

“Again, again!” he says. “Just one more chapter?” they ask.

These are the repeated pleas at the end of story time before bed each night in our house. For each of us, the reader as well as the listener, this half hour is holy time. The value of our storytime is in the cuddling; the time and space set apart, free from distraction, to spend with one another; and perhaps most importantly, the shared experience of the adventures authors take us on. We were all impacted by Wilbur's grief in *Charlotte's Web*, fascinated by Mary Lennox's bold curiosity in the *Secret Garden*, and grateful Margaret asked real question in *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret*. Lois Lowry, Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton, and JK Rowling spin their tales of adventure (and misadventure) capturing the attention of all of us, and providing lots of discussion fodder over moral quandaries and mundane experiences, triumph and failure, joy and guilt, and lots of imaginings over what we might've done in similar circumstances. Thanks in large part to bedtime stories, our family shares a common vocabulary to discuss some of the hard topics: puberty, managing hard dynamics with friends, standing up for what we believe in, and life after failure. As a family, we have been shaped by the stories we've shared during that sacred half hour before bedtime.

I recently stumbled across an article online from the The New York Times Sunday Review. A man named Henning Mankell wrote that “a truer [name] for our species than *Homo sapiens* [or thinking creatures] might be *Homo narrans*, [that is, story-telling creatures].” Mankell's argument is not that the biologists are wrong or that we are not thinking creatures, but it is that we are also – and maybe even primarily – story-telling creatures. We make sense of the world and our place in it through story. It is how we create meaning. It is how we interpret reality. It is how we come to know **who** we are and **why** we are. It is why when we enter a story that we know is good and true and life-giving, we hug the book to ourselves, and think “what time is it? Yeah, ok, perhaps just one more chapter.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/opinion/sunday/in-africa-the-art-of-listening.html>

This evening, we have revisited some of the classic stories of our faith tradition ~ each telling of God's. These are the stories that have built upon one another in the collective conscience of God's people: stories of divine fidelity, continued relationship, and abiding mercy. They tell of a people whose hearts and minds intermittently wander ~ who long to abide in the heart of God, yet need reminding that God abides within their own hearts. And it is through these same stories that **we** begin to realize just how blessed we are.

The power of God's might and the overwhelming grace of God's mercy has spoken to those who have heard these stories for thousands of years. Our ancestors committed them to memory so as to revisit them time and again. Thanks to their commitment to being divine Story-Keepers and eventually recording them for future generations, we have them as our inheritance (and through them) we discover sacred Truth. They have shaped our understanding of who we are, who God is, and how we abide in holy relationship with God.

It's worth noting that many of the greatest hits of Scripture are the ones with shock value – the ones that highlight the struggle of God's people to remain faithful: they act as allegories for the dilemmas we face ~ the Israelites breaking their promises to God, prophets running away from what they knew God was calling them to, and those who struggled to see the good in their neighbor, or desperate to find hope in situations that seemed utterly hopeless.

Mankell states, "What differentiates us from other animals is that we can listen to other people's dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, desires and defeats – and they in turn can listen to ours."<sup>2</sup> When we dare to share our own stories, we find that we are not alone in our journey – many others have trod through what to us is unfamiliar territory. Grief, doubt, failure, guilt, fear, passion, joy, hope, grace ... none of these are new to God or God's people.

It has been said that "it is through storytelling that people possess a past."<sup>3</sup> But, it works both ways. In storytelling, we possess a past, but that past possesses us, too. It's through storytelling that we discover our own identity.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/opinion/sunday/in-africa-the-art-of-listening.html>

<sup>3</sup> John Niles in *Homo Narrans*.

This whole liturgy tonight is an embodiment of that. We tell story after story after story to remind us **who** we are, **whose** we are and **how** we have come to be. *Each story* is a reminder of the identity of God's people. *Each story* is a testament to the enduring and faithful love of God. *Each story* is another invitation to take our place (once again) in the good work of God in the world.

At our baptisms, we were immersed in not just water, but in the sacred stories of God's love for God's people as well. "The early church fathers [and mothers] compared the waters of baptism to the [waters of creation], the Red Sea waters [through which the Hebrew people were delivered from Egypt], the water from the rock [at Horeb for which the wandering Israelites thirsted], the water in which Naaman was immersed [and healed], the water of Mary's womb, the Jordan River [in which Jesus Himself was baptized], the living water promised to the woman at the well in Samaria, the healing pool of Bethsaida, the water from the side of Christ, and the waters of Paradise."<sup>4</sup> As the love and grace, peace and mercy of God transform us in the baptismal waters, we are made part of the story of what God has done in the world. And in the reaffirmation of covenant, we tell the story again (profess it again), thereby binding ourselves to it - again.

Through these stories, we are blessed with a lifetime of revisiting the miracle of creation, with the implications of the great flood, and with the challenges of sacrifice. We get to vicariously experience life under pharaoh and deliverance through the Sea. We get to look forward to enduring friendships with Abraham and Sarah, with Moses and Miriam, with Jonah and Job and Samuel, with Ruth and Naomi, with Peter and Paul, with Mary and Martha, with all the saints down through time. We inherit a lifetime of encounters with the God that these stories proclaim. We are so blessed!

And each time the stories get told, we celebrate them ~ and we wrestle with them, too. We struggle with the mysterious ways of God. In the more difficult parts, we try to discern words of life, however faint they may sound. And in the overtly redemptive parts, we wonder how we, too, with all our faults, could be among those who find favor with God. In the telling of the stories, the past lays claim to us and we lay claim to it. And so we tell them again.

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<sup>4</sup> Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the Prayer Book*, p 253.

And yet, it is not just the past that lays claim, it is not just the ancient work of God that lays claim to any of us tonight, because through story – through the particular story of Easter – God’s future lays claim to us in the here and now, as well.

We hear in the Gospel story this evening that Jesus, after his resurrection, is going before the disciples to Galilee. He is on the move. He is moving forward. And we are invited to follow. We, too, get to move forward into the future that God has dreamt for us.

We are so blessed! We know how the story goes ~ we know that Jesus is no longer on that cross. *We know* that he defeated death and fear and darkness of every kind. *We know* that heaven and earth are joined and humanity is reconciled to God. *We know* that God’s kingdom is one of light, love and grace. Because of God’s ever-evolving holy story ~ in which we play a crucial role ~ *we know* that come Hell or high water, we are God’s beloved children.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!