

A Few Thoughts On and An Invitation To Biblical Storytelling

Rev. Dr. Margie Brown, April 30, 2010

In the beginning was the Word. In the original Hebrew language, our English noun “word” is actually a verb. In the beginning was Being, was Birthing, was Loving, was Creativity, and the verb has continued and continues through this present moment and into the unfathomable future.

The Bible holds within it words and the Word. The Bible is that relationship with Being as expressed through all of the characters, stories, and ever-evolving understandings of what that means.

The Bible is not one book but a library of books; thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. The main chapters in this story are stories of God (OT), stories of Jesus (Gospels), and stories of the church (Epistles). Scholars agree with our Jewish sisters and brothers and prefer that we call it the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures, since they don't believe that the Jewish tradition is old and outdated which our traditional terminology implies.

The Bible is actually a much bigger library than only sixty-six texts. Editors put together letters, fragments, re-tellings, and other pieces into the form we have now. Scholars know, for example, that Genesis was crafted by four different editors at four different times with four different points of view. Each sentence, as well as fragments of each sentence, can be associated with one, two, three, or even four of the editors.

In ancient times, there were no intellectual property rights as we have today. Books could be named under an authorship with a recognizable name to insure that people would read it. King David did not write all of the Psalms, but they are attributed to him out of respect. King Solomon did not write Song of Songs, but they put his name to it as well. The book is actually written from the woman's perspective.

In Isaiah, events take place over hundreds of years so we know that there was not one author named Isaiah but rather a school of thought attributed to Isaiah. Similarly, it is tradition that Moses wrote the first five books, including the sections of what happened after he died. Numbers, Exodus and Deuteronomy tell their versions of events surrounding the flight from Egypt and wilderness wanderings, but with what we would recognize today as different political and social views; notice that their leader Moses is either beloved or tolerated.

The books are not placed in the Bible in historical chronological order. Books about some events were written long after they occurred by authors writing in the Diaspora times to help people to come to terms with their tragedy of homelessness. The letters to the churches which follow the Gospels are not all written by Paul, and again cannot be

read in order to understand the unfolding history of the early church. First come letters ranging from the most important churches to the least important churches, followed by letters from the most important to least important individuals, with Revelations chosen for the grand finale.

The invisible books which are part of what we know as the Bible are the gazillion books written about the Bible over thousands of years. This huge body of shared analysis and interpretation informs our reading so that when we read it today, our minds understand it quite differently than persons who read it over the many centuries.

And finally, the Bible is a Living Word in relationship with our own hearts. A passage you read today will be experienced differently than how you read it yesterday or will read it tomorrow.

So where does one begin? All of this sounds like an overwhelming amount of scholarship needed before you can consider yourself knowledgeable about the Bible! That is like asking where one should begin when meeting a new friend. Begin where you are, and then enjoy getting to know the person and how that person is in the world and in her or his spirit. It takes a lifetime to journey with intimate friendship. At the same time, it takes only a moment to be present with another and share deeply.

Biblical storytelling knows that there is all of this glorious behind-the-scenes work which can be fascinating to explore. But it also knows that the story on stage is the one that the people in the pews know and how Sunday School, Bible School, and sermons have always presented it to us. This “Dash Through The Bible” will explore this delicious rendition of the beloved story of the Word made flesh in Jesus and made flesh in us. Larry Love is our docent for this course, and we get to take this exuberant trip through his eyes.

However, please permit me to offer you my own trail markers which I have found meaningful:

The first seven books tell of the tumultuous history of the covenant community coming into being and finding their way. The eighth book is a woman’s story, the book of Ruth, which offers an intimate oasis of two women who plot to make themselves visible in the world once again.

The next eight books tell of the power of kingdoms and of political storms, followed by a woman’s story, the book of Esther, which tells how a perceived Barbie® doll became a real woman.

The four wisdom texts tell of wrestling with God, followed by Song of Songs, where the woman beseeches us to linger in the delight of love and choose for yourself whom you will love.

The next seventeen books tell of the major and minor prophets with all of their drama. This is the end of the Hebrew scriptures, but in the Christian story they are once again followed by a women's tales which serve again as transition.

Luke gives us Elizabeth's story of abundance. Matthew gives us Mary's astonishing story. Mark has John the Baptist prepare the way for the descending dove of the feminine Holy Spirit. John describes the spiritual birthing of the Word made flesh.

And finally, in the Epistles and Revelation, the story flows from the source of we the church, the Bride of Christ.

Enjoy these sessions of studying the words and experiencing the Word. And, as did Mary, ponder all these words in your heart.