

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

¹⁵The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it.

¹⁶The LORD God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; ¹⁷but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!"

The snake was the most intelligent of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say that you shouldn't eat from any tree in the garden?"

²The woman said to the snake, "We may eat the fruit of the garden's trees ³but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, 'Don't eat from it, and don't touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴The snake said to the woman, "You won't die!

⁵God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food and that the tree would provide wisdom, so she took some of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

⁷Then they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves.

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer: Amen.

Today, we embark upon our Lenten series, with this goal in mind: To learn to share with others the story of God's work with us and to invite others to join us in that story. We'll take these 5 weeks and invest heavily into learning different parts of spiritual storytelling, from what parts of a story are important, to listening to others stories, to making room in our stories for others to become a part of the story. To begin, today we're talking about how to make sense of our history, or more accurately, about how to tell true stories and tell them well.

There's a movie, called *Big Fish*, that tells the tale of Will, whose father Edward is dying. Edward is a storyteller, but Will just can't believe his dad's stories. Stories of befriendng giants and working with a traveling circus and escaping Korea as a war hero with conjoined twins, stories of a practically perfect neighboring town that no one else has heard of which was ruined when the interstate took all the traffic from their scenic byway, and yes, even a story about a big fish. While will was raised on these stories, has come to believe that his dad is nothing but a liar who wanted attention, and even after his death, just can't believe that there's any truth to these tall tales.

That all changes when characters from these stories start showing up at his father's funeral. Now, the conjoined twins from Korea were only identical twins, and while the giant from the circus wasn't twice as tall as an average man, he was 7'6". Even the legendary little town is proved to exist when the residents credited his father with saving it after the local economy crashed. The son discovers that his dad told the truth all along, even if it was a truth hidden inside some fantastic details. What we learn

from Big Fish is this: Truth is bigger and more beautiful than simple facts. That's something to remember when telling our story, that truth is bigger and more beautiful than just the facts.

We heard stories today from Genesis 2 and 3, parts of the Bible we've come to refer as the creation story. We heard that God created humanity for the Garden of Eden. Eden, you might know, means something like "delight" in Hebrew, so being created for God's garden is being created with a delightful purpose and presence, and there's one simple rule in that delightful place: don't eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We heard also that humanity chose to eat from that tree and immediately became ashamed of their nakedness. These are also parts of the Bible that inspire conflict within the church about how God created the earth. Some people claim that if creation didn't happen the precise historical accuracy as it's described within Genesis 1-3, then we can't trust Scripture at all. It's literalism or nothing.

But for Biblical authors, historical accuracy wasn't the most important consideration. Instead, the goal was telling a true story about God using all the literary devices at hand – not just historical record, but narrative, fiction, poetry, and myth. That's why, for instance, we see different creation stories in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3, as well as a story of re-creation through the Great Flood. Different Hebrew ancestors in ancient times were trying to tell their children and their neighbors about God's importance to all living things, so they told different stories from different genres with the same truths: (1) God created everything as a garden for delight and (2) God created humanity to play a central role as caretakers for that delightful creation. Though quite different in detail, sometimes seeming to contradict one another and the historical record, each of these stories brings the same central truth to us.

While some say these deviating details are a problem, to me they sound a lot more like jazz. This is the improvisational storytelling of a people performing their faith and, at its best, inviting others to play a part in that faith as well. One thing to know about jazz is that the best jazz musicians know the songs they play better than anyone else. They know the ways that the melody is written to rise and fall, as well as the ways that the chords progress and relate to one another. They know exactly how to play the song with complete accuracy. But instead, they improvise, to invite new perspectives, fresh considerations, invigorated approaches to what might otherwise feel like an ancient song. Just having a simple theology of creation that said, "God made everything and made people to take care of everything," would be like playing the song straight through, but our creation stories, with different narratives or poetry or legends, different characters, even different plots, reveal the jazz of storytelling that magnifies those truths in relatable ways.

Another thing to know about jazz is that the best jazz comes from a place of passion, from conviction, from love. Jazz isn't just about playing the notes but about feeling the music and its impact on your life. In a similar way, Edward's love of telling stories that excited people in *Big Fish* is what jazz brings to us as well. It's not just about telling any old story, but it's about telling a story that's a part of our DNA, that's ingrained in the fabric of our lives. Spiritual storytelling is a type of jazz, which carries the same truth through all sorts of different details. That's how truth is bigger and more beautiful than mere facts.

For us to tell our story well, to tell it true and tell it beautiful like the Biblical authors, we've got to get to know our story like jazz musicians know their songs. We've got to know who we are as God's people, so we've got to get to know scripture inside and

out, both the things that inspire us and the things that challenge us. We've got to get to know who we are here as Christ Lutheran Church, so we've got to get to know our local story well, both the good things and the difficult things. We've got to know our story well before we can tell our story well.

There's two sides to the Gospel today. One is that we've got a beautifully true story to tell. The other is that God's truth isn't limited to factual details. How can we tell the Big Fish stories, the creation stories, the jazz improv that boils our blood and swings our souls, to tell the truth about who God is and about who we are as God's people? We've got to know the stories better than anyone because they're our stories and we've got to love the stories like they're a part of who we are, because they are a part of who we are. The stories of God that we know and tell are what shape our identities.

What, then, are the practical skills that we need to learn to tell our stories? The first is this: you can't tell a story you don't know, so we've got to learn the stories. The second is this: like a jazz musician, when you know a story really well, you can improvise so that you connect that story with different people at different times.

So, it's time to practice. Let's pair up in groups of 3-4 and share with one another two things: what's your favorite Biblical story and why? What's your favorite story about CLC and why? We'll take about one minute per person to share.

Then, ask yourselves how well you told the story. Was it convincing? Was it interesting? Would it make someone who didn't know it want to be a part of it? All of us could certainly learn more about ourselves and about scripture, so pay attention to areas where we can learn more about even our most favorite things.

Your homework, then, is twofold: First, learn a Biblical story better this week. For your devotions, read the same story every day so that you get to know it better inside

and out. Second, learn to tell a part of our story here at CLC better. Ask yourself this: What is it that I most like about this church? Then, learn to tell a short story that would invite others to become a part of this church, to share their stories with us.

It's time that we learned to share our story, and to do that, the we've got to know our story. Let's pray.