

Stories, whether they be fictional or fact, are perhaps one of the universal elements of human history. Since the beginning of human civilization, throughout most historical periods and cultures, stories have been told. From the Norse Epics, to the tales of the Greek Gods, or the romances of the troubadours of medieval Europe, stories have been told over and over again. Stories of great military victories, stories about how the world was created, stories about Gods and men, stories of great love, stories of heroes and villains, stories that give instruction and stories merely for the sake of amusement. For many cultures storytellers hold a place of great honour, as they hold the stories of the past, stories that show how cultures have developed and societies have risen and fallen. How many of you haven't sat with rapt attention as a skilled story teller weaved his or her words with great effect, or perhaps you yourself have the gift of telling a great story, with people longing to hear your words hanging on every word, waiting for you to continue. Even as we move further and further away from an oral culture where great storytellers are revered and sought out, stories still play an important role in our daily lives. While many movies and television shows rely on visual effects and pure action to capture our attention, it is the ones with great and compelling stories that stick in our minds, it is these movies and shows which come to be known as classics, as timeless.

Each of us has a story or stories that shape our life. Stories of who our family is or was, stories about where we've lived, where we went to school, stories of childhood adventures, stories of love gained and lost, work place stories, stories of children and grandchildren, stories of friend and foe alike. We each have stories of who we are, what we like and don't like. We all also have forces outside of ourselves that impact our stories, for better or for worse. We are not isolated individuals but rather a product of the stories of the people and culture around us. Who we are friends with, what country we live in, what news we read, what advertisements we watch, everything around us impacts the story of our life. How different would our stories be if we were born in a different place, at different time?

As a faith tradition we have stories too, stories of how the Church grew and developed over the centuries, stories of heroic saints, stories of failure and success. Our Bible is mostly filled with stories too, stories of Creation, Stories of the great Patriarchs of Israel, stories of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. It is filled with stories of a man called Jesus, stories of his followers, stories of his death and resurrection. Sometimes that is all it seems the Bible is full of. Sometimes the way we read the Bible in Church, the way our culture tells us to view the Bible, leads to believe that Bible is just a collection of disparate stories, stories that have no unity have no common theme or actors. In fact the great narratives and stories of our culture – consumerism, individualism and on and on – want us to believe that there is no other story that can shape our life, they want to convince us that our own stories will only find meaning if they find their place in the midst of the grand narratives of the world.

But what if there is another story, what if there is a story that gives meaning to all the stories we find in the Bible? What if there is a grand story that gives meaning to our own lives, a story that we can find a place within, a story that gives meaning to our own stories that shape our lives? This is the story that begins at Creation, the story that continues through the history of Israel, the story which finds its dramatic climax in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the story which continues today in the Church and in the world that God loves, and in the people God has called. We are not the primary actors in this story, and that's ok. This is not our story to shape and direct, it is God's story, and God invites each of us to find our place within it. God invites each of

us to embrace his story as our own, he invites each of us share in the riches of his grace and mercy as we find our place and meaning in the story God has been weaving since the very beginning.

Over the next nine months we will be exploring this story. We will be exploring God's story, exploring the Story of God coming to dwell among us in his son Jesus, and we will explore what it means to **Know** this Story, to **Live** this Story and to **Share** this Story. Over the next three months we will focus on some of the very basic elements of our faith, questions which dominate the life of a Christian: Why and how do we worship? Why and how do we pray? Why and how do we believe? In the midst of reconnecting or connecting for the first time with the building blocks of Christian faith, we will, God willing, come to know God's story more fully, we will come to find our place in the Grand story of God and his Kingdom.

Once we have explored some of the basic building blocks of our faith we will turn to explore what it means to **Live** the Story that God invites us into. Beginning in Advent we will explore what it means for our own stories to be marked by God's Great Story of hope, peace, joy and love. Throughout the season of Epiphany we will explore the impact God's story has on our own lives and the stories that we create. As we continue to get to **Know** God's Story deeper and deeper, we can learn again and again what it means to **Live** God's Story each and every day of our lives.

As we continue to deepen our knowledge of **Knowing** and **Living** God's story, for the final three months we will turn to **Sharing** God's story. As we continue to **Know** and **Live** the story deeply, joyously, faithfully we cannot help but want to **Share** God's story with people around us, with the world that is in desperate need to hear the forgiveness, mercy and love of God. Through Lent, Easter and Pentecost we will explore what it means to **Share** how our own stories find their place within the story of God, we will explore what it means to share this great Story. It is by **Know, Living** and **Sharing** this Story, that we can truly come to realize the place that God has set for us in the grand narrative of history.

N.T. Wright, a former Bishop of Durham and a prominent English theologian, has likened all of cosmic history to a five act play. It begins in Act 1 with God's beautiful and wondrous Creation culminating with God's magnus opus humankind. Act 2 continues with drama of the Fall, the disobedience of humankind and the entry of sin and death. Act 3 continues with God's relationship with Israel, and God's decision for them to function as a way for the nations of the earth to find their way back to God. In Act 4 the drama reaches its climax, as God writes himself into the story in the person of Jesus Christ as the definitive way to restore the relationship between God and his fallen Creation. Act 5 begins in the stories of Acts and the infancy of the early church, but is left unfinished with glimpses of how it will end with the coming of God's glorious kingdom. Today as a Church we find ourselves in the midst of this fifth Act, we find ourselves invited to play a role in God's great drama of salvation. Like any good actor we must come to **Know** the story deeply, so that we can **Live** out the roles God has invited us to play, and finally be able to **Share** story with the world around us. Let us all take this journey together, let us over the next nine months learn are parts and play them well as come to **Know, Live** and **Share** the Grand Story of God's Kingdom.