



Worship 31 January

Welcome

Welcome to our Cadbury Pastorate worship on this fifth Sunday of the month and fourth Sunday of the Epiphany season. In “normal” times we would have gathered for a joint worship in one of our churches but with the three churches closed for the time being we find ourselves worshipping together *every* week, that is, in spirit while still physically distanced. And doing so we continue to draw closer together.

This week, from the 30th of January to the 6th of February is “National Storytelling Week,” a week to raise awareness of the art, practice and value of storytelling. Perhaps you did not know this, and neither did I until I happened to come across a calendar with all the days and weeks that are designated to raise awareness about certain past events, present issues, etc.

We have a story to tell, based on the story of the Bible which is a “collection of stories of Ancient Israel and the early Christian community,” a “grand narrative of our faith,” “the greatest story of all time,” a “love story in which we are invited to take part”.....

This lectionary year we read through the gospel of Mark. Mark is a storyteller, not a reporter. He writes a fast-paced story of Jesus in which he draws us in; he invites us to journey with Jesus and we are encouraged to respond to “the good news of Jesus Christ.”

My reflection today is a reading from a book written by Nico ter Linden, for many years minister of the Westerkerk in Amsterdam (the church in which, among other famous people, Rembrandt is buried). His sermons were a retelling of the story of the Bible, doing so in a wonderful though unconventional way. The church was packed and the series of books he wrote, “The Story Goes,” became instant bestsellers.

Let us worship God! And our opening hymn seems to fit the theme of storytelling as we sing of knights, giants and dragons and faith as our shield.

Hymn

When a knight won his spurs

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, by your Spirit you have called us, in Christ you have united us. Open our eyes, our ears, our minds; open our imagination to your presence and to your love.

Examine my heart and remove all that prevents compassion: arrogance, fear, greed.

Enlighten my understanding and give me all that makes for discernment: wisdom, patience, kindness.

Enliven my imagination and inspire the gifts that bless: generosity, courage, creativity. Even as you know us, make yourself known to us. Amen.

(Psalm 47 in Psalms Redux, Carla Grosch-Miller)

Scripture Reading

Mark 1: 21-28

Reflection

As the story goes.....In the synagogue of the fishing village the people of God gather round the scriptures, and the service goes as the service always goes: it's all very familiar. So the only difference makes a difference: someone has come with Simon and Andrew, a man from Nazareth. Not a well-known place in those days. But when after reading from the Torah and the Prophets, according to ancient custom they ask whether anyone want to say anything, this stranger, of all people, stands up to expound the scriptures. The people who hear him will never forget it all their lives. Silence falls on the house of God. *They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.* The man from Nazareth talks about Moses and Elijah, so impressively and compellingly that it's just as if Moses and Elijah were there in person. Sabbath by sabbath the people sit here, in their synagogue. That's their custom: it's tradition, and it's a good tradition. Always the same group: the rabbi, the cantor, the caretaker and the schoolmaster, the fishermen, the craftsmen and the tradespeople, the women, the children – and of course there's also the village fool, who now and then shouts out something but then is quiet again. Everyone knows everyone else, and they all know the Torah and the Prophets. Here words from the old days are spoken; it's good to hear them again, and people comfort themselves with the old promise:

one day the Messiah will come; one day the messianic kingdom will dawn. And of course they believe that, firmly and truly. Or has some of the passion gone? Is it still news? But now! It seems as if this stranger has seen heaven open. What a fabulous child of God he is! They've never heard anyone speak with such warmth about the Eternal One and about human beings; they drink in the words of the man from Nazareth. Everyone feels, 'This is about me, this is about us.' Who is this man? His voice, his words, his eyes are all so different. The scribes talk about God. This man has a touch of God himself! *They were dumbfounded and said, 'What is this? A new teaching!'* A shock went through Capernaum; their teaching had suddenly grown old, because a new teaching had come. Or is it still the old teaching, but experienced and told afresh, so that a healing power goes out from it? So the story goes.....

Ter Linden continues to write: Teaching always has an element of danger, whether it's Jewish teaching, Christian teaching or any other kind. Faith never begins with teaching. Teaching sometimes puts an end to it. Faith begins, as with Moses, when life becomes a burning bush, or when, like Elijah, we hear God in the rustling of a gentle breeze. Faith begins with people on our way who give us eyes to see and ears to hear with. We always get faith from someone.....

In this Storytelling Awareness Week let us remember who told us the stories that have opened our eyes and ears and let us share our personal, unique stories of life and faith so that others will see the burning bushes in the world and hear the voice of God in the gentle breeze.....Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn We are one in the Spirit

Prayers & Lord's Prayer

Storytelling God, write your story upon our hearts in this time of prayer. Tell us again of the beauty of your creation, of your presence in every breeze and every breath, of your love in all of life. Write upon our hearts your story of the living stone that is the foundation for the place where all are welcome and accepted. We hold on to your story, grateful in the knowledge that we live and move in your story as you participate in ours. We thank you for eyes to

see and ears to hear your story of love lived out in care and compassion for the young and the old, for the sick and suffering during the pandemic, for the traumatized by natural disasters, for those who are discriminated against because of colour, creed, sexuality or ability, for the poor, the homeless and all who are anxious and depressed. May we tell your story through the way we live and speak and respond to those in need. And when we despair that health and healing, peace and justice, may never come, when we feel lost in all that is unknown, may we hold on to your story, that you too are supremely unknown yet you know every one and you know every story. You name us. You hold us and all of creation in your hand. You continue to live out your story of faithfulness. Let your story be full of life within us and within the world, we pray in Jesus' name. And we say together....OUR FATHER

Offering

Take our gifts, our witness, our lives, O God, that we may tell your story of love and the good news of peace and justice in the world.
Amen.

Hymn

Tell out my soul

Blessing

Let us go forward to tell the good news.....
in the power of the love of God
in the company of Jesus Christ
and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Amen.