

Thomas E.  
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# STORY JOURNEY

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AN INVITATION  
TO THE GOSPEL AS STORYTELLING  
Abingdon Press Nashville

Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my father and mother,  
Glenn and Garnet Boomershine

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The best way to tell you about this book is to ask you to think of it as a large, clear woodland pool fed by deep, subterranean springs and several bubbling brooks. Identifying the springs and streams that flow into this pool may help prospective swimmers decide whether they want to try these waters. As in biblical genealogies, many names appear here, some of which may not be widely known. But each name is important and is connected with a much longer story, in which many other persons were involved who remain unnamed or even unknown, but not forgotten.

The stream of biblical scholarship is the deep spring that provides the clear, cool water in this pool. This book began with James Muilenburg's telling the Yahwist's story of creation from Genesis 2-3 during a lecture at Union Theological Seminary. J. Louis Martyn, Samuel Terrien, Amos Wilder, Hermann Gunkel, Rudolph Bultmann, and Martin Dibelius have taught me, in distinctive ways, how to swim in this bracing water. Gil Bartholomew, David Rhoads, and Merrill Miller have, as scholarly colleagues and friends, shared the deep dives of exploring the gospel as storytelling.

Another deep spring is contemporary literary criticism and, in particular, Wayne Booth, with whom I studied at Earlham College. I will never forget working with him in the reading room of the British Museum as he was checking the proofs for *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. His teaching and work have enabled me to understand the logic and structure of narrative.

Still another major spring for this pool has been the media research associated with the name of Marshall McLuhan. In the subsequent work of Walter Ong and Werner Kelber, the radical nature of the shift from the world of orality to the world of literacy has been made clear. This work has in turn enabled me to understand the shape of oral experience and what is needed for literate persons to enter the world of storytelling.

Over to the left is the sparkling, wide stream of the storytelling tradition. Listening to the rich storytelling traditions of black preaching proved to me that long biblical stories could have great energy and life. Robert Newbold and James Forbes have shown me the way to that stream. The traditions of Jewish storytelling, from Martin Buber to Elie Wiesel and Rabbi David Dinn, have enabled me to hear the stories of the Gospels in the context of the storytellers of Israel. In that same storytelling stream are the contemporary storytellers who have been vital contributors to the renaissance of storytelling, in particular Ken Feit, Jay O'Callahan, and Bill White.

On the other side of the big tree is the stream of experiential approaches to biblical study. Walter Wink and I have shared a common quest for a new pattern of relationship between biblical scholarship and experiential modes of teaching the Scriptures. In distinctive ways, Walter, Hans Reudi Weber, and Conrad L'Heureux have each helped me see how the biblical traditions can be related more directly to human experience.

The stream from which lots of folks are swimming into the pool is the Network of Biblical Storytellers and the many persons who have told these stories in ministry in the aftermath of storytelling festivals, courses, and workshops. This network of fellow

storytellers is the source of many elements in this book: stories about telling biblical stories, educational processes, and the book's overall spirit of good cheer. In particular, Margaret Eddy, Mal Bertram, Judy Gorsuch, Ken Parker, Richard Rice, Paul Neff, and Louise Mahan have contributed stories and materials to this book. The spirit of Oay Woodbury, Pam Moffatt, Gary Vencill, and the many members of the Network of Biblical Storytellers is evident throughout this book.

A beautiful quiet stream which led to this book is the stream of the Spirit to which I was guided by my spiritual directors: Margo Merz; Michael Cooper, S.J.; and Richard Bollman, S.J. They, along with the community of the Jesuit Renewal Center, have generously shared the gifts of prayer and Ignatian spirituality with me. The ways of seeing and listening to God that I have learned through their spiritual companionship have made it possible for me to find this lovely pool through what appeared to be impenetrable thickets. This book has been formed by a unique confluence of Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions.

Another stream that has fed this pool is Abingdon Press. Ron Patterson has persisted in this project, and Robert Conn is the kind of editor every book should have, namely, someone who genuinely loves the topic. I cannot imagine a happier convergence of streams of energy than has happened with Bob and the Press in this project.

The communities of theological education where I have been privileged to teach have provided the ground on which this pool has been formed. New York Theological Seminary and its commitment to contextual, professional education literally drove me to make biblical scholarship directly relate to the practice of ministry. And my colleagues there, in particular Melvin Schoonover, Willis Elliott, Bob Washington, William Weisenbach, and George W. Webber, supported and encouraged me. At United Theological Seminary, I have received warm administrative support and the gift of time from Newell Wert and Leonard Sweet, which has helped to make this work possible. My colleagues on the faculty, in particular Irvin Batdorf, James Nelson, and Tyron Inbody, have given significant help. Dennis Benson provided camaraderie and the wisdom of his experience during the process of writing the manuscript. Ann DeHays has contributed patience, skill, and good cheer in the various stages of the manuscript's preparation. And the staff of the library, led by Elmer O'Brien, has been a model of support in the years of this project's evolution.

Finally, there is my family. When Tom, now twenty-one, was not yet a year old, he was crawling around under the typewriter as I began the search that led eventually to this pool. Both Michael and Tom have been my most sympathetic and responsive listeners over the years. They have no idea how much I have learned from them about the meaning of the stories. Jean has walked beside me throughout this quest. Without her love and support, the search would have ended in the slough of despond.

Several persons dove into this manuscript and made suggestions that have made it far more accessible and clear: David Rhoads, Margo Merz, Pam Moffatt, Ken Kreuger, Gary Vencill, Gil Bartholomew, Pat Linnemann, and Dennis Benson. Bob Peiffer, Bruce Hartley, and Addie Clark have given valuable help at various stages of this work.

That is the general description of the pool and its most present springs and streams. But, as with all woodland pools, it is only clear and living rather than stagnant because rivers and streams flow out from the pool and water the ground all around. Only the continued sharing of the stories will make it possible for the tradition to live. You are invited, therefore, to tiptoe, walk slowly, jump, or dive head first into the world of the gospel as storytelling and to join a wonderful group of people who love to tell the stories of God's presence and action in Jesus Christ.