I Speak for the Trees
(John 1:1-18)

This past year Mary I went to see Dr. Seuss’ The Lorax movie in theaters. As the movie was nearing the end when the Lorax lifted himself by the seat of his pants and left with a backward glance, Mary turned to me and said, “Phil, this story is like the Gospel story: the Lorax is like Jesus who came to earth, who taught a better way to live, who left, but who also plans to come back again.”

And in this profound thought I had a notion almost as big as the ocean //: why not do a sermon series someday on Dr. Seuss books? The Lorax and others: Horton Hears a Who, The Grinch Who Stole Christmas. As we thought through several of his books, we realized again that these were not simply children’s stories. These books were meaningful stories that had much to teach us about our own world. I realized that Dr. Seuss’ stories were kind of like Jesus’ parables: simple stories with deeper meanings and important lessons. And as we continued to think through the stories, Oh the Place’s You’ll Go, The Butter Battle Book, we realized that these stories not only had significant connections to our world, but they also had much in common with the story of Scripture.

So here we are, the notion is taking motion. Over the next four weeks, we will spend time reflecting on four Dr. Seuss stories in relation to four key passages of Scripture. As we do so, I invite each of you to allow these stories and scriptures to invigorate your imaginations. Dream big dreams of how our world can be a better place, pray that your dreams would line up with God’s purposes, and then become the answer to your prayers.

Today we’re focusing on The Lorax, a simple story that teaches us to recognize the consequences of our actions. // Too much greed leaves the entire world in need. Therefore I plead that you catch this seed: plant it here and there, plant it everywhere. // And as Mary said, this story is a Gospel story. So as we reflect on the Lorax, we will also be reflecting on Jesus, especially as presented in the Gospel of John.

So as with every story, The Lorax begins at, well, the beginning of course. After the boy finds the old Once-ler at the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows he pays him the appropriate price, and begins to listen to the Once-ler’s story from long, long ago.
“Way back in the days…” *(Creation)*

I. “...when the grass was still green...”

II. “In the beginning...” *(John 1:1; Genesis 1:1)*

Way back in the days when the grass was still **green**, the pond was still wet and the clouds were still **clean**... // Back in those days, the Once-ler came to the land of the Truffula trees.

Now John’s Gospel begins in a very similar kind of way: looking back on a time that is long past. In the beginning was the Word who was with God and in fact was God.

// Now before moving on, we must realize that John’s story is not altogether **new**, but is pointing back to another story **too**. //

**In the beginning** God created the heavens and the earth. It was covered by darkness and the Spirit of God was there. And God **said** “Let there be light, let there be sky, let there be dry ground, let there be plants and trees, let there be sun, moon, and stars, let there be living creatures in the sea and on the dry **land**, and let there be people made in the image of God to care for everything with their own **hands**.” And in God’s eyes, this was all good.

John’s Gospel begins with the creation story woven into the very fabric of his writing: **God spoke**: all things were made through the Word, **Let there be light**: the Word was the light that shone through the darkness, bringing life to all, **Let us make people in our own image**: the Word became flesh and lived among us.

John begins his Gospel with the creation story, helping us to remember the fullness and beauty of all that God has made: perhaps there were even Truffula trees.

“I knew just what I’d do!” *(Fall)*

I. “I chopped down a Truffula Tree with one chop.” *(Genesis 3:6)*

II. “The light shines in the darkness...” *(John 1:5)*

But, unfortunate as it may be, the fullness of creation did not last. // The story turned **sour** seemingly within the **hour**.

The Once-ler who saw the beautiful **trees**, had a new dream with tingling in his **knees**. He reached for his axe, chopping down his first **tree**, then he quickly knitted a **thneed**, which of course is something that everyone does **need**.

Once again this reminds us of a story from **before**, about a piece of fruit and the desire to have much **more**. //
In the beginning, God commissioned people, both men and women to care for creation, but one thing that they were not to do was eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That kind of fruit would only lead to death. But as we well know, the people disobeyed and took that first piece of fruit, thus rejecting God and beginning a downward spiral of sinfulness and brokenness. People’s intimacy with God would not easily be restored, not without some kind of divine intervention.

And eventually that first piece of fruit did lead to death and destruction, and people quickly forgot their mandate to care for all of God’s good creation. In *The Lorax*, that first tree that was chopped down by the Once-ler, led into a similar spiral heading toward complete desolation of the land.

In John’s Gospel, this downward cycle is described as darkness. The people were living in darkness, and there continues to be much darkness all around us today: bombs that explode, wars that carry on, loved ones who die, cancer that spreads, relationships that are tainted, and so on and so on. **We live in a world longing for God’s light to shine through the darkness.**

“**I heard a ga-Zump!**” *(Incarnation)*

I.  The Lorax: “I speak for the trees”

II. “The Word became flesh and lived among us...” *(John 1:14)*

And into the darkness, **God sent light.** The Once-ler describes it like this. “I heard a ga-Zump! I looked. I saw something pop out of the tree *stump.*” When that first tree fell, the Lorax was summoned and his message that he did tell was, “**I speak for the trees.**”

The Lorax hoped for the madness to stop right then and right there, before one tree became two. Before two trees became four. Before **four** chopped trees became many many **more.**

John speaks the message of incarnation like this: “The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son....No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son...who has made God known.”

