

One of my favorite things about the pastoral office is visitation. I love taking the time to either visit you or have you visit with me. I especially like hearing your stories. Tell me about your life. Tell me about the things that are important to you that happened in your life.

If I asked everyone in this church, “What are your favorite stories from your time at church?” Some of us might talk about something that happened here at Faith. Some of us might talk about a positive experience we had back at another congregation. The things we share tell a lot about what matters to us.

When we gather with friends, what’s one of the top things we like to do? We tell stories! Perhaps we tell stories of things that happened to us long ago. Perhaps we tell stories of things that happened since the last time we saw our friends. We love to hear and tell stories.

Today is Christian education Sunday, and to be certain, we hope you can be inspired to learn a thing or two about the Bible after hearing this sermon, but I want you to understand why Christian education matters. **YOU EMBRACE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT USES BIBLE STORIES TO CALM YOUR ANXIOUS HEART.**

First, I. Having lost our story, we don't understand why Christian education matters. It used to be that there were only three or four television channels. If you were watching television, all Americans were pretty much watching the same thing. Now, we have streaming services and Youtube, and we have no shared sense of story. Everyone watches their own show or follows their own sports team. We are an increasingly fragmented society. We are increasingly lonely. Once upon a time maybe we could agree upon liberty, justice, and the American way. But I bet many people would disagree on what liberty, justice, or the American way is nowadays.

We’ve lost our sense of what life is about. Our society no longer has a shared story of why we exist or how we are to live. Should it surprise us that many people struggle with anxiety and depression, and some even wonder if life has any meaning at all?

On this Christian Education Sunday, I want us to reflect not only on the cost of those out there not having a story, but for those of us in here thinking we don’t have a story. We’ve lost touch with the wonderful accounts given to us in the Bible: the histories, the poetry, and the prophecy that fills this book to warn, encourage, and to inspire.

On more than one occasion, I’ve heard a pastor at a different church lament that he has a hard time teaching confirmation students the Ten Commandments when they don’t know who Moses is. A consultant who visits many Lutheran churches cited real life examples from congregations with whom he consulted. One board of eleven elders couldn’t find the book of Romans. At another congregation,

only one out of eight elders could name one of the Ten Commandments. In a Lutheran school board of eight, only two could easily locate the book of Matthew. The chairman of one church council gave up trying to find Ephesians, slammed the Bible shut, and shoved it to the center of the table.

If you can't name a single of the ten commandments or cannot locate Matthew, Romans, or Ephesians, you're in the right place. We want you to learn more.

But here's the problem. I think we package Christian education as more school. Either kids are sick of having more school than they already have, or you are done with schooling and don't want to go back to school. What if we reframed this as a time to hear stories? True stories to be certain. Histories to be certain. But just as we are eager to hear and tell stories, do we not have an eagerness to hear God's Story?

II. The Holy Spirit uses Christian education to teach us God's story. And so we talk all about the story of Scripture, but I haven't mentioned it. To which we draw to our Old Testament text. “Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”” God's story, the Bible, is all about the Lord coming to us to make things right and to save us.

This word vengeance here is not about God committing random acts of violence or doing some kind of mob hit. When we talk about vengeance, we talk about the Lord setting things right. Vengeance means not only does the Lord punish evil, but He saves His people from sin, death, and the devil, and rewards them with forgiveness, eternal life, and His holiness.

This happens as the Lord spares Adam and Eve rather than destroying them and starting over with a new creation. This happens as God spares Abraham's son Isaac on Mount Moriah. This happens as the Lord led the people of Israel out of Egypt eventually into the promised land. This happens as the Lord rescued the Israelites from their foreign enemies time and time again.

Most clearly, this happened as the Father sent Jesus Christ to this earth to save me and save you. From His birth in a manger to His death on a cross, to His resurrection from the dead, He did this all for you. As we see His healing in our Gospel account, and all that He did in between, He did this as an act of God's vengeance, His recompense, to come and save you.

There's a reason why a biography of the life of Jesus is called *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Christian Education is not about filling ourselves up with obscure points of doctrine, but it is about hearing the stories of God because they are our stories. It is about telling each other the stories of God because we can't wait to hear what's next. The Bible is not simply abstract trivia, but it is the living, breathing, Word of God!

Thus, III. The Holy Spirit uses God's story to calm your anxious heart. As we gather here as those who may have lost our story, or at least forgotten it, we can take heart. Be strong! Fear not! We not only tell these Bible stories to one another, we apply them to our lives.

It's one thing to tell you that Napoleon lost at Waterloo. It's another thing entirely to be the ancestor of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, who beat Napoleon and won fame and fortune that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The Lord has intervened in history to save. So what? ***“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water;”***

The stories of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and many others in Scripture are not stories of far off people in remote places, they are the stories of your brothers and sisters in the faith. Their blessings are your blessings, and their burdens are similar to the ones you face.

Yet look at these blessings! Today, we see Jesus unstop the ears of a deaf man. There will come a day when there will be no need for deaf ministry because Jesus will heal the hearing of all those born deaf. The loved one whose hearing is starting to go will have perfect hearing in the resurrection. Jesus will make all things right.

Each of these Bible stories we learn in Sunday school, Bible study, in church, or in our personal reading has an application to how it matters in our lives. One day, the Lord will restore things in our lives, even as He is working now to improve our lives and watch over us, showering us with blessings such as the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

As the Holy Spirit aligns our stories with God's Stories, we find that our hearts are calmed and our fears subside. Please consider joining us for one of the many teaching opportunities where we gather to hear and tell the stories of God. Amen!