

ENDINGS

A map can be helpful for a journey, especially if it is a journey into new territory. And a principal task of explorers is to make a map for those who want to travel in that new land. This book has been a kind of guide or map for those who want to begin a journey into the gospel as storytelling.

From beginning to end, the author and guide in the background of this journey is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the source of this storytelling tradition. The spirit of Christ continues to be the force behind this storytelling tradition. As we hear and learn these stories by Jesus and about him, we can hear his voice and discern the shape of his character. As we tell the tales, Christ's spirit is present in and through the telling. In this narrative tradition, Jesus Christ tells his own story, first to us and then through us.

To become a teller of Jesus' tales is to become a disciple of Jesus. As with the pilgrims of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, those who learn these narratives join Jesus and his followers as they travel the roads from Galilee up to Jerusalem. Along the way, we learn his parables and sayings, and we share the things that have happened to us. The story journey means participating in Jesus' journey.

Another dimension of the story journey is that Jesus Christ joins us in our journeys. If the adventures of the Gospels are learned deeply, our stories get woven together with Jesus' story. Jesus becomes a companion, whose words and actions provide a context for the way in which we experience and recount the events of our life journeys. His story becomes a framework for our stories. As things happen, as crises emerge, the memories of his life come up. In ever-new contexts, as we walk along, Jesus appears out of the shadows and reminds us of an event or a saying that sets our experiences in a new light. Just as with the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32), Jesus becomes a storyteller companion who is traveling our way.

The life journey becomes a series of interconnecting stories. Christ's story and ours are woven together. The events of our lives are the episodes of an ongoing narrative that is given meaning and perspective by Jesus. Our stories find their source and their destiny in being linked with his. In turn, the gospel tradition is given fresh meaning by being connected with our personal and communal sagas. At the beginning and at the ending of our journeys is Jesus Christ.

The next steps in the journey involve broadening and deepening the connections between God's story and ours. Here are some of the steps that can be taken to explore those relationships.

Study. Learning more about the story and its meaning in its original context is a natural step. This can include anything, from learning about the historical background of Israel and the Hellenistic world of the first century, to studying and even learning the stories in the Greek language, to investigating the theology of the narratives. A way to focus such broader learning is to explore the meaning of a particular story in a general rather than a specific way. This is to study *out* from a gospel narrative into related narratives in the biblical tradition itself and in the traditions of the biblical period.

Potentially, every aspect of the historical-critical study of the Scriptures can be a resource for the story journey. Good critical commentaries on the Gospels are available. The use of dictionaries and concordances broadens and deepens the study of the narratives. The full and unfettered journey of the mind is an integral part of the gospel as storytelling.

Pray. Living into the stories in prayer allows them to become more deeply internalized. *The Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola are a primary resource for

this kind of prayer. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius outlines a series of meditations on the life of Christ. They are one way of letting these stories speak to us. Several of the exercises outlined earlier in this book are derived from Ignatius. But an excellent next step would be to do a guided retreat with a director who knows the exercises well.

Master a range of stories. Internalizing a broader range of stories is an obvious next step. There are several ways of selecting the ones to learn next. You might decide to *learn a block of stories*, ranging from a chapter or two of a Gospel to a series of parables or healing stories. Or *learn the passion/resurrection narrative from Mark*. Another possible step is to *learn the stories of the weekly lectionary*. Pastors, teachers, and church members who have done this have found that their weekly worship experience is deepened.

Still another way of mastering a range of stories is to *learn stories that connect with your life story now*. In a period of coping with an illness or stress, you might choose to learn a series of stories about persons who dealt with illness or stress. In each period of individual and congregational life, there are biblical stories that have within them the good news for that period. Meditating upon and choosing the stories, either alone or with a director, is like choosing your own gift at Christmas.

Tell the stories. An essential step in the story journey is to tell the story to someone else. It is best to approach this in stages. Telling the story to another person is a first step. Children are wonderfully receptive story listeners. It is virtually impossible to fail at telling a story to a young child. Whatever you can tell them will be a gift. A trusted friend or a storytelling companion is also a possible first listener. A next step is to tell a story to a small group of two or three persons, perhaps a class that is studying the story. Then telling a story in congregational worship or to someone who really needs to hear a particular story might be the next storytelling adventure.

There is a quantum leap in the story journey when the stories begin to be told to others. It is only in telling someone else that you can experience the resonance and power of the stories through you. To be able to tell good news to someone is a gift. And it will be a gift to your listeners if it is given freely, without pre-determined expectations about its meaning. If you have already decided what the story will mean or ought to mean to someone, don't tell it. Or if you really need for your listeners to respond positively, don't tell it. Only if you can allow your listeners to be free will you ever know what the story can mean to them.

