

*I Love to Tell the Story*  
September 8, 2019  
Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher  
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12, 23-28

Rally Sunday! It is called by many names, Opportunity Fair, Cinnamon Roll Sunday! What a great time it is. One of my churches would call it Promotion/motion/ Commotion Sunday. I am not sure what all that might mean except that lots of energy is generated. Some kids who are finally old enough to occupy the coveted Youth Room. Along with that right, they are now privy to the stories of mission trips and lock-ins as well as some of the pranks and calamities. In it all it is now the opportunity for each class each group, each member to weave their own stories of faith into the lessons and stories being told.

One of the reasons we come to church in order to discover how our life story fits into the stories of our faith. It is our stories that connect us. It helps define who we are. Imagine the intent of the writer of the Book of Hebrews. Reminding those who gather in Jesus' name of the stories of faith from their past. Let us hear the stories from Hebrews about the ones to whom we belong.

A reading from Hebrews Chapter 11 various verses.

<sup>1</sup>Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup>Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. <sup>3</sup>By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. <sup>8</sup>By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup>By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. <sup>11</sup>By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup>Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” <sup>23</sup>By faith Moses was hidden

by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter,<sup>25</sup> choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.<sup>26</sup> He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.<sup>27</sup> By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king's anger; for he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible.<sup>28</sup> By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. This is the word of the Lord.

These are the stories of faith we do not simply read them and put them away. They are designed to seep into our consciousness and become part of our own DNA. They are tied with our own personal stories of faith. God, who promised Abraham and Sarah multiple generations of descendants is our God to whom we pray. The God who picked stuttering Moses to lead his people from slavery is the same God who raised up a Baptist preacher to national prominence as a speaker for justice in Martin Luther King, Jr. The God who continued to stand by David who wrote beautiful psalms of praises but who also was capable of murder in order to hide his sexual scandal, is our God who will walk with us through our own dark valleys and shadows. The stories that we read and learn from the Bible is the foundation of our own stories of faith.

One of the things that I love about being a Transitional Pastor is that I have been able to enter into so many church communities and into so many people's lives. I hear stories of the members that inspire, move and strengthen my own faith. There is a story in a church where the pastor of fifteen years discovered he had brain cancer. Without much time for preparation, had surgery and unexpectedly dies on the table. The church was devastated. Along with grief came some guilt of the times they complained to him or groused about him. They were bereft. I began the Interim with tears in the congregation every Sunday as we journeyed through the Interim, on a good Sunday there was some laughter mixed with the tears. Slowly the church as a community regained its footing and they began to look for their next pastor not a copy of who they lost, but a pastor who would lead them forward. In that

time of loss and grief we welcomed new life as I gave birth to our second daughter. My story of that church was the depths of grief and loss into the light of hope and possibility.

We do not own our stories. They become part of the tapestry of the people of faith. As we seek out God in our lives, we begin to embrace what God has done for us through Jesus, God's son. We begin to realize that we are not alone. That our stories have an element of what I would call **the other** in it. God is with us in our stories. The stories we have in the Bible are not about Superhero's as much as they are about flawed humans who sometimes do great things while other times not so much. Remember it is Abram who when challenged tried to pass his attractive wife off as his sister rather than sticking up for her honor and risking the wrath of foreign king. And Peter the disciple with the best intentions always seems to be saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. More often than not Peter becomes the object of Jesus' teachings of what not to do! What makes them stories of faith is that God is with them in their journey.

Whatever heroic acts that we credit ourselves of doing, I would wager that there is a little piece within us that knows, truly knows we did not do it entirely on our own volition. God's imprint is on the story.

Our stories also involve **another**. That another may have a story very different from our own. Listening to the story of another helps us to understand our neighbor in a different light. Stories offer another function as we build community and that can bring us together even with whom we may disagree. Writer and theologian, Parker Palmer said in a recent podcast in how to talk with others whose opinions, views and beliefs are radically different than our own. He suggests that we approach such a person, saying, "Tell me a story that illustrates how you came to the position that you now hold."

As we listen to another's story, we begin to see them in their own humanity and struggle. When Jesus tells us to love our enemy it is not in a blanket superficial way, but to know and understand another person and where their journey has led.

On the commotion/promotion/motion Sunday, we begin another year. A time for a new chapter in the story of our life together. And in this year our

story as a church and as people of faith will unfold, maybe in unexpected ways. We begin the year in transition. Our story will be a tapestry drawing upon many threads. The first step is to learn who we are and how our story of faith is bolstered by the stories of those in God's teaching. Our story involves the Other, the working of the Spirit in our lives and in this church. It involves how our faith has been strengthened by witnessing members of this community. How the spirit has moved us to be bold in our faith. Our story is also woven with the threads of one another. How our minds and our generosity has been expanded not to make a community that reflects only ourselves, but to see each other as children of God. Our story involves listening to others, being curious about their story. And being vulnerable enough to share our own.

As you might have guessed by now sharing our story is our theme for this year. Sharing our story will deepen our own awareness of God in our lives. I also have an ulterior motive in sharing our story. As a church, we need to articulate clearly to the next pastor who we are and what we hold important. Each of us has our own opinions about that, as we bring together over 500 perspectives we begin so we weave the tapestry of the faith story of Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. This will benefit our church, as we will prepare to seek the next pastor. It is not enough to say we are a friendly church and we want a pastor who is a good preacher. 90% churches think they are friendly and 95% of pastors believe that they are a good preacher. So, when we ask you to share your story about moments of the Oak Grove that were tender or joy filled, poignant or memorable, please think about it and honestly share it. When we ask you to share a story when you have made choices about your giving. Please let us hear it. You don't even need to sign your name because you are part of the Oak Grove family. Let us tie into the stories from here, the Bible and connect our own story with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Let us expand our story as we listen to one another, even those with other views. Let us discover the tapestry of our own story of faith and the story of faith of Oak Grove. I know our stories will be filled with a rich combination of colors and textures. I look forward to us as we can claim as our story. Thanks be to God Amen.