

ONE STORY

Here is an allegory about a congregation of geese.

Pastor Gander waddled up to the pulpit one Sunday, and began a fiery sermon. "What kind of birds are we?" he thundered.

"Geeses! Amen!" the people yelled back.

"And, what are these things that God has given us, these majestic appendages?"

"Wings" shouted the congregation.

"Why did God give us these fine wings?" the pastor bellowed.

"To fly, Pastor, to fly!" they sang out.

"That's right!" The pastor really started to roll now.

"God wants us to fly. We are God's flying children! The gophers can dig, the lions can hunt, but we can Fly! We can catch the wind beneath our wings, and we know how to fly together in order to go a very long way. We can fly together!"

"Amen! We can fly together" the congregation honked back.

"If God wants us to fly together, then what shall we do?" the pastor asked.

"We'll fly. we'll fly together for God" they all yelled.

After the worship service, the congregation, chatted to each other about how inspiring the sermon had been..Then,...they each waddled out of the church, and walked separately to their own homes.

They heard and understood the message, but for some reason,...it just didn't take -- it didn't take hold.

Repetition helps--we remember better if we hear or read something over and over, and that is why the lectionary passages cycle every three years. Yet, repetition will not guarantee that something will stick in our minds and thoughts.

We did not read or highlight one of the lectionary passages, and that one is the familiar lesson in I Corinthians 12:12-31 about how all the parts are necessary for the whole. Paul uses the analogy of the parts of the human body to show how we all need each other to make a church body whole -- the living body of Christ.

Many of us have heard this lecture a hundred times. Paul states that

we are each given "gifts" to contribute to the church--the body, and each are important. The body wouldn't work if all the members were feet; each part contributes. And, if the feet refuse to participate then the body struggles to move,... and so forth.

We know this and affirm it, yet agreeing and knowing is not enough.

So, for more insight, we'll look at the Old Testament passage.
But first, a trivia question: who was the shortest person in the Bible?

Nehemiah..... Knee-high.... miah..... get it?

From the Nehemiah text:

All the people gathered together, outside in the open air, by the water gate to listen to Ezra read the laws of Moses--the Pentateuch.

To celebrate the restoration of the temple and the wall, they listened to laws being read and explained to them.

Why? because they loved to hear the rules?

A legal refresher course was their way of having fun?

Far from it. They were no different than we are today. For the most part, they ignored the laws unless they got caught or became a victim.

Laws are boring, even when interpreted.

It was about the laws. They were celebrating by listening to the stories that framed the laws; it was their story, and the reading of the Mosaic laws was a ritual, too--a re-enactment that was also part of their story.

As the laws were read and interpreted, they lifted up their hands and bowed down. They heard the message: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods besides me",.... and embracing this story / joining into the story caused the people to weep.

They entered the old story; They became the story. It was their story,..... and they felt it in their hearts.

During our Winter Study, that was about how to use the Bible, we were reminded that the power and truth in the Bible are not the facts and the little details, but rather the stories. The Biblical stories invite us in and become alive and change because we are part of the story.

Truth is in the Biblical Stories, and with God's Spirit, the stories pull us in by touching our emotions. Emotions / the will is what motivates us to apply what we know.

And, stories are the glue that holds all the parts together--the parts that form the church.

In the Luke passage, Jesus launched his ministry by reading in the synagogue and quoting from Isaiah 61 and 58.

He ended the reading with, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour", which is Isaiah language for the messianic age.

Jesus pulled from the past, from the prophet's story about the coming Messianic age. This was also the people's story; they were waiting for that time to come / to happen.

After Jesus read the passage, which was always done standing up, he then handed the scroll to the attendant, who was called a "Chazan."

The Chazan, as was his duty, returned the scroll to the rack, and Jesus sat down.

Normally, a synagogue leader, while sitting, would give a sermon to interpret the day's reading; however, something different happened this time.

Jesus ended the reading by giving the interpretation himself. He declared, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus was saying, "I am the Messiah. I AM the one in the story."

Jesus claimed the story and invested himself, without hesitation,... and... a new story began. An old story was given, new life and became the Gospel Story.

To be sure, there is much more that can be said about this and the message in those Isaiah quotes, but I want to focus in on the personal investment of Jesus putting himself into the story of the people. He owned that story and all the implications and meanings.

And, that is what we are invited to do..... in order to understand God's word... God's message and mission for our own lives.

We are given stories to invest in / to own / to bring alive with our lives..... so that we can better grasp what is going on,... so that we can sense God's Spirit.

