

The Turning Point of History

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson, minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church on the seventh Sunday of Easter, May 24, 1998. Scripture Lessons: Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

How many of us know our ABCs? The English alphabet has 26 letters. The alphabet begins with the letter A and ends with Z. There's an inexhaustible supply of stories in those 26 letters. The entire history of the world can be told using those 26 letters. Long before the English alphabet evolved, the Greeks developed an alphabet of 24 letters. When I was in college I studied classical Greek. The first time I opened a Greek book I wondered how I'd ever make any sense of it. Fortunately, we didn't start with Plato. We started with the alphabet. I was like a little five or six year old child learning her ABCs. I disciplined myself to spend two hours every night memorizing the Greek alphabet until I knew it as well as my ABCs. I knew that unless I mastered the Greek alphabet I'd never get very far in learning the Greek language. *And I never did get very far*

The first letter in the Greek alphabet is Alpha and the last is Omega. We can see those two Greek letters in the middle stained glass window, at the top on the left and right. The *Alpha* looks pretty much like an *A*. The *Omega* looks kind of like a horseshoe. The stained glass window reminds us that Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

1. First, Jesus is the Alpha. The first letter a Greek speaking child learns is Alpha. She'll never read Plato or Sophocles unless she starts at the beginning of the alphabet. *And* ~~But~~ when we learn our ABCs we begin a journey that leads us into

the inexhaustible world of literature and history and poetry.

Now
And if we want to know God Christians claim that we need to begin with Jesus.
Children, for example. Jesus loves no... Missionaries... We don't begin with a general God...
Jesus opens our eyes to the inexhaustible wisdom and knowledge of God. We don't

begin with nature and sunsets. We don't begin with our feelings. We don't begin with mystical experiences. We begin with Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, who was born nearly 2000 years ago in the backwoods of the Roman Empire. He's the Alpha of our knowledge of God. He's where we must begin. For example, do we want to

know about the wrath of God? We need to look at Jesus and the way he expressed his anger.⁴ Do we want to know about the grace and love of God? Begin with Jesus

we need to look at no man whose holiness against sin is taken upon himself
who ate with outcasts and forgave sinners. *Do we want to know what God Thinks of the world? While Jesus, who expresses the love of God for all to experience salvation.*

Without Jesus we'd never know that God is a loving and a suffering God. God is *(In Jesus we discover God)*

like a playwright. God uses words to create a world. God writes an epic story, a

while beginning with the Drama of the world
tragicomedy, and then falls in love with the characters in his story. He loves them so much that he writes himself into his own play. God, the author of the play, enters the play as an infant and puts himself at the mercy of the characters he has created. He allows himself to be tortured and killed in order that the story might have a happy ending for the characters. In Jesus we learn that God does not remain aloof and far off from the world's suffering. In Jesus, God himself takes upon himself the world's suffering. Jesus is the Alpha of our knowledge of God.

Christians believe we can't really know who God is unless we begin with Jesus.

2. But Jesus is also the Omega. He is the final letter in the alphabet. He is *+ no final letter in God's final word -*
God's final word. He is the One who will come at the end of history. The writer of

*Our Father had begun to
send with the River Christ*

the book of Hebrews calls him the "author and finisher of our faith." Jesus, the Word of God, was there at the beginning of history. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Through him all things were created." And Jesus will be there at the end of history. ~~And Jesus was there with us at the beginning of our lives.~~

At no beginning of our lives Jesus was there -

In our baptism, Jesus called us by name and claimed us as his very own. As we grew older we came to trust more and more of ourselves to Jesus Christ. At the end of our lives, Christians believe we will see Christ. He said, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. And I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there you may be also." Jesus will be there at the end of our lives.

Now people will dispute his words. Some people say that at the end of life there's nothing but a grave and eternal oblivion. Others will say that after death we'll be endlessly recycled through reincarnation. Still others say that we'll live only in the memory of others. But the Christian hope is that we'll see Christ at the end of our lives and at the end of history.

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He's the beginning of our knowledge of God. He's God's final word. He's the One who came to save us. He's the One who is coming to establish his kingdom on earth as well as in heaven. He's the One who with the Church and the Holy Spirit invite us to come and drink from the water of

life as a gift. History is His story.

Some of you may be familiar with the story of Scheherazade. She was a beautiful, young, Arabian woman taken by the sultan to be his wife. That was not really very much of a blessing because the Sultan was a deeply selfish, cruel, and dissatisfied person who had the habit of keeping his wives for only one night and then having them killed the next day. But unlike her many unfortunate predecessors, Scheherazade had the wit to save herself. On her wedding night she persuaded the sultan to let her tell him just one story. He became very enthralled with her story, but she stopped right in the middle of it. The Sultan decided to let her live another day so he could learn how the story ended. The next night she finished that story and began another. And so it continued for a thousand and one nights. Scheherazade kept death at bay by telling stories which we have come to know as "The Arabian Nights." Finally, the sultan realized he loved Scheherazade and kept her alive.

In a sense, the world is kept alive by the Christian story. Our story begins and ends with Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Those who live that story are kept alive spiritually by telling the gospel message. Tell the story to your children. Tell the story to your neighbors. Begin and end that story with Jesus. Amen.