make bad people good, He came to make dead people alive!"

So the apostle Paul – who knew the genealogies of Genesis – can say in 1Corinthians 15: "For since by a man came death, by a man came the resurrection of the dead." For as in Adam all die, so also all in Christ (the New Adam) shall all be made alive. Paul goes on to say what the genealogy of Genesis 5 is point toward: "Look! I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at

the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. When this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and the mortal will have put on immortality. Then will come about the saying, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?' Thanks be to God, who gave us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:21-22; 51-55, 57).

Keeping His word. In the seed of the woman. In the New Adam. God is keeping His word. Amen.