

The Great Vigil of Easter

April 19, 2014

I remember with fondness reading stories to my nieces when they were small children. We would have a dozen or so books around us while one of them sat on my lap, but, for some reason they just wanted to hear the one story over and over again. "Read it again," they would say. And I would suggest "how about another story?" They persisted and they wanted to hear the same story several times over. I must confess I really got tired of "The Cat in the Hat."

Have you ever had that experience? There's something about one story that we want to hear and receive because that story gives us meaning or joy or a sense of identity.

Tonight we hear the one story that binds us together. We've heard it before and we'll hear it again and we want to hear it again and need to hear it again.

You've just heard the highlights ...

- God spoke and a world was created filled with beauty, order, and wonder.
- God lifted a faithful remnant – Noah and his family - from the flood after the people God created turned their backs on the Creator.
- God delivered God's people from slavery and oppression and delivered them into the freedom and joy of the Promised Land.
- God offers restorative and life-giving waters to all who are thirsty.
- God promises the garland of salvation and to anoint us with joy.
- And in the resurrection of Jesus, God's promises are fulfilled. The one whom the weeping Mary thinks is a gardener speaks a word, and she recognizes him.

This is God's story that we get to hear every year, every Sunday, in a way. It's is God's story ... and it is our story.

We come, each of us, with our unique stories including where we have lived and worked. Where we've traveled, the friends we've made along the way. As a result, we each have gifts to share.

We also share a common story with others. We come from a particular family or town. I'm from the "Daffodil Capitol of the World," (Puyallup, Washington). I bet you didn't know that! Here in Auburn we live in the "Endurance Capitol of the World." Maybe you belong to the "Sons of Norway" or the local lodge or the basketball team.

We have identities that are shaped and formed by our stories.

Yet, undergirding it all, the common story that binds us together is the story of God. Not only do we get to hear it again and again, we are privileged to participate in the story. It is the story of God who created and re-created the world and whose promise to be with us and to restore the world in grace has been given to us in Jesus.

Soon, one among us will step into these storied waters. Here he will be joined to Jesus Christ. Yes, Paul said it well in the lesson we heard Peggy read. "Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? If we've been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

These storied waters echo God's creative act of fashioning a new world. Here we emerge from the flood. Here we cross the Red Sea as God delivers us from slavery and into the freedom and joy of the Promised Land. Here we come to the waters freely given by God. And soon we will receive the mark of joy, one of us sealed by the Spirit and the rest of us receiving the oil of gladness to remember our baptism.

We don't just hear the story. We step into it. We live it. It is God's story and it is, by the grace of God, our story!

So, following the baptism of Zac, all of us get to splash around in the water, get our faces wet, make the sign of the cross, and receive anointing. We hear it, feel it, and touch it. And God is the author of it all!

In a moment our candidate for baptism will renounce other stories, other scripts that seek to have power over us. And then our affirmers will join in that renunciation. And then all of renounce the ways of sin and death that draw us from God.

Then he will say yes and we will say yes again.

We want to make this story our story and we need to come back again and again to hear, touch, taste and see the story. We come to these storied waters. We come to the storied Table. We come to pray. We come to be one with each other.

We can't get enough the story. Let's hear it again. Amen.