

## “THIS IS MY STORY”

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We are continuing in the season of Epiphany,  
looking at how God is revealed.

We have already looked at God’s revealing work in a number of ways.  
Now, I’d like to step back from specific Bible stories,  
and look at the larger story that is the Bible.

We have heard some Bible passages read and recited this morning.  
My guess is that what you heard may have been familiar to you.

Nehemiah 8 and Luke 4 should be familiar  
because Pastor Phil preached on these passages  
as recently as October 18  
as a part of the series about being church in smaller,  
more intimate and accountable communities.

You may recall that Phil spoke  
on the importance of interpreting scripture -  
not on your own,  
but in the context of a community.

That continues to be an important point to hold on to.

Now, allow me to change gears a bit.

Children and youth,

I have some questions for you.

I need you to raise your hands for me so we can see where you are.

Ok, now put them down.

How many of you have heard the story about God creating the world?

Have you heard the story of Joseph and his many-colored coat?

David and Goliath?

Jesus walking on the water?

Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana?

You better know that one, Pastor Barbara just preached about it last  
Sunday!

Adults, you all know those stories,  
and probably many, many more.

You probably know some stories from the Bible that I don’t remember.  
Many of you - children, youth, and adults,  
have memorized verses from the Bible,  
or maybe even whole chapters or books!

We value the Bible.

The Bible is what we believe to be God’s story,  
telling us about who God is and what God wants us to be.

We reference the Bible as we attempt to discern -  
in community

how God is calling us to live in our unique context.

But many of us have a nagging suspicion  
that our biblical grounding is slipping.

According to one source,

81 % of American Christians surveyed thought the saying  
“God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse.

Jay Leno questioned some people

who thought that phrase was one of the 10 Commandments.

And many thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

Beyond biblical illiteracy,

for those of us who do read the Bible,

ok, for ME when I read the Bible,

I sometimes wonder why a particular story was included in the Bible.

What does it mean?

Wouldn’t the Bible have been better without some of the gruesome  
stories?

In Nehemiah 8,

the city walls and gates of Jerusalem had just been rebuilt.

Israel was in exile.

This small group remaining in Jerusalem had forgotten their story.

When Ezra brought out the Book of the Law,

people were amazed.

They were weeping at what they heard.

Now, it also says that they didn’t understand what they were hearing  
and the Levites went out and helped them to understand.

We need to hear the Bible story,

and like the remnant in Jerusalem,  
we need help in understanding what we are hearing.

In October of last year,  
I went to Hesston College, in Kansas,  
to participate in a conference titled:  
Learning the Bible in Life-giving Ways:  
History, Hooks, and Heilsgeschichte.  
For years, Marion Bontrager and Michelle Hershberger  
have been teaching this as a required course  
to all students at Hesston.  
My experience this weekend was powerful.  
I was helped to understand -  
and put together –  
what I have been reading in the Bible.

I'd like to break now, from giving a sermon,  
and invite you to listen in on a conversation.  
Kim and Eric, would you join me up here?  
Kim and Eric Schmucker graduated from Hesston College  
almost 4 years ago.  
While there, they both participated in the Bib Lit class  
that Marion and Michelle teach.  
We'll talk a bit about that class.

What does Heilsgeschichte mean?  
What impact did this course have on you?  
Talk a bit about the content of the course, or the outline that people have  
in their bulletins.  
What does it mean that this is your story?

How do we approach the Bible?  
It is not simply a book of verses that we should learn.  
It is not a book of ideas and theology,  
which we simply need to learn in a rote manner  
so as to have “right” beliefs.  
The Old Testament isn't just an extended genealogy of Jesus,  
outlining the family into which he was born?  
Nor is it just a series of books with shadowy references

pointing to Jesus?  
The Bible is certainly not a book about a God  
who deals with puppet-like people,  
pulling their strings and making them act at God's whims.  
Do we view the Bible as being written by God,  
a book that is perfect,  
without error or contradiction,  
a book that is an exact history,  
and a science book following modern scientific approaches?  
I would say “No.”

Can we take the perspective that the Bible was written, edited,  
and collected by diverse people who were inspired by God?  
The writing and editing occurred with divine inspiration,  
but the writing and editing occurred in a particular historical context,  
with a vocabulary, concepts, strengths, and weaknesses  
that were unique to that context.

As we read the Bible,  
look at it as the story of God's good creation,  
and of human rebellion toward God.  
In this story, God, with amazing grace  
and a dogged persistence that defies logic,  
works to solve the problem of sin.  
This is a story of God's dynamic interaction with humans  
humans who, at times, show amazing faithfulness  
and at other times, remarkable faithlessness.

It's my story,  
because the story does not end with the book of Revelation.  
It is a story that rolls on through history, full of love.  
May God continue to be revealed  
through our reading of the Bible,  
and may we continue to find ourselves  
placed firmly within that story.  
Let's sing about this love story.  
Turn in the Hymnal Worship Book to #315, This is a story full of love.