

For some reason, things haven't felt the same lately. She seems distant, detached, depressed. After three years of marriage—the best years of their lives—all of a sudden this last month feels different between John and Kim.

Now, at first, John hadn't really noticed. He figures maybe it's a mood swing, perhaps Kim just got busy, or Kim might just have a lot on her mind. But as the days turn to weeks, John starts to sense that something's wrong. Kim isn't texting or calling as much as she used to. She no longer snuggles up with him during romantic comedies or grabs onto him when they watch scary movies. Neither is she very chatty, her chores at home seem to be slipping, and her eye contact is minimal. Picking up on these changes now, John's stomach starts to sink.

One night, he can't stand it anymore. Sitting on the edge of the bed, John motions for Kim to come sit by him. Reluctantly, she comes over, slowly bends, and sinks in next to John. Taking a deep breath, he turns to her and says, "Kim, what's up? What's wrong? You just don't seem like yourself?" There's a long pause. Kim starts to get up, but John grabs her wrist. "Honey, I love you. Please tell me what's going on." Kim doesn't resist this time—she sits down again. Then come the tears. Then the sobs. Then she hides her face in her hands.

Gently, John rubs her back. "It's okay . . . It's okay . . ." he keeps saying over and over. Finally after a few minutes of this, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose, Kim speaks. "I'm so ashamed, I'm so ashamed. I don't deserve you." The hairs on John's neck start to rise—what's coming next? Her voice hoarse, she chokes out the words that John's now dreading. "Remember that party? Y'know, the one last month at Shawna's house? . . . Well, there was this guy there . . . and I'd had a lot to drink . . . and well . . . you know . . ." John is speechless. But then the question swells up inside him and bursts forth—"What do you mean, Kim?" "We kissed, John. We kissed."

John lets out a deep sigh. Looking up at him, with full sincerity, Kim whimpers, "I'm so sorry, John. I'm so, so sorry. I'm so sorry I did this to you. I would understand if you can't be with me anymore." Then come the words John never expected—"You should've never married me—I bet you wish you could do it all over."

I heard something like that while I was teaching Confirmation class once. That day we were covering creation and the fall of man, discussing original sin. I was in the middle of an explanation when a student's hand shot up—they seemed concerned. "Yes." I said. "Pastor, if God knew Adam and Eve were gonna sin and, y'know, ruin the planet—like, bring death and brokenness into the world—then He never should've created them. I mean, God knows everything right, even the future, so why would he allow all that to happen? Why would He make them and also *all of us* if He knew we were gonna sin? Wouldn't He want to do it all over?"

Have you ever thought about that before? How would you have answered that student?

Jump from that Confirmation class now to a world religions class. One of the Open Arms teachers was bothered by something her professor said, and so she came and talked to me. Apparently, she was being taught about the History of Religions, how the earliest ones evolved into the ones we have today. Her teacher seemed to be discrediting Christianity's originality, comparing the Bible's stories to the myths of other ancient religions. For example, they pointed out similarities between our creation account and others, our account of the great flood and other, our story of David and Goliath and others' stories of heroes toppling giants, and so on. But could it be that any likeness between our Bible and those myths doesn't hurt credibility but actually substantiates it?

Think about it—if the Bible is true—if all these events actually happened in real history, then wouldn't similar stories be found in the traditions of other peoples? Their accounts might not be as accurate, but they do go to show that something *did* in fact occur. And, if *our Bible* and *our God* came first before any other civilizations or religions—if we can

trace our roots all the way back to Adam and Eve at creation, that is—then it sounds to me like *those other peoples* actually borrowed from us, *they* were the ones who hijacked *our* faith stories. It just makes sense—Christians aren't the copycats since we would've been there long before. Contrary to popular belief, polytheism never evolved into monotheism, because monotheism has been around since the beginning of time.

But let's compare creation accounts, what we just heard in Genesis this morning to those of the ancient Near East. In the Roman and Mesopotamian worlds, their stories of first things *do* sound close to our biblical account. Like, first, there was a desolate and disordered waste—then came light (Gen. 1:2). Then, a dome appeared, providing space where the rest of creation would take place (Gen. 1:3). Next, dry land was formed (Gen. 1:9-10), followed by the sun, and moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-15). Finally, humans came on the scene (Gen. 1:26-27). Lastly, the gods rested to celebrate their achievements (Gen. 2:3).

