

Lent 1C  
February 21, 2010  
Hymns: 241 - 455 - 377v4f - 562

**DEUTERONOMY 26:4-10**  
**TELL THE STORY OF JESUS AND HIS LOVE!**  
**\*Tell It With Your Offering.**  
**\*Tell It With Your Voice.**

**For many years, O God grace, This church has been Your dwelling place....**  
**Today, we pray, May the story of Your glory here resounding**  
**Be a song of grace abounding! CW 622**

Dear lovers of the story of Jesus,  
“That northern musta weighed 30 pounds,” said the old Minnesota fisherman talking about a recent trip to the lake. “I fought upwards of three hours to bring him into the boat.” His buddy interrupted the story and scoffed, “I saw the picture you took of that fish. You’re lucky if it even weighed 10 pounds.” The old fisherman replied, “Well, a fish can lose an awful lot of weight during three hours of fighting!” Who doesn’t like a good story--even the kind that fishermen tell. Stories bring the word alive! Jesus used stories called “parables” in much of His preaching. And pastors today often tell stories too, to bring home a point in the sermon.

Storytelling is the single most powerful form of human communication. It is the primary tool that human beings use to pass on their cultures. We can use it to inspire, teach, comfort, and entertain. Or we can use it to destroy, stir up hate, and demoralize. Jesus Christ and Adolf Hitler were both great storytellers. It is in our hands to decide how we will use this powerful tool.

The Hebrews were splendid story-tellers. They still are. Have you ever noticed how many of comedians and television writers and novelists are Jewish? It is part and parcel of their culture. Notice how much of the Bible is story! Long before those life-changing stories of Jesus, there were the stories of Abraham and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Joshua and David. The Bible is crammed through with stories. God knows that telling stories is the easiest way to communicate with human beings. Now there are stories, and then there are “stories.” Jesus’ parables were “earthly stories” with a heavenly meaning. So, while Jesus may have spoke about farmers and merchants and housekeepers, whom He never intended to be understood as real people— He used such to teach important spiritual truths.

Unfortunately, in our day and culture much of what are factual stories in the Bible are considered fable. Noah and the flood, Jonah and the whale, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, Jesus walking on water, the disciples’ great catch of fish – these are all considered mere fish stories. Sadly, we WELS congregations have been warned against even using the word “story” for our Sunday School lessons. Stick with “lessons” we are told. “Stories” smacks of fiction in children’s minds today.

How sad! And yet, how all the more important, that children and adults hear, heed, and believe the marvelous historical stories of the Bible! Today’s lesson from Deuteronomy recites a series of history’s most important stories. Deuteronomy was written as Moses’ final address to the people of Israel. Soon they would be entering the Promised Land. Moses, unfortunately, would not be with them. Still, he had a vision of their future home--a land flowing with milk and honey. **Slide 1** They were to take the first fruits of what they produced season by season to God’s house.

Notice these words about how the people are to make their offering: “*Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for His Name and say to the priest in office at the time . . .*” In other words, it doesn’t matter who the priest is. **Slide 2** You may have a hard time believing this, but I have heard of church squabbles in which people begin withholding their offerings because they don’t like the pastor. Friends, biblically that is obscene. We don’t make an offering to a particular pastor, we make our offering to God. We make our offering to God to acknowledge what God has done for us. We worship a great God. It makes no difference who the pastor is or the priest. You’re not here to worship the pastor. We’re all here to worship God. We have a great God Who is worthy of our praise.

Gladys Aylward was a missionary to China whose story is told in the book *The Small Woman* by Alan Burgess, published in 1957. In 1958, this book was made into the Hollywood film--*The Inn of the Sixth*

*Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman. In 1938 Gladys was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led ninety-four orphans over the mountains to safety. We are told there was a point in that escape when Gladys grew greatly discouraged. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of the story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. "But I am not Moses," Gladys cried in desperation. "Of course you aren't," the girl said, "but Jehovah is still God."

Friends, you know that I am not Moses. No pastor can ever be Moses or Simon Peter or St. Paul. But God will still be God and we come to worship to present ourselves and all we have to God, not to a mere mortal. Nor do we give to a building or to only a particular program we like or to fellow Christians. We don't withhold our offerings because we don't get our way. Two things pop out at me in this chapter: When the people enter the Promised Land, they are to set up an altar and they are to give their offering to the priest in office at the time, whoever that priest may be.

**Slide 3 Then, they are to tell a story before God.** They are to tell this story--a story that is critical to their existence as a people. Wherever a group of Jews shall gather on this planet, this story will be told as praise to God. The wandering Aramean refers to Abraham and his descendants who were nomads. They moved around the desert. They were not fixed to a land. The only constant in their lives was a covenant that God established with Abraham. This covenant sustained them in the time of Joseph, who was sold into slavery in Egypt. He later brought his brothers and their families into Egypt as well. They were no longer nomads. They were residents of a country, though a country that did not recognize their God.

