

**Proper 5C  
Galatians 1:11-24  
June 6, 2010**

**Little Kate Hankey could have been like any other privileged London girl in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Her father was a wealthy banker. They lived in a nice part of town. They were faithful members of their local Anglican parish. She could have walked through her life like a princess, with governesses and dancing teachers, parties and ball gowns, finishing school and an advantageous marriage.**

**But little Kate Hankey was not like any other privileged London girl. Her wealthy banker father was also a member of the Clapham Sect, one of the most radical group of Anglicans the world has ever seen, a collection of powerful, connected, philanthropic rabble-rousers who took their faith so seriously, they changed the world.**

**The Clapham Sect included William Wilberforce, Hannah More and the slave-trader turned abolitionist, John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace.” Years later a historian wrote, “Never in the history of Anglicanism has any group exercised so profound an influence.” The Clapham Sect demanded the end of the British slave trade, and later worked to emancipate every British slave in the empire. They fought to improve conditions in prisons, sent missionary teams into slums and around the world, and educated the poor when no other groups would bother.**

**Into this world Kate Hankey was born. A faith community where Jesus was the source and center of life, the reason for being, and the force propelling all this social change. A world where the gospel was not just a good idea, it actually had power -- power to upend the status quo, power to change the world. At 14, Kate herself was setting up schools for working girls, teaching them to read and write. In her 20s, she traveled with missionaries to South Africa, to work as a nurse.**

**In her 30s, she fell desperately ill. She was confined to her bed for a year, unable to teach, or nurse, or even attend church. She had nothing to do but reflect upon her life and all the many ways her faith had formed it. During her convalescence, Kate wrote a 100-verse poem about Jesus, about living a life embedded in Christ and what that story of love and sacrifice and justice and redemption had done for her, a poem she called “The Old, Old Story.” A part of that poem has lived on for years, as the hymn we just sang ... “I love to tell the story, of Jesus and his love.”**

**Then Kate Hankey got up, got better, and went back to work, living out that old, old story in her life, teaching, studying, advocating, until she died at age 77. And although her work is ended, her song still sings on.**

**Young Saul of Tarsus was like any other privileged Jewish man in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. He was a citizen of Rome, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, educated by the finest rabbinical minds of his generation, skilled in athletics, steeped in scripture, a Jew among Jews, a Pharisee among Pharisees. He stood for tradition, for education, for the beauty and discipline of living by Mosaic law. He was compelled to protect his world and his faith, with violence, if necessary.**

**Except that young Saul of Tarsus was not like any other privileged Jewish man. You see, he got caught in the story – the old, old story, told with a brand-new twist. God revealed God’s self to Saul ... the Greek word is actually apocalypse ... God APOCALYPSED God’s self into Saul’s life, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob turned out to be manifest in the person of a cursed, crucified little preacher from Galilee, a man Saul had never met until that moment, a man who seemingly lived in spite of the most ignominious death Rome could provide, a man who made the old, old story ... of creation, fall, exodus, exile, law and prophets ... made that old story make sense. Made it over new. And wrote Saul –now renamed Paul -- right into the narrative.**

**And so Paul's story becomes part of God's story. The one story, the old, old story -- of Jesus and his love. Paul reminds his far-flung, troublesome churches in Galatia about that story. "I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it," he reminds them. "I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors," he reminds them. But God ... who had claimed this zealous young religious terrorist from the very beginning ... "was pleased to apocalypse his son to me," Paul reminds them, "so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" ... the non-Jews, the nations and tribes and peoples and languages who had never yet met the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

**Paul became part of the story. The story whose central character is Jesus. The story whose plot is the narrative arc of self-emptying, nonviolent, redemptive, reconciling love for every single person in the whole world. The story whose climax is the vindication of that same self-emptying love as God raises Jesus from the dead.**

**The story whose epilogue continues through the ages, as one by one, like Paul, like Kate Hankey, like countless others, we too find ourselves written into the narrative, caught up in the plot, empowered and encouraged and inspired by this story to live it out in our own lives, in what we say and in what we do, in what we relinquish and in what we stand up and fight for.**

**So how do you tell that old, old story? How, like Kate Hankey or Saint Paul, do you see your life as something guided and guarded and led by God? How have redemption and resurrection and truth and creation and healing come true in your own story? If someone were to say, "tell me about yourself," would it be a narrative of your own isolation and independence, or would you say, "better still, let me tell you about what God has done in my life"?**

**Because if we had a spiritual sort of ultraviolet light, the kind that forensic detectives wave around a crime scene when they are looking for fingerprints – if we had a transcendental version of that light and shined it into your life, you would find Jesus' fingerprints were all over you, all over your story, all over your joys and sorrows, your highs and lows, your successes and failures. If you shone the light of this story upon your life, you would see amazing things.**

**I know this, because I know you all. I know there are people in this room who were led by God to change their jobs – jobs that weren't good for their families, jobs that weren't good for the world – to pursue new vocations that build up the world instead of draining it dry. I know there are people in this room who could tell us right now how Jesus has walked with them through times of unending darkness and personal struggle, through death, disease, depression – how Jesus walked with them -- even carried them -- through to safety on the other side.**

**I know there are people in this room who like Saul turned Paul, ran into God like running into a brick wall. Who got the message that it was time to change, time to turn around, time to leave behind the bad practices, the addictions, the obsessions of the past. Who realized that it was time to find the light, and then found that Jesus gently stretched out his hand and led them into that light.**

**And I know there are people in this room like Kate Hankey, who grew up knowing God was as close to them as their next breath. They didn't have to get smacked like Paul, because all their lives they have stood on tiptoe, ears pricked to hear the next call from their Savior's lips, ready to respond to someone in need, ready to provide a listening ear, ready to challenge the injustices of this world.**

**And I can tell this old, old story too, of all the times in my life when pain has been turned to joy, when God has landed me in exactly the right spot at exactly the right time, when Jesus has nudged me over and over again to try again, to do it better, to be bigger than I want to be, to speak up when I would rather be silent, and also to shut up when I have spoken too much. I get glimpses, sometimes, of who I might have been if Jesus had not dragged me into his story. And I don't think I would like that person very much at all.**

**As Paul writes in another epistle, "By the grace of God I am what I am and his grace toward me has not been in vain." I am who I am. I am how I am. I am where I am, by the grace of God, because the story is true, because it is actually my life story, because it is actually your life story, OUR life story -- this old, old story ... of Jesus and his love.**