

Sunday, October 12, 2014

What Do You Want Out of Church?

Tradition?: Being the People of God.

Genesis 12: 1-3; Deuteronomy 7: 6-9; 1 Peter 2: 9-10; Colossians 3: 12-17

I remember we once had someone in our community who became frustrated with all our creativity in worship.

It was not so much that they were not open to creativity, but they had been through so much in their lives that they needed their experience of God to be the same, reliable, that their experience of God would be the same week after week

– and so, a sameness in the ritual of worship was important for experiencing God as always being present to them.

Being the people of God has to do with ritual, tradition

– just read through the Old Testament and you will see the way the people of God came before God and worshiped God

– to rehearse and remember their relationship with God and foster that relationship.

We read through Leviticus and we are amazed at the ritualistic nature of coming into the presence of God; the preparations and the ways of offering sacrifices and thanksgiving.

The Psalms are the worship book of the people of God and it is filled with similar ways of connecting with God.

Yet, theirs was no empty ritual, no empty tradition

– it was ritual pregnant with meaning, with life.

Perhaps to say it better:

– this ritual, this tradition revealed and celebrated and retold a particular Story every time the people of God gathered

– God’s Story, Our Story, the Story of God’s interaction with us and our interaction with God, in the world.

It’s an organic story, a dynamic story.

It is a Story full of re-establishing the reign of God in the hearts and lives of human beings,

Re-establishing God’s reign “on earth as in heaven, completing the project begun but aborted in Genesis 1-3” (Wright, *Surprised by Scripture*, 28).

It’s a story, as N.T. Wright expresses in *Surprised by Scripture*, of God and human beings in which

“God’s authority is exercised not to give his people lots of true information, not even true information about how they get saved (though that comes en route). God’s authority, vested in Jesus the Messiah, is about God reclaiming his proper lordship over all creation. And the way God planned to rule over his creation from the start was *through obedient humanity* [or humanity in interactive engagement with God]. The Bible’s witness to Jesus declares that he, the obedient [human, par excellence], has done this. But the Bible is then the God-given equipment through which *the followers of Jesus are themselves equipped to be obedient stewards, the royal priesthood, bringing that saving rule of God in Christ to the world*” (Wright, 29).

As he further has expressed:

“The central message of the Bible is not simply that we are sinners, but through Jesus God is rescuing us from this sinful world so that we can be with him in heaven.”

Wrights says, and I agree with him,

“That’s only part of it, but it’s not the whole biblical story. The Bible is **not** about the rescue of humans *from* the world but about the rescue of humans *for* the world, and indeed God’s rescue of the world by *means of* those rescued humans” (Wright, 32).

It is a story of the abundant life to be discovered in a world living under the reign of God.

It is a story then that offers life,
and we discover in this story our engaging of life, and struggling with that steals life from us
– in our best moments we celebrate life
– in our darkest moments we grasp for life.

It is a story of God always coming to us,

God being patient with us, always extending a hand of healing, forgiveness and re-creation to us
– and a story of our responding to God’s overtures
– and a story of our rejecting God’s overtures.

It is a story of our faithfulness and our unfaithfulness to God and to one another
– and it is the Story of God’s continuing faithfulness to us, no matter what we do or do not do.

God’s Story is always running in the background of our lives
– in fact it runs in the background of every human life
– because God is about storying life (intentional play on words: restoring) in each human life.

We become conscious partners in God’s Story as we

- respond to God by yielding ourselves to God,
- offering ourselves to God,
- seeking to stop living lives that continue our de-storying (destroying) of our selves.
- participating with God in restorying and restoring the world
- to complete God’s intent for our stewarding this gift of this earth given us, in relationship with God

God’s Story always involves a call, an invitation for us to be constantly and continually in relationship with God
– because God is always reaching out to us to be in relationship with us.

This Story of God took on a uniqueness in God’s encountering of Abram (Abraham), and Abram’s encountering of God.

In Genesis 12: 1-3, we hear the foundation of our story and God’s Story in the language of chosenness
– being chosen to be God’s people.

And as God’s people, sharing our story with God’s Story – our chosenness, our purpose is to live this Story, tell this Story.

As, Michael Goheen expresses in *A Light to the Nations*,

“the role of God’s people is here [in Genesis 12]: they are chosen for the sake of the world. Against the universal backdrop of the seventy nations [of Genesis 10 and 11], which represent all the peoples of the earth, alienated from God and standing under his judgment (Gen. 10 and 11). Abraham is singled out precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations, to all those seventy nations God had scattered over the face of the whole earth. The election of the one has as its goal the salvation of all” (Goheen, 30).”

Because we are chosen,
our Story, our ritual, our tradition
is not for ours to keep, to treasure in books hidden away on a shelf,
but it is a story to be told and retold
– whose telling and retelling we do in worship
– but also in our living as a people who live in response to God who is LIFE.

And yes, creativity is good and restorying or restoring
– if it helps us to tell this same Story in fresh ways.

Yet, creativity is not good
– destorying or destroying
– if we begin telling a different story, or changing the story so that it’s about us, rather than about God and us.

And so we need to give attention to the Story
– and the way we tell the Story
– and the way we live the Story,
– as the people of God.

But before we can tell the Story, we need to know the Story, and be known by the Story.

The Story has to find its way into our DNA, our psyches, our beings, our lives

We come to know and be known by this story as we take time to be with one another in worship, in fellowship, in life, in good times and hard times
– because, here in our living we discover the Story being told and lived out in the midst of all we encounter, experience
– learning to attune our ears and eyes to hear the Story being lived out in us, among us and around us.

It is with one another we learn this Story, as we tell this Story with one another.

In our gathering together,
In our sharing life together,
In our being with one another over meals,
Spending time with one another at Retreat,
Laughing with one another at MennoNite Live,
Sharing our struggles together,
Praying for one another, etc.

This is the context in which we share our lives and in which we tell our story, God's Story,

Our lives are the context in which we practice our tradition, our rituals

- these traditions, these rituals, which we have taken for ourselves as God's people known as NSMC, give us a grounding, a foundation for being who we are
- the people of God.

This Story of our being the people of God is what Paul expresses to the church in Colossae

- and if we listen in, we discover his word to us encouraging us to live and be the people of God whose story is God's Story
- Listen as I read the first part of chapter 3
- its about how we are called to live out God's Story as God's people
- and Paul jumps into the Story where we have been re-created through Christ:

[Reading, Colossians 3: 1-17]

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

**This is our manifesto,
This is our calling, our destiny
Our story as God's people.**

**Christ has re-storied us
and the Spirit of Christ continues to re-story us**

We are daily being restored
and recreated into the fullness of life that is God.

May we live expressing, showing, displaying

- that we are the people of God,
- revealing God
- revealing God's purpose
- and re-establishing God as Lord of this world, in and through Christ.

And that is why we gather together on Sunday mornings

– to remind ourselves whose Story has taken hold of us, and in whose Story we live!

Amen.