

A Sermon for Advent 4, Year A
Festival of Lessons & Hymns
Fr. Jim Cook

The Power of Stories.

We've just done something that is so important to families; we've listened to some stories. And as a parish family, we don't get the opportunity to hear so many stories told in one sitting. And the eight stories we've just heard, are some of the stories that are especially important to our history as Christians.

To the best of my knowledge, the *Book of Common Prayer* provides only one such opportunity, and that's during an Easter vigil. To get the form for the service we're doing today, I had to turn to the *Book of Occasional Services*, which is a supplementary liturgical resource. And I'm telling you this, so you'll understand just how unique today's worship service is.

Telling stories is important, because it's how we connect with each other.

When the Cook family gathers for dinner – and we do so almost every evening – we each share the stories of that day, like how our classes went, or what happened at work. We talk about who we saw, and what we heard. We talk about what went well, or what didn't go so well. And when we tell these stories, we include each other in our experiences and in our feelings. We become closer as a family when we share each other's stories.

Telling stories is important as well because it reminds us of who we are, and *whose* we are.

One of the things that my kids like to do is look at our video tapes of them when they were much younger. And when they see themselves as they once were, it helps them to understand a bit more about where they are now. When they see themselves, in those videos, as being loved when they were young, and set that information next to their current assurance of being loved now, they begin to see the whole span of their lives as being lived within the context of a familial love. And that gives them security. Stories, even those transmitted by video tape, can help us feel good about ourselves.

Telling stories is important because it helps us cope in stressful situations.

One of the most common things I see take place, when someone has died, is for friends and family members to gather together and tell stories about the one who died. They tell stories about the things they did, and the things they said. And when those stories are told, you begin to see people smiling, and even laughing. Stories enable the light of hope and the light of peace to come into what was seemingly a very dark situation.

Stories are very powerful.

When we're feeling lost, a story can remind us of where we came from, and help us remember where to go.

When we're feeling alone, a story can remind us of all the people who are important to us – and all the people who think us important to them – and help us remember who we are.

And when we're feeling uncertain about our life and our future, a story – and especially the stories we've just heard – reminds us that God is our source, that God is our companion, and that God is our ultimate destination.

This is why the stories about the life and ministry of Jesus are collectively called the gospels, the “good news.” For, when we hear these stories, we're reminded of the love that God has for all of us, and the lengths to which God went in order to secure our relationship with him, and the promises that God makes to us.

In a few days, we're going to hear and celebrate another story: the story of how God came to earth in the form of a little baby born in a manger. This is the Christmas story, and it's one of our most important stories.

God's love-affair with humanity, which began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, finds its ultimate expression in the story of a young couple and their little baby boy. That couple's names were Mary and Joseph, and their baby's name was Jesus. And I'm certain that you know (if I may quote Paul Harvey) “the rest of the story.”