

First Sunday after Christmas
Sunday, December 29, 2013
The Rev. Elizabeth A.B. Tesi

Have you ever known a story so great you didn't want it to end? Somewhere in your life, you must have read a story, seen a film, heard a piece of music, or gone on some adventure that you just wished you would never stop. You might have wished you could climb inside that story and become part of the characters forever.

As a child, I was certainly in this camp. I was an imaginative child who was usually found buried in various books. Over the course of my childhood, I became obsessed with one and then another at various times. I'd invent extra characters for myself to play out. Usually, I'd invent myself into a side character, someone who would not be all that noticeable so I wouldn't change the story, but I could be part of the action. I would imagine myself into scenes that the author hadn't written, the breakfast scenes, the walking to school scenes, the part where Anne falls off the roof, and what she would have said to her best friends Diana and me while waiting for Mr. Barry to come carry her home.

I think that God is like that too, in many ways. And when God became human in the great story of human kind, he lived this dream. He saw the story of his creation playing out below him on some infinitely tiny scale and I think he wanted desperately to be part of that story. He didn't want to let the characters hijack his play, so he entered into the story that will never now end—the story of God and humanity entwined and interdependent forever.

Listen to this:

“In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

The Word, as we hear it, refers to Jesus. We talk in terms of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. In our tradition, we call this the doctrine of the Trinity. We talk about God as the Three-in-One and the One-in-Three. God is eternal, from before time and beyond time. Thus, the Trinity is also eternal. The Word, the Logos, this has been with God and part of God from the beginning of creation. The Word has been a light unto creation from the beginning. And no darkness has ever overcome it.

This mystery of the Trinity, when and who and how, it is indeed fascinating, and very wise men and women have written libraries full of books parsing out the Trinity. That's not actually where I'm going to go, today. Instead, I'd like to talk about the part where the Word became flesh and lived among us. Knowing what we know about us, why would God want to be a part of us?

Throughout the Old Testament, we see this grand scale of cosmic misunderstandings. God set creation into motion, and he gave free will to his players upon this little stage. We *can* choose what we want. Yet, as you well know, we don't necessarily choose what is good and beneficial to all creation. We all fell into sin and darkness. The play was changing, not taking the course that the Creator hoped for.

Remember when I asked you about that story you wished could go on forever? Think of some of the great stories of our time. Most people know Harry Potter—when it first came out and no one yet knew the ending, I remember a couple of young people I know who stopped reading for a while around Book Four, because it just got “too scary.” The story became so dark.

I think God sorrowed as he watched the story of humanity becoming darker and bleaker and scarier. We needed a major change to change our story. He chose to live the dream. Instead of closing the book, and snuffing out our existence, he chose to enter the story.

With the birth of Christ as a baby, a new chapter of the play has now started. It began with the birth of a babe long ago in Bethlehem. God entered our story because he found us so fascinating, so amazing, so worthy of love and care, so astounding and interesting, that he just had to be here among us.

Let me tell you one final story. It's one that an old priest told me long ago, though I've seen it circulate through the Mighty Internet since.

Once upon a time, a farmer was walking out towards his greenhouse. He was startled by a thumping on the thick plastic. He peered in through the door, and to his astonishment he saw what looked like a few dozen starlings. He realized they must have been attracted by the birdseed he'd scattered carelessly when he filled the feeder. Laughing, he threw the door open so they could fly to free. The birds squeaked in terror and all hid beneath the various leaves of the plants around them. The farmer was worried they would damage his plants, so he went in to the greenhouse and tried to shoo them out. He flicked his hat at them. He shouted “Shoo, bird, shoo!” He blew at them. He waved his hands behind them in the direction of the door. Nothing worked. The birds fled from plant to plant in terror, crying out to each other, but not one bird flew out the door. Soon he realized that his plants were becoming destroyed, and worse yet, a few of the birds

were exhausted and not a few had small cuts and bruises. Soon, they'd be seriously injured if not worse!

The starlings just couldn't understand that he wasn't trying to hurt them, that he wanted to help them. He as human was so Other that they just could not connect. Luckily the farmer was a magical farmer. So the farmer placed his hat on his head, and gathered his magical powers, and carefully transformed himself down into a starling. Suddenly, the infinite cavern of the tiny greenhouse loomed large about his tiny starling body and he looked with beady black eyes at his fellow starlings who gathered curiously around this new fellow. "Look", he told them in starling speech, which now he could speak since he had a starling tongue, "There is a whole universe out there. I can show you a whole new existence." "That would be quite nice," agreed the others, who had gotten tired of exploring their whole known world. "Follow me, then," said the starling-farmer, and he gathered his wings, and he flew, followed by all the other starlings. Through the door they flew and out into the wild beyond, and into freedom.