Jesus, the Word, comes from God, and reveals who God is. “That’s the theme of this gospel: **if you want to know who the true God is, look long and hard at Jesus.**”¹

Just as the Lorax speaks for the trees, Jesus speaks for God and all living things. Jesus confronts the darkness, the madness in our world, and speaks a hopeful message of restoration. God plans to restore the earth, not destroy it. And thus, Jesus teaches us again to be people created in the image of God. Jesus teaches us again to **care** for all people and all creation.

---


² Wright, Tom (2002-10-18). John for Everyone Part 1: Chapters 1-10 Pt. 1 (For Everyone Series) (p. 5). SPCK.
One author says it like this, “The Word is bringing into being the new creation, in which God says once more, ‘Let there be light!’” In a world longing for light, God sends Jesus.

“How my business did grow!” (Rejection)

I. “I biggered my money, which everyone needs.”

II. “His own people did not accept him.” (John 1:11)

But the temptations in life are strong, to be sure. It’s not easy to get away when you’re caught in the lure of greed.

As the Lorex persistently spoke for the trees, the Once-ler and his family were jingling their big machine’s keys. Thneeds were selling like hotcakes, business was booming. And with each cent made, the Once-ler fell deeper into the cycle of greed. The only option he could see, was biggering his operation as fast as can be.

No matter the cost, money was to be made:

Yes, the brown Barbaloots got crummies in their tummies, because of the smoke the Swomee-Swans couldn’t sing a note, and the humming-fish couldn’t hum because their gills were all gummed.

And while he did feel a little bad for the creatures who were forced to go, the Once-ler was focused on one thing alone, biggering his operation because Thneeds are things that everyone, yes everyone definitely needs. //

The Lorax persistently called the Once-ler and his family to a better way of living, for the benefit of all of creation, but the Once-ler continued to reject the Lorax’s words.

John says it like this: “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11). Jesus persistently called people to a better way of living, for the benefit of all, but many rejected him time and time again. With each rejection, darkness seemingly overcame the light.

It is so easy to find ourselves in the cycle of greed, where we only consider our own wants and needs and we forget God’s call to care for all. // That’s what happened to the Once-ler. That’s what happens in our consumerist culture. That’s what happens even to us.

What are those things in your life, you believe that everyone needs?

And can you begin to see, the hurt to others caused by greed?

---

"We heard a loud whack!" (Cross)  
I. “Then we heard the tree fall.”  
II. “It is finished.” (John 19:30)

And as we all know, Truffula Trees are a limited resource. Eventually, if no one ever plants more, then all of them will be chopped down. At the very moment when the Once-ler was ranting about biggering his operation, // “we heard a loud whack! From outside in the fields came a sickening smack of an axe on a tree. Then we heard the tree fall. The very last Truffula Tree of them all!”

And without the trees, there would be no more Thneeds to be made. With no more Thneeds, the Once-ler’s family took off: “Now all that was left ‘neath the bad-smelling sky was my big empty factory...the Lorax...and I.”

And with that, the Lorax who had done all that he could to help the Once-ler see the error of his ways, gave a backward glance and lifted himself by the seat of his pants. All that he left in the world that was now a mess was a pile of rocks with one word, UNLESS.

In similar fashion, Jesus did all that he could to teach people the right way to live. Finally, after being rejected time and time again, he hung on the cross and said, “It is Finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30).

A few days later, after rising from the dead, Jesus spoke his final call: follow me, he said. Even after all the rejection and abuse, Jesus’ call was and is the same: “Follow me to freedom, that’s how you play the game.”

“UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot...” (Church)  
I. “It’s a Truffula Seed. It’s the last one of all!”  
II. “He gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:12)

And that brings both of our stories just about to a close, although, they are not finished, not really you know(s). The Once-ler discovered something that day, in talking to the curious boy who came his way: “UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” So what did he do, but throw the boy a seed. The last Truffula seed indeed. And he said:

“You’re in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.  
And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.  
Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.  
Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.  
Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.  
Then the Lorax and all of his friends may come back.”
So what’s the seed that Jesus throws to us? What’s that thing that everyone truly does need in our world?

It’s the invitation to become God’s children, which is so much more than a simple prayer, it’s a radical new way of life if you dare.

“Perhaps the most exciting thing about [the] opening passage [in John’s Gospel] is that we’re in it too: ‘To anyone who did accept him’ (verse 12), [Jesus gave power to become children of God] – that means anyone at all, then and now. You don’t have to be born into a particular family or part of the world. God wants people from everywhere to be born in a new way, born into the family which he began through Jesus and which has since spread through the world. Anyone can become a ‘child of God’ in this sense....”

This truly is the seed that everyone does need.

And Jesus, like the Lorax, left the earth, although he did not leave for good. His Spirit to help he did send and he promised someday to return again. In the meantime, keep on following the way of life that I have taught to you: care for all of God’s creation, love each other with the deepest affirmation.

So there you have it. The Gospel story through the lens of Dr. Seuss’ The Lorax. But lest you think that this is simply a fun exercise, I exhort you my friends to receive this message with great care. Care. That’s the heart of it,

May we first and foremost be people who care a whole awful lot:
- For all of creation, which belongs to God and is not our own
- For all kinds of people, whether they are like us or not
- For all the things that God cares about, that’ll hit the spot

And as we care, even though caring is sometimes unfair, we will play a central role in joining God’s restorative mission, that’s the goal.

After all, biggering isn’t always bad, as long as it’s biggering God’s kingdom tad by tad.

Amen.

If you would like some specific resources on how to better care for creation, please check out the Sermon Blog on the Tabor Website. I also invite you to share your own resources and feedback there.

---