We continue the Gospel story with our story. We keep it alive, by breathing life into it / by being in the story. Thus, the story keeps changing.

It is the putting ourselves, **our story** into the story--Our Personal investment / our gifts that synthesizes our Part into the whole.

Our honest, commitment / surrender / investment in this thing we call church is the catalyst in the process that turns the parts into one body.

So,..... what does this mean "Our Story"? ????

It is us -- our lives -- you and me.

We each have a story; it is who we are.

Your story could include, seeding again after heavy rains drowned your seeds.

Or it could be cussing and cursing as you seed again, after heavy rains drowned your seeds.

It may be getting up in the morning, starting another day bearing the weight of the heavy burden of grief.

It could be sharing a great game played, or a sharing a disappointing game.

It could be, in spite of a busy life, volunteering with MCC, the Thrift Store or someplace else.

It could be agreeing to be on a committee when you doubt your qualifications or available time..... oragreeing to serve again, in spite of your age.

Your story may be going to work every day to provide for your family.

Your story may be dreams of a family, or memories of a family or being in a family.

Your story may be about school and the upcoming ski trip.

Your story could be your ability to sense pain..... or it may be your devotion to prayer..... or commitment to come to church on Sunday.

Part of my story is my passion for peace and justice.

And,.... I have to share it or... I'm not sharing / giving myself,... and if I'm not giving my passion, then something is missing from the whole.

So,..... share your story! Share Your passion. Invest yourself, your gifts..... and the claim the stories --all the stories.

This sermon is a reminder and... an affirmation.. because we do story.

We do share our stories.

Our children's drawings / art work posted is our story.

This building is a story: how it came about; how and why it is laid out the way it is.

We are "still" in the process of putting together the heritage room, and we need to finish that.....

because it will present stories of the past, including immigration stories, that are not in everyone's past, yet all of us need to learn those stories and hear them.

Moreover, Sundays are full of stories.

Our music is story, as are our rituals and prayers.

We often have a segment called "our story", and we invite all to share their stories of joys and concerns.

{We heard a number of them this morning}

Today, we added a different twist to our worship service story. That story was refreshed for today.

In addition, we will, as we do each Sunday, share our stories in the gathering room, after the service.

And, Sunday School is telling and being in old stories.

Blanket making is part of our story, too, as is our youth ministry, and so on...

Perhaps, some of us here don't talk that much... or attend simply out of habit.

Well,..... we need habit people --hobbits, and simple *presence* forms our story, too.

We need unspoken stories / tacit stories. They can be very enriching, and humbling.
And, we need protest stories, too. Some are not content with the twists in the plot,..... and that is okay...
and part of the story.

So, Why do we tell stories?

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We tell stories to remind ourselves of who we are and to tell others who we are and how we got here.

We tell stories to maintain the identity of a family or tribe, to pass on knowledge or wisdom, to create a sense of meaning, and to make sense of what is being experienced.

We tell stories to see the path that has been taken and that we are taking.

We tell stories:

to explain how things came to be;

to explain how we came to be and why we feel the way we do.

We tell stories:

to explain the nature of our reality;

to explain how to live a better life;

to entertain and laugh;

to keep us from being victims or captives, and to communicate emotions.

We tell stories because we've been entrusted with a story to tell that is worth telling. It is a story that makes us whole, and it includes ourselves.. IN the Gospel Story.

To be sure, we listen and tell stories because God's love inspires us with passion and compassion to see God in every story...in each person. We want to share and learn.

As long as we continue to tell our story, we will never have to worry about our children or losing the Anabaptist passion,.... and we'll never have to worry about the Gospel message losing its power.

So,... tell your story; be yourself, invest yourself, we need it; you need it, too

Most importantly, be honest. Share your hopes, failures, frustrations, fears, disappointments and delights... because OUR story, the Gospel story is NOT a myth. It's true, real and alive, and it is what gives us life and hope.

And, please don't tarnish it with fluff, lofty church talk and wishful thinking.

The Body needs All of its parts -- warts and all. We need the "whole" story, anything less than all the truth hurts the wholeness,... AND...holds back the tears.

We live in a world full of lies, greed, deception, violence and broken stories. Too many people are alone, helpless, weak and with no one to hear their story or to invite them into a better story.

God has given us a story. Christ is in that story, and so are we.
It is a living, dynamic story for us / with us.....and it is a story worth sharing.

We don't tell fairy tales.

We share / our lives share... who we are, and it doesn't have to be pretty.... just honest / just the truth.
God is love and God is in the truth, and that's the story for today.