

Story Time
United Church of Broomfield
December 5, 2021

Psalm 78:1-7

1 Give ear, my people, to my teaching; Incline your ear to the utterances of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a proverb; I will utter riddles from of old. 3 Which we have heard and known, and which our mothers and fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their daughters and sons; We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds of SHE WHO SPEAKS LIFE and her might and the wonderful works she has done. 5 She gave her decrees for Rebecca's descendants and placed teaching among Sarah's offspring, which she commanded their mothers and fathers to make known to their daughters and sons. 6 In order that a coming generation, children yet to be, might know, and will rise up and tell their daughters and sons. 7 Then they will put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but will keep her commandments.

Romans 8: 18-25

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the daughters and sons of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the daughters and sons of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Good morning my church family.

When I became the pastor here, almost 5 years ago, I began my first sermon with, "Good morning my church family." It wasn't scripted. It wasn't planned. And, upon reflection, it seemed rather strange because greetings and salutations had already taken place as people entered the church and also when the worship service began. Yet....halfway through our first worship service together with me as your pastor ... as I "stepped up to the pulpit" ... before I began to "preach," I said it. I've begun my sermons thusly ever since, almost without fail. A couple of years ago I began my sermon without saying the traditional, "Good morning my church family," and one of you asked me about it; "I noticed you didn't start your sermon today by saying, "good morning my church family. Any reason for that?"

I was taken aback a little, to be honest. My response? "I don't know."

It gave me pause. While I had never planned to begin my sermons with a standard "good morning" intro, I hadn't actually realized that I was doing it. I mean, I knew I was doing it, but the natural inclination to say that phrase on that first Sunday had taken root in my psyche and in my unconscious routine....and I hadn't really noticed it. But someone else had. And, clearly, that invitation is important and powerful. It begins the story of our faith each week ...

The author of Psalm 78 understands the power of story, and the absolute necessity of it. He understands that we cannot know God without stories; that we cannot know ourselves without them. The psalmist knows that we cannot be the family of God without telling the story of God, passing the story on to each generation.

Advent – a time of waiting and preparing. These are the beginnings of THE STORY that we're anxiously awaiting. Reliving the events of Jesus' birth – of God's inbreaking into the world – through sermons, hymns, prayers, pageants and story.

Things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us, the psalmist writes.

Where does the power of a story lie? What is it about a story that so compels us?

Once upon a time.

Long ago and far away.

In the beginning.

Good morning my church family.

Incantation and enchantment, invitation and initiation.

We speak of getting lost in a story, but part of what draws us to a story is the promise of finding: finding a different world, finding another time, finding ourselves, finding community and new connections with our family – ancestor and those whose births are on the horizon. There is something in us that hungers for a story, an empty space that is shaped precisely to its contours. We reach for the threads that a story offers, we enter the rooms it opens to us, we inhabit the skin of another and somehow, in the hands of a good story, we are returned to ourselves. And we are perhaps holding the threads of our own stories a bit differently, or entering a new space within ourselves, or finding ourselves able to inhabit our own skin more completely....because we re-discover (or sometimes remember) that we are part of a beautiful and wonderful story called creation and it begins with the birth of a holy child.

Elie Wiesel says that God created us because God loves stories.

Give ear, my people

Incline your ear

I have a Proverb for you – riddles of old

The Psalmist, Paul, the Gospel authors and more gave us the Biblical canon that we have today – histories, poems, letters, hymns, psalms, proverbs and parables – because they WILL NOT be hidden from the daughters and sons of creation. Generation upon generation not only NEED to hear these words but WILL hear them. That's what the Psalmist accurately states. These stories WILL be told and WILL be heard.

Paul echoes these same future declarations in our passage from Romans. Despite the divisions that can sometimes occur within families and communities, there is hope for healing and reconciliation. The creation waits and through the stories of Jesus' birth, through the lessons of his life and the parables of his teachings, the creation WILL be set free.

When Christ came (*in the fullness of time*, the story goes), he came as the Word made flesh. A story in motion. And he went into the world with stories on his lips, weaving them everywhere he went.

A sower went out to sow.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers.

There was a man who had two sons.

Suppose one of you has a friend

~~*And, this week, Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*~~

Jesus understood that in a world where it can be so difficult to know God, to know others, to know even ourselves, a story can offer a language, a doorway, a point of entry. He knew how a story can take us a little deeper into knowing, a little farther down the road in our journey of return.

We will not hide them from their children, the psalmist writes in Psalm 78. And perhaps that's where the true power of a good story lies: that it unhides something, reveals something—and someone—we need to know. During Advent, particularly this year as we explore it through the non-traditional Women's Lectionary, we are discovering, hopefully, new aspects of the Advent story that perhaps we've overlooked.

The Advent story WILL continue to reveal to us the hope within us all. It WILL continue to promise us the peace for which we yearn. It WILL continue to bring us the joy that all creation deserves. And it WILL continue to teach us the love that the Christ child brings for all who are part of God's family. We know that the Christ child is coming, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. At this time of year, we tend to want to jump right to Christmas – the inbreaking of God – but if we don't savor, wait and linger in the season of Advent we're missing out on so much that the story offers us.

I'll leave you with a poem by Jan Richardson, called...

Blessing the Story

You might think
this blessing lives
in the story
that you can see,
that it has curled up
in a comfortable spot
on the surface
of the telling.

But this blessing lives
in the story beneath
the story.

It lives in the story
inside the story.
In the spaces
between.
In the edges,
the margins,
the mysterious gaps,
the enticing and
fertile emptiness.

This blessing
makes its home
within the layers.
This blessing is
doorway and portal,
passage and path.
It is more ancient
than imagining
and makes itself
ever new.

This blessing
is where the story
begins.¹

AMEN

¹ <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/11/04/where-the-story-begins/>