

To be totally honest, I never really thought much about bible literacy – about *really knowing* the stories of my faith.

I entered seminary with just a basic understanding of the scriptures, and was actually ok with that. Obviously, it was important to me that *some* people would know the stories well, but I was pretty sure it was enough to just believe in God and carry on with my life of faith...and then I delved deeper, and it changed me.

I began to discover stories I hadn't heard before. I began to notice things about familiar stories and familiar characters that opened up new avenues for understanding God, myself, humanity and our relationship to the divine. I began to realize that there was so much more to the faith I inherited than simply believing in God and calling myself a Lutheran Christian.

A while ago, I was with a gathering of other pastors listening to a guest lecture by a certain biblical scholar. In it, I heard about a survey he had his students conduct for a class. It was simple: ask a person what biblical story s/he thinks of when life gets difficult.

What specific story (or stories) of your faith breathes hope into your life when you are scared, sad, angry, anxious, etc.?

When the question first hit me, I'll admit that I didn't know how to answer...even with all the biblical study I have under my belt. It was clear by the body language around me that I wasn't alone. It was pretty uncomfortable. The lecturer went on to report that in all the years of this survey, he had only gotten one specific answer. Most Christians did not have a quick or clear response.

His question convicted us that day, and it drew our attention to why these ancient stories are important for us to know...to *really know*.

The stories of our people and our faith are not just a foundational text for Christianity. They are not just a tradition. They are not simply ancient accounts or depictions of things that God's people experienced or imagined in their reflecting on the divine. They do not simply serve to shape the Church, its past and its future. Indeed, scripture is and does all of those things, but these are also *living* stories of God's love and grace poured into *this* world and into each of our lives. They bear meaning for all of us. They articulate the difficulties and the joys we face as God's people. They articulate the hope we all need to live as people of God, sharing in God's work for this world.

For most of us who have lived in faith for a long time, we know these stories better than we think we do. We have heard them again and again. They are in our bones. As you ponder the many characters and scenes you carry with you, I invite you to go that extra step and imagine what such stories say to you in the midst of a life that knows the trouble of sin, brokenness, loneliness, loss, anxiety, anger, sadness, etc. What do they say to you as a child of God living for the sake of God's justice, mercy and love? There is tremendous power, beauty, and life in the answers you may discover.

I also invite you to participate in opportunities to explore and grow in biblical literacy, whether they be on your own in personal study, with others in small groups, or in organized programs/classes/events in your church or faith community. Your faith and your relationship with God will be richer for it! Who knows?...the connections you make for yourself may help others to better see God's Spirit alive and at work in their own life! These stories can do amazing things...dive in and enjoy!

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Peder