

I Christmas YC 2024

The Gospel Prequels
By the Rev. Salying Wong

As part of my Christmas break, I decided to watch “Wicked”, the prequel to the Wizard of Oz. It tells the missing story of how the Wicked Witch of the West became wicked. Prequels are done to satisfy our curiosity for the bigger story.

It got me thinking that we can line up our canonical gospels as an order of prequels, with the original story being the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Mark begins the story of Jesus with him as a grown man who is empowered to save at his baptism. Jesus’ coming was announced by the prophets, according to Mark. But then, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew wanted to write a prequel that showed Jesus was the long expected messiah not just since the prophets, but from the time of Abraham—that bigger than life ancestor in which the Jews traced their salvation. That was fine for Matthew, but when the gospel really reached the gentiles and the rest of the known world, the writer of the Gospel of Luke wanted to go even further back. He wrote his prequel with Jesus as the long expected messiah since the time of not just of the prophets, not just of Abraham and Sarah, but of Adam and Eve. For Luke, the salvation of God was always meant for the whole world. Not to be outdone by Matthew and Luke, the writer of the Gospel of John wrote the prequel of prequels and went all the way back before the prophets, before Abraham, before Adam and Eve, before even creation, to the beginning of beginning, to the absolute beginning.

Here in the absolute of beginnings, before Jesus was Jesus of Nazareth was Jesus as the Word, the Logos. In the beginning was the Word, John says. This word, Logos, has a few translations—one of which is “word”, another is “reason”. I like the translation of Logos as “discourse”. It has the sense of a conversation. Consider this translation: In the beginning was the

Conversation and the Conversation was with God and the Conversation was God. I like thinking about it this way because I have sometimes felt something new created in me, something saved, because of a conversation. In a holy Conversation, someone is always giving the gift of listening. Have you ever felt saved in having a conversation? Have you ever felt that amazing feeling of being listened to? Do you think you can offer this to someone today? Would you be surprised if they felt saved by the conversation, the words of grace, the silence beyond words as you listened? A Conversation is inherently relational. If God is the divine conversation, then God is not only speaking to us, but God is listening to us.

John's intention is that we understand the Logos as divine, as before time. Pushing the story back before creation and mimicking the imagery of the Book of Genesis, salvation in the imagination of John's Gospel is huge: it is meant not just for the Jews, and not just for humanity, but for all of creation. For God so loved the WORLD, John says, the world that God created.

Because God is God, when God loves the world, God loves in particular and not in the abstract. God loves you and has the capacity to love everyone and everything else. Therefore, your story matters in the story of salvation. Where would you begin your story, your discourse? Would it be a prequel or would you write the next chapter? Where are you in the story? How will you be a part of the conversation?