But despite any possible similarities, there is one *very big, very important, very glaring* difference. The creation of the world and especially of humanity came about *for them* by a struggle between the gods. Everything is a result of hatred—war and competition and embattlement! For example, if there's a god of rain and a god of sunshine, then the weather simply depends on which god seems to be winning at the time. How different is that from the Bible! Creation for us isn't the result of multiple gods vying for power, but the product of a God *who is love!*

Already in the very first verses of the Old Testament, the Trinity—the great three-in-one—belts out its love in the chorus of creation. There's God the Father opening His mouth to sing. And the refrain on His lips is none other than the Word of the Lord, Jesus Himself. And the Spirit hovering over the face of the waters makes the whole world ring with divine goodness. Out of the coming together in love of the Holy Trinity, a new world births forth out of the darkness and void. But that's nothing until God scoops up some clay, lovingly humming life into man, the object of His affections. Like Father, like son—man stands in God's own image and likeness, his heart dances in rhythm with his Creator's. But what happens when those two hearts—God's and man's—no longer beat as one, when they're no longer in harmony?

Well, any other religion's gods would just give up and move on. That's what happened in the case of the Romans—they reinterpreted the Greek gods for themselves, concluding that since they were now the next great civilization that those gods must now be on their side. But again, let me remind you that there's a very big, very important, very glaring difference between those gods and our God. God is love, and God made man *to* love. And love—*true love*—can't help but put itself out there. It never counts the cost, doesn't mind the risk, can-never-and-will-never think twice.

See, if God made His world where you and I were without the potential for sin, then we could never truly love Him and He could never truly love us. We would be robots, automatons, programmed without freedom—forced to love, which is no love at all. But God would rather genuinely love us, and have us genuinely love Him back, even if it means all the trouble that goes with it. For God so loved the world, God so loved Adam and Eve, God so loves *you and me* so much that—even knowing everything He knows—He still refuses to change a thing, won't scrap it all and just start over, He intentionally has no Plan B. He sticks it out—through thick and thin, for better and for worse—fully aware of the mess He's getting Himself into. No, instead, God so loved the world even, that He sends His one and only Son.

Maybe that's why the Common English Bible translates Genesis 1:1 this way. Not just "In the beginning, God *created* the heavens and the earth," as if it's all over, but "When God *began* to create the heavens and the earth" like He was just getting started. Sure God's first creation was complete on the sixth day, but in Jesus God's still in the construction business. Perhaps that's why John begins his famous gospel the same way Moses began Genesis—"In the beginning," John says. What John's telling us is that in Christ Jesus, God is still busy, actively creating.

Just think—God picks up right where He leaves off on that sixth day and sets out to make a new creation, a re-make, a rebirth. On Good Friday, the sixth day of the week, Jesus hangs on the cross. He bears everything wrong with the world, everything wrong with us since the days of Adam. And as the old creation dies in His flesh, the new emerges. Like labor

contractions, the earth shakes, rocks split, the dead awake. A new creation of forgiveness, and eternal life, and salvation is born. We see it as Jesus rests in the tomb on the seventh day just as God rested, and then on a brand new day (a new one tacked on to the old) our risen Lord steps out Easter Sunday. And ever since, God's been breathing new life into humanity. You and I, the whole Church, is evidence of that.

Just last Wednesday, at Open Arms chapel, we just so happened to talk about Good Friday. I asked the kids, "We know why we might call it Good Friday, why it's good for us. But would Jesus have called it Good Friday?" I mean, it was the day He was crucified, the day He died; how could *He* call that good? Reading through the Story Bible we were using, it said that Jesus could've come down off that cross if He wanted to. He could've called an army of angels to rescue Him, but He didn't. "It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to that cross," that Bible said. "It was love." Remember, God knows all things, He can see into the future, and what Jesus could see was us—beautiful and perfect and back home with Him forever. And because of that, Jesus could indeed call it Good Friday.

Maybe that's enough to satisfy an eighth grade confirmand's curiosity. And today maybe that's enough to satisfy our own.

John turned to look at Kim through misty eyes. His heart was breaking into a million pieces. Only one of the cracks, however, was caused by Kim's confession. All the others were out of John's compassion for her. How could she have said that, he thought? Me, wanting to rethink this marriage? How could she ever think that I'd rather miss these three wonderful years, plus the rest of our lives together, just so I could save myself this one painful moment?

John squeezed her hand. He then took her face in his palms. Looking her right in the eyes he said something with more truth, more sincerity, more purpose than anything he'd ever said before—"I. Love. You. . . . Always have. Always will."

He then took her and led her in front of the vanity mirror. Taking a cloth and some mascara, he fixed her makeup which was streaked with tears. Then, he clasped the diamond pendant around Kim's neck—the one he'd gotten her for their three-year anniversary. And leaning down, he gave her true love's kiss. His face next to hers in the mirror, John said, "I wouldn't take anything back. I'd still do it just the same."