Enable someone else to learn a story. The journey of Christ's story into the world is multiplied when you enable someone else to learn to tell the stories. Whether you do it for one person or a small group, enabling others to become tellers as well as listeners is a good next step. The journey into the gospel as storytelling can be done in an almost infinite variety of ways, depending on the needs of the group. In general, a storytelling process needs to enable persons to take the steps we have taken for each of the stories in this book: learning the story, listening to the story in its original context, connecting with the story in relation to our own experience, and telling the story to someone else. However, this process is like a good jazz melody: there are many good variations that can be played on it. There is no methodological orthodoxy for the story journey. Whatever facilitates the connection between the particular stories of the Gospels and the stories of people's lives will be helpful. And the ways you might use for enabling this to happen will vary with different contexts. Furthermore, you may find something new that no one has ever tried before. As you can see from this report, many people have made distinctive contributions to the exploration of the gospel storytelling tradition. You will know when others have actually been enabled to tell the stories. Seeds will have been sown, and you will see the fruit.

Form or join a storytelling support group. A reality in our time is that storytellers are a little unusual. Therefore, joining with others who are embarking on the same journey is helpful and supportive. There is energy and life in the support that comes from sharing a common task.

The Network of Biblical Storytellers has been formed for precisely this purpose. It is a loosely knit organization of persons who are actively exploring the gospel as storytelling in ministry. There are chapters of the network in several major metropolitan areas of the United States and Canada. The address of the network is included at the end of the bibliography. One of the purposes of the network is to assist persons who want to form or join a group.

While there is a need for such a group now, the time will come when it will no longer be needed. The most natural support groups for the gospel as storytelling are the local church and the seminary. As the storytelling tradition comes alive and is appropriated more generally, the need for a special organization may decrease. At present, however, there is an important role for persons and groups who are called to the task of recovering the gospel as storytelling.

Take on a long-term project of ministry or research. Both individuals and groups can undertake long-term projects of ministry and research. Translations, exegetical commentaries, hermeneutical research, and audio/video materials need to be developed for use in all aspects of ministry. And the biblical storytelling tradition needs to be explored substantively with particular age groups and in relation to the infinite number of special needs that are present.

In any serious effort to explore the gospel's life as an ongoing oral tradition, the relationship between this work and the various disciplines and movements of biblical and theological thought will need to be examined. Historical-critical biblical study, biblical theology, and narrative theology are areas with obvious relationship to this effort. Biblical storytelling also has a major contribution to make to the various aspects of ministry: worship, preaching, pastoral care, religious education, evangelism, missions, world religions, ecumenics, and church administration.

The gospel as storytelling is a primary language of the Church. Story, song, poetry, prophecy, law, liturgy, and wisdom sayings are the primary forms and languages of the religion of Israel. Secondary languages are used to reflect upon our use of the primary languages. Theology, philosophy of religion, and history are the major secondary languages of our tradition. The vitality of the secondary languages and their disciplines is dependent upon the richness and depth of the primary languages. Story is the most important of the primary languages of the Church, and the stories of Jesus Christ are the most central stories. The gospel as storytelling is certainly not the only means for the revitalization of the Church's life and mission, but it is a central one.

Telling the Gospel stories is a way in which we can be sensitized to Jesus Christ's presence among us. As in the Eucharist, the real presence of Jesus Christ can be perceived and known in the faithful telling of the stories of the Gospels. Wherever the Gospel narratives are faithfully told, the living Christ will be present there in the midst of them.

I sense that the living Christ is calling those who would join this story journey to a distinctive discipleship in our time. A major challenge that lies before us is to integrate the world of electronic media into the Church's ongoing mission of proclamation in word and deed. An approach to this task is implicit in recognizing the mutually complementary relationship between the gospel as storytelling and the gospel as text. I used to think that this relationship was, to some degree, contradictory, but I have changed my mind. While there are differences that need to be recognized, story and text are mutually dependent. The

storytelling of the community of Israel gave birth to the biblical texts. And the texts of the Scriptures have, in different ways, led to the recovery of telling the stories. Now, in turn, the telling of the stories is bearing fruit in new texts. And these texts will generate more storytelling. In a similar manner, the gospel in electronic media will both grow out of and give life to the gospel in story and text.

We are called to tell the stories of God, who is known in the life of Israel and in Jesus Christ. What becomes of them is up to God. In an electronic age in which storytelling is once again becoming a primary language of communication in the emerging global village, the gospel as storytelling may be one of the means God will choose to make known Jesus Christ's victory over the powers of sin and death.