

The Staff is Reading

~ Pastor Bill

It's been a few months since we've done this so we will surely not remember everything. And most of my reading has been of books that Mary Koon recommended to me, including the first two below.

Born a Crime by Trevor Noah. The comedian and host of the *Daily Show* has written this memoir of his growing up as a biracial -- and therefore literally illegal -- child in Johannesburg. His father is a white Swiss-German and his mother is a black South African. She was fined and jailed for having a relationship with Trevor's father.

While I am always a bit leery of someone in his early 30s writing a memoir, I found this book to be absolutely fascinating, compelling, and heart-breaking as Noah gives concrete examples of the demonic absurdity of institutional racism. Strongly recommended.

A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles has a unique and fascinating plot. It is the story of an upper class Russian gentleman being sentenced to permanent house arrest in the Hotel Metropolis in Moscow following the Bolshevik Revolution. Despite having taken a college course on Modern Russian History, I learned vastly more about Russia in the early 20th century through this extraordinarily well-written novel. Yes, read it!

Our own Jeff Williamson has written a slim history of his ancestors and others entitled *Anti-Slavery Presbyterians in the Dakota Mission*. It contains one fascinating story after another of voluntary manumissions of slaves, of adventures freeing escaped slaves through the Underground Railroad, and the like. Jeff notes that Gideon Pond, founding pastor of Oak Grove Church, attempted to convince the territorial legislature to grant voting rights to black and Native American men. This took place in 1849, 20 years before African-Americans gained suffrage. I am happy to lend my copy and I am sure that Jeff would also make copies available.

JoAnn A. Post was a fellow student in the continuing education event I participated in this summer at St. John's University, *Writing Theology for the General Reader*. JoAnn is a veteran Lutheran pastor, having served congregations in Alaska, Georgia, Wisconsin, Connecticut and Illinois. Her book *Steward of Stories: Reflecting on Tensions in Daily Discipleship*, contains many stories and lessons from her three decades of pastoral ministry. These include stories of pastoral care, baptisms, weddings and funerals, church council shenanigans, misconduct by other pastors, and the like. She has had a few more misbehaving parishioners than I have experienced (well, except for one congregation, which was rife with them), but reading this would give you some idea of the challenges, and especially the joys, that Mary and I encounter daily. Recommended.

Miracle at Augusta by James Patterson. Pretty boring and I don't think it's just that I'm not a golfer.

This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New by Wendell Berry. Of course it was wonderful, as is everything, poetry or prose, by this inspiring farmer/writer.

Movies: *LaLaLand*. Fun and poignant. However, Oak Grove has a couple dozen folks who sing better than Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling.

Wonder Woman. I am NOT a fan of comic book movies and this one certainly had an appalling amount of violence (though only about half a teaspoon of blood somehow). It certainly is a depiction of a strong woman, in every sense of the word.

Kris and I recently saw *Sister Act* at the Chanhassen Dinner Theater. First thing to note: the food has significantly improved from the last time we were there quite a number of years ago. This stage version of *Sister Act* has a few slight plot changes (for the better) from the movie and the songs are all original, none from the movie. Overall, Kris liked it. I loved it. cont'd

Chadwick Reading cont'd

A Short History of Nearly Everything by Bill Bryson. This was recommended to me by Rod Myers after I mentioned in a sermon the book *Origins: God, Evolution and the Cosmos*. Rod noted that Bryson's book is much more accessible for the non-scientist than this book by Philip Rolnick. And indeed, it is. Of course, best-selling author Bill Bryson could make any topic entertaining. *A Short History* covers the origins of the universe, the earth, life, humans, etc. He makes subjects like physics, anthropology, geology, meteorology, quantum physics, and string theory intelligible even to me and tremendously interesting. One astonishing piece of information after another. Bryson intersperses hilarious vignettes about the personal lives of these scientists through the centuries. HIGHLY recommended.

~ Nathan Hirsh

I've got a terrible habit of stopping a book midway and coming back to it weeks or months later. At any given time, my reading list is stacked up in the teens and twenties. However, I was able to condense it to a few of the ones I'm really enjoying now even as I plod through the rest of my stack.

Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales by Ray Bradbury. Since high school, I have kept two books sitting on my nightstand without fail, the Bible, and this collection of short stories. If you haven't taken the time to read a Bradbury classic science fiction story in the past, you're missing out on a true master of the craft. This collection in particular is a constant reminder that science fiction isn't about space battles and weird science. It's about using a strange context to examine familiar human issues. Every single story is a gem, and every time I read through them again I learn something new about writing.

Parade by Shuichi Oshida -- One of the strangest books I've picked up in a while, the writing stays accessible the whole way through and offers a unique glimpse into Japanese youth culture. Not a book for the faint of heart, it also takes time to contemplate issues of violence and power through a group of young adults living together in an apartment. I call it strange though, largely because it has a sense throughout that the author is alluding to greater meaning and metaphor with every word, a strong kind of purpose that never feels fully revealed. I think, in some respects, that not knowing much about Japan personally means I've missed out on some vital context that would really help this book shine. I put it on my reread list immediately and look forward to learning even more in round 2.

The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society by Lesslie Newbigin -- A mentor of mine passed this one on to me and I've been slowly making my way through it for ages. It's a dense book, and I have to hold off the compulsion to underline and earmark just about every page. Written in the late 80s, it's strangely poignant today as it discusses how we talk about scripture and truth in the context of an academic world that questions the existence of knowable objective Truth, with a capital T. While some of the arguments and theological imperatives are a little dated, the overall framework is a fantastic place to start discussions about what we believe we know about Christianity. In particular, I enjoy that this book doesn't paint pluralistic and postmodern viewpoints as the enemy of Christianity, but merely seeks to talk about how these philosophies interact with each other both positively and negatively.