

QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

This past Sunday—1.14.18—we examined the first two chapters of *The Story We Find Ourselves In*. The concept of “story” as a framework for understanding life might be new to you. So, read aloud the following quotes aloud and discuss them using the following question.

- What insights do these quotes provide into the nature of story, life, hope, faith, etc.?

Existence has a story shape. The most adequate rendering of the world in words is by storytelling. It is the least specialized and most comprehensive form of language. Everything and anything can be put into the story. And the moment it is in the story it has meaning, participates in plot, is somehow or other significant. (Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*)

I had always believed...that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller. (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*)

We have a beginning and an end, we have a plot, we have characters. We are not journalists—rather, we accumulate meaning. If we put it in the larger framework, God has a story. The Scriptures are given to us in the shape of a story. (Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*)

Christians have recognized the power of story ever since the ministry of Jesus himself. The Scriptures Jesus used (the Old Testament) are overwhelmingly narrative—well over 75 percent. The gospel is at its core a story—God acting in history to reveal his love by saving humans. Jesus consistently used parables to communicate truth. Abstract proposition was not his trade. Rather, compelling stories triggered the reason, imagination, and emotion of his listeners as they were invited to deepen their faith and understanding. (Catherine Barsotti & Robert Johnston, *Finding God in the Movies*)

In modern Greek cities, the word for mass transportation vehicles—whether buses, trams, or trains—is *metaphorai*. That is to say, one takes a “metaphor” if one wants to go from one place to another. By telling their stories, movies give us a “ride,” they fill us with the dreams, hopes, and fears of others, enabling us to move from here to there. (Catherine Barsotti & Robert Johnston, *Finding God in the Movies*)

All the great literature offers entrée into the story we find ourselves in—through stories of good and evil, love and hate, pride and repentance, fear and courage. Sometimes, we become so familiar with the primal sacred story of the Bible that we need some fresh takes on it, telling us the same thing in different ways, or giving us some new vantage points to see what was always there, things we’d missed before. (Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*)

We’re still living in the same crisis. There used to be one world, one story. But now, we’ve separated ourselves. We’ve moved out of the world and that story and struck off on our own. We’ve broken the robust dynamic harmony of goodness, so men and women struggle in conflicted relationships, like Adam and Eve. New economies arise and compete, often with lethal results, like Cain and Abel. Languages and cultures strive for dominance, as at the Tower of Babel, and civilizations develop in the flood plain of complete chaos and self-destruction. We’ve mucked up the story. That’s the crisis, the crisis we find ourselves in. (Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*)

Storytelling creates a world of presuppositions, assumptions, and relations into which we enter. Stories invite us into a world other than ourselves, and, if they are good and true stories, a world larger than ourselves. Bible stories are good and true stories, and the world that they invite us into is the world of

God’s creation and salvation and blessing.... Within the large, capacious context of the biblical story we learn to think accurately, behave morally, preach passionately, sing joyfully, pray honestly, obey faithfully. But we dare not abandon the story as we do any or all of these things, for the minute we abandon the story, we reduce reality to the dimensions of our minds and feelings and experience. The moment we formulate our doctrines, draw up our moral codes, and throw ourselves into a life of ministry apart from a continuous re-immersion in the story itself, we walk right out of the presence and activity of God and set up our own shop. (Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*)

It is significant, I think, that in the presence of a story, whether we are telling it or listening to it, we never have the feeling of being experts—there is too much we don’t yet know, too many possibilities available, too much mystery and glory. Even the most sophisticated of stories tends to bring out the childlike in us—expectant, wondering, responsive, delighted—which, of course, is why the story is the child’s favorite form of speech; why it is the Holy Spirit’s dominant form of revelation; and why we adults, who like posing as experts and managers of life, so often prefer explanation and information. (Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality*)

Stories have enormous power for us, and I think that it is worth speculating why they have such power. Let me suggest two reasons. One is that they make us want to know what is coming next, and not just out of idle curiosity either because if it is a good story, we really want to know, almost fiercely so, and we will wade through a lot of pages or sit through a lot of endless commercials to find out.... That brings me to the second reason why I think stories have such power for us. They force us to consider the question, “Are stories true?” Not just, “Is this story true?” —was there really an angel? Did he really say, “Do not be afraid”? —but are any stories true? (Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*)

One of the remarkable qualities of the story is that it creates space. We can dwell on a story, walk around, find our own place. The story confronts but does not oppress; the story inspires but does not manipulate. The story invites us to an encounter, a dialogue, a mutual sharing. (Henri Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*)

Jesus’ story cuts against the grain of every heroic story from its time. The myths from Babylon, Greece, and elsewhere celebrated strong heroes, not weak victims. In contrast, from the very beginning Jesus took the side of the underdog: the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the “marginalized.” Indeed, Jesus chose to be born in poverty and disgrace, spent his infancy as a refugee, lived in a minority race under a harsh regime, and dies as a prisoner, unjustly accused. (Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God*)

The story the Psalms tell is the story Jesus came to complete. It is the story of the creator God taking his power and reigning, ruling on earth as in heaven, delighting the whole creation by sorting out its messes and muddles, its injuries and injustices, once and for all. It is also the story of malevolent enemies prowling around, of people whispering lies and setting traps, and of sleepless nights and bottles full of tears.... We are called, then, to stretch out the arms of our minds and hearts, and to find ourselves, Christ shaped, cross shaped, at the intersection of the past, present, and future of God’s time and our own time. This is a place of intense pain and intense joy, the sort that perhaps only music and poetry can express or embody. The Psalms are gifts that help us not only to think wisely about the overlaps and paradoxes of time, but to live within them, to reach out in the day of trouble and remind ourselves—and not only ourselves, but also the mysterious one whom the Psalms call “you”—of the story in which we live. Past, present, and future belong to him. We are called to live, joyfully and painfully, in the story that is both his and ours. Our times are in his hands. (N.T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms*)