

Message for Sunday, June 8, 2025

Title: Stories We Tell

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Welcome

Announcements: Giving Options, Special Offering Peace with Justice (Video)

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: O Lord, your works are wonderful!

P: The earth is full of your handiwork.

L: When you open your hand,

P: we are filled with good things.

L: When you take away our breath,

P: we return to dust.

L: Put your Spirit within us, O God,

P: and renew us as your people.

Unison Prayer:

God of wind and flame, pour out your Holy Spirit on a world in need of Pentecost fire.

Fill your people with courage and power, and set our hearts ablaze, that our young may have visions, and our elders may dream dreams.

Ignite a passion within us to spread the good news of your glorious salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Offering/Song

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up;

a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away;

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a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

L: The word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Message: Stories We Tell

When I was a small child, my mother would tell me stories. Over thirty years later I don't remember the exact details of these stories, but I do remember some of the primary elements which were that we were descendants of kings and queens, exiled and just making our way in the world today and one day we would be brought back to the family kingdom and rule over the kingdom. This story captured my imagination, however this obvious story telling liberty taken by my mother did have some unintended consequences. Apparently when the teacher told me to do something I did not want to do I informed the teacher that I was royalty, and we would be leaving the country soon anyway.

Childhood naivety aside this points to the power of story to shape our world and shape our views. My mother did not intend for me to go to kindergarten or first grade and refuse to do schoolwork because of our royal lineage. Instead, she had created a story to pass the time, to engage the imagination and to encourage me to be a better individual. As I have gotten older I have had continual reminders of the power of stories and what stories can show us. From the horrors of the world to the wonders of deep space, the quiet introspection of a life examined and experienced to the boisterous posturing of theological and philosophical positions. Stories shape us fundamentally as individuals and define our place in the communities in which we participate.

Growing up with both physical and learning disabilities I have always found solace in stories, and as a pastor and theologian I have found that stories are the medium I work in and the medium I find much of our lives to revolve around. I have often experienced parishioners who cordon off parts of their lives from other parts, not stopping to see how the two weave together in the story of their lives. This has often concerned me because the driving need in American culture to segregate and separate religious from secular, private from public, spirit from body has caused a significant disconnect in people's lives as they struggle to make sense of their world and reality.

When people experience a breakdown between these artificial barriers in their lives, they have difficulty placing themselves in a healthy relationship with whatever caused the breakdown.

An example of this happening can be a sudden onset illness that causes a disability. Or the birth of a child or grandchild with a disability. When life has been cleaned and segregated so that the individual as the main character of the story has not had to deal with issues of these sorts, they will struggle to have a healthy response. A sudden onset illness is the result of their actions or inactions. A disabled family member is a result of poor genetics, and the future is projected for its potential difficulties instead of its possible potential.

I have been victim to this as well. I was taught as a child that my disabilities made me no different than anyone else. That I could do anything anyone else could and that is patently not true. In fact, the truth is far more complex than that, the truth is that I can both do what others do and not do what others do. The only way I find this becomes apparent is through the telling of stories. When you start to thread your life together as a story then you find how all the pieces begin to fit. For instance, I became a pastor, one who's role often involves a significant amount of careful listening. This is sometimes not always possible. I have been able to hear and counsel people in perfect environments, but then I have been at death beds, surrounded by beeping machinery and breathing apparatuses, where you cannot say "please speak up." Trying desperately to hear someone's final words that they wish communicated to their family.

When I began working on the theological concept of disability, looking to address the lived reality of my own life and experience, what I came across immediately is the innate need to share our stories. Most of you all have known me for 7 years now. You know that I am not too shy about sharing my stories, especially if I think it will help us learn a spiritual truth or make a point in a message. Everything I just talked about is important for the thesis I am writing for school. What I am looking at is how stories impact how we share our faith, and disabilities in particular; hence sharing some of these more personal stories.

I have spent a lot of time lately thinking about stories and the stories we choose to share. How those stories influence who we are, what we believe and how we interact as believers. I have made off handed statements over the past about how the Bible is

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stories of our faith. I have often viewed scripture as stories that we share about God, about community, and about how we are to live together. In the course of thinking about stories as I mentioned though I do spend time thinking about why we share certain stories and not others. I do not have any answers to offer up to you today on this, at least none that only take a short amount of time to talk about. Instead, I want you to reflect on your own story.

You see how we interact with our stories is crucial to how we develop as people and how we develop as a faith community. The stories we reflect on, like focusing on Jesus' life as opposed to Old Testament law, influence us deeply. This is not to say sharing about Old Testament law is not important but to say that the stories we repeatedly tell ourselves are the stories that get lived out in our lives.

I know today's message is not one that is heavily biblical, hey it is my birthday sermon so as most of you know I preach on things that I feel are important. I invite you to think about your story. How did you get to this point in your life? When you tell your story how has God been involved? Where do you see your story going and where do you think you will end up? God cares deeply about stories, that's how God has chosen to reveal Gods self all throughout history. Lets tell our stories together today. Amen.

Lord's Prayer/Pastoral Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song/Goodbye