At first, the children of Israel prospered. However, over the generations the Egyptians forgot Joseph and his descendants became slaves. Not only that but their Egyptian masters mistreated them and made them suffer, putting them to hard labor. The people cried out to the Lord, the God Who had established the covenant with Abraham, and the Lord heard their voice and saw their misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought them out of Egypt, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey . . .

This is the story they were to tell as they presented their offering. God had delivered them and brought them into a land which they would make their home. They were to tell the story and then present an offering. Obviously, they were to be enthusiastic about telling their story! Who benefited the most? Understandably, those Old Testament saints encouraged their fellow Jews in their messianic faith by their story telling. **Slide 4** They also sent a most important message to their children! So, it is still important today for children to be enthusiastically told the old, old story of Jesus and His love – and not just on Sunday. That Christian faith and the Word needs to be spoken and lived out in the home throughout the week.

Have we been less than fully committed to passing on the baton of faith to the next generation? Why is it that the numbers of young adults and small children are so small among us? Maybe we have brought our monetary offering to the Lord's altar week by week, and maybe we could we have done a better job on that, but also on bringing to our children's hearts the story of God's love?! I heard a statistic this past week that 75% of high school freshmen have already deserted the faith in which they began their life. I think our WELS is doing somewhat better on this – in great part because of our Lutheran elementary schools and high schools – besides many conscientious parents. But because of poor statistical retention of our young people, there may be all the more reason to come to the Lord's altar – to plead His forgiveness for the sake of our souls and our children's!

If we were to follow the same practice as the ancient Jews each time we presented our offering, "WE" would tell the story of a people who were once slaves to sin and to death. But a man named Jesus came down from heaven to live among them, to give His life in their behalf. This also is a story of deliverance--of an exodus, if you will. It is OUR story! The story of every man, woman and young person in this room. Through our offering, we help to tell that story, don't we? Whether it is Gospel proclamation here at Brooklyn Lutheran, or at West High School, or Martin Luther College, or a mission setting in America or half way around the globe!

**Slide 5 Christian faith is not a philosophy, but a story.** There have been many great philosophers, people who have studied about life and have come to understand many important truths about life. Socrates was a philosopher. Buddha was a philosopher. Emerson was a philosopher. I suppose Dr. Phil is a philosopher of sorts. And maybe we can learn something from these insightful individuals. But Christian faith is not a philosophy. Christianity is based on an historical event--the Word of God became flesh and dwelled among us! God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ!

You and I in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America might not tell a story each Service as our offering is brought to the altar. But in a way, and to a degree, you and I have our story to tell each worship – not so different from what the ancient Jews did! You and I do something similar every time we recite one of the creeds: We tell a story by our.... “I believe in God, the Father almighty....” When we use our Morning Praise order the second Sundays of months, the Te Deum very much sings out in story form. In part it goes: *Eternal Son of the Father – When You became man to set us free, You humbled Yourself to be born of a virgin. You overcame the sting of death and opened the Kingdom of heaven to all believers. You sit at the right hand of God....* And so it goes! These are not principles about life great minds have discerned. These are historical truths that have been revealed. Christian faith is not a philosophy, it is a story.

**Slide 6 That story has been constant ever since the creation of the world; it is the story of God’s love for fallen humanity.** Already in the garden God promised Adam and Eve that they would have a Savior, Who would crush Satan and his power over mankind. God made a covenant with Noah and then with Abraham and with the children of Israel. And God sealed that covenant with the cross of Calvary. God loves human beings. God loves you and me. God loves every person on this earth. If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. That is what is revealed to us through a man hanging on a tree on Golgotha two thousand years ago! This box of brains inside our skull is simply not adequate to understand God in His fullness. The best we can do is point a trembling finger toward Jesus and declare, *“If you want to know what God is like, look at this man. Look at how He lived and how He died. This is what God is like.”* We know what God is like through the story of Jesus.

A pastor’s wife was visiting her elderly mother-in-law with dementia and asked, “Mum, would you like to pray?” Mum couldn’t say anything coherent, but somehow a window came open just for a moment and here is what the mother prayed. It was the last coherent thing she said in her life. She said, *“Dear Lord, I don’t know who I am. I don’t know what I am and I don’t know where I am, but please love me.*

There’s not a philosopher on earth who could comfort that mother at a time like that. But on a lonely hill overlooking Jerusalem hangs a man on a cross Who says to her and to us, “See how much I love you.” Christian faith isn’t a philosophy, it is our response to an historical event, the Christ event. The message of that event has been constant through the ages. It is the story of God’s love for fallen humanity. Amen.

**Dear Master, Yours the glory of each recovered soul.  
Ah, who can tell the story of love that made us whole!?  
Not ours, not ours the merit; to You alone the praise!  
Give us a thankful spirit to serve You all our days. Amen. CW 388 v3**