



Children's stories

Our daughter, Annika, is three, and she has me thinking about stories. Annika loves stories. She is quite fond of the VeggieTales versions of Bible stories. My wife, Kristina, leads a Bible study for North Park students. During one study last year Annika grabbed a Bible, ran into the living room, sat down and began to read. “Where are you?” Kristina asked. “I’m right here,” Annika said. “No, I meant what story are you reading?” “Dave and the Giant Pickle,” she replied (The VeggieTale version of David and Goliath). Annika loves books even more. A year ago her favorite was *Brave Potatoes*, about a group of courageous tubers leading a vegetable revolution at the Chowder Lounge against chef Hackemup who, clearly, bears the vegetables malicious intent.

We adults often relegate stories to the nurseries and playgrounds of childhood, reckoning them mere trifles to divert the attention of the young. In so doing we make a grave mistake. Stories are not just childish amusements; they can convey the deepest and most potent truths.

The first performance of Joseph Addison’s play *Cato* took place on the London stage in 1713. It is the story of the growing concern of the Roman aristocrat Cato with the ambition of Julius Caesar. Convinced that Caesar meant to destroy the Republic and become a dictator, Cato tried to awaken the Romans to the danger, to sound the alarm that their liberties were threatened. Eventually he gave his life for the cause. The play later became wildly popular in the American colonies. It was a favorite of George Washington’s. During the long winter at Valley Forge, Washington brought in a group of players to perform *Cato*, reminding his soldiers that some causes are worth great sacrifice.

We Christians believe that God acts in history to bring about his purposes. The New Testament asserts that the central events of our faith—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ—actually happened in a specific place and time, in Roman Palestine under Pontius Pilate. If these events did not, in fact, occur, then, as Saint Paul said, we are to be pitied for our faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). When Joshua led the people across the Jordan, God commanded that twelve stones be set in place, markers of what he had done, set to spark retellings of the story for generations to come (Joshua 4:1-10).

Stories of the faith are important because they remind us that God has been faithful in the past and that he can be trusted in the future. What is to come is unknown. What is certain is that life is often inexplicable—the evil seem to prosper, while the righteous are brought low. The stories of faith do not promise that we will understand all the mysteries of life. But they do stand as living stones, markers to remind us that we can hope for the future, that in the midst of the inexplicable and the unknown God is present, and he is trustworthy.

Saint Paul once advised that we should allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). The stories of the Bible are our heritage. Read them to your children, your children’s children, to each other, and to yourself. May their tenor and timbre sink into your bones. They have the power to transform, as we open our hearts and minds to the spirit of the living God. May we be so shaped by the stories of our faith that our tomorrows are rich with markers of faith to be read by our children and all those yet to come. □

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Lost in Translation

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eration understood the generic use of masculine terms. He was surprised, however, when two women in their sixties, who are evangelical Christians, told him that they had always felt left out whenever masculine terms were used in the Bible. No one had ever asked them about how they felt.

“I think the number of women who hear language that way and who are not in the church is getting larger and larger,” Madvig says. “We, as a committee, were concerned to produce a translation that non-churched people will read.”

Madvig also points out that the use of “they” instead of “he” was used in several cases in the King James Version. Philippians 2:3 reads, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” It’s also found several times in Shakespeare. “God send every one their heart’s desire” in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Act III, Scene 4) and “There’s not a man I meet but doth salute me, As if I were their well-acquainted friend” in *Comedy of Errors* (Act IV, Scene 3).

The desire to reach a new generation of people—both inside and outside the church—had a major effect on the decision to go ahead with the TNIV, says Bolinder. While the TNIV was being worked on, Bolinder got a letter from Adam Hamilton, pastor of Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. One night, Hamilton came into to his eight-year-old daughter’s room to kiss her good night and saw her reading her Bible. Then his daughter asked him, “Why is the Bible only written to boys?”

“It was like an epiphany to him,” says Bolinder. Hamilton’s daughter pointed out several passages where there were male generic pronouns that were intended to mean both men and women. “But it didn’t mean that to this little girl,” says Bolinder. “She could make no sense of it. For her, the English language doesn’t get spoken that way anymore.”

Bolinder says that one of the misconceptions of the TNIV is a mistaken claim that it no longer refers to God and Jesus as male. That is not the case, says Bolinder. God is still referred to as “Father” and Jesus is still male. But no matter how hard the CBT tried to communicate that, some people still got the wrong idea. One of those people was a coworker of Bolinder’s wife, Jill. Soon after the news about the TNIV came out, a woman came up to Jill at the school where she teaches and said, “So I understand your husband is putting out a Bible that makes God a woman.”

Members of the CBT say they know that the TNIV is not perfect, and that some of their decision may be devious. Moo hopes that the focus on the TNIV will help Christians get a better understanding of how translators work. “People think there is one word in English that can be plugged into one word in Greek,” says Moo. “They they don’t understand how complex the translation process is.”

“All of us endorse the idea that each word in the Scriptures is verbally inspired,” Moo says, “but individual words don’t communicate much. It’s only in context to those words have meaning. The task of the translator is to look at those words, try and figure out the meaning, and then communicate them.”

Whether people agree with the TNIV or not, Moo says he hopes they will understand that the translator’s only agenda was to “communicate as clearly as we could in contemporary English.” And he wants them to know that they are well aware of the responsibility they have in trying to communicate God’s word to people.

“All of us on the translation committee realize that the work we are doing will influence the way millions of people will read the Bible,” Moo says. “It’s a huge responsibility. If I write a scholarly article, I know the people who will read it will have the tools to know where I am wrong. When I am working on a translation, the people that read it most likely won’t have the tools to know where I am wrong.” □

KRISTA BRUMBERG STEVENS



Let your light shine

Recently, eleven Covenant churches let me visit them briefly and I came away from each encounter with fresh ideas, new facts, and a sense of connectedness with my brothers and sisters in Christ as far away as Alaska and as close as a half hour from my home. On a whim, I logged onto www.covchurch.org (the Covenant’s website) and found a listing of Covenant churches websites. For fun, I decided to pop in on all the churches with the same name as my church, Community Covenant Church. Here’s what is happening at Community Covenant Churches across our denomination.

I want our church to go to the beach every Tuesday in the summer and have an all-church weekend retreat in a nearby mountain facility like the church in El Cajon, California. I want my church to have three choirs like the church in San Andreas, California. I want my church to have an annual outing to the Red Sox just as Omaha, Nebraska, goes to a Royals game.

Looking at other churches’ schedules made me rethink how we plan our activities. In Upsala, Minnesota, the Covenant Women get together once a month at night, which may attract more working women, as well as women who can’t arrange child care during the day. In San Andreas, youth ministries happen right after school during the week. In East Bridgewater, Massachusetts, their groups meet twice a month on Friday evenings.

Need some new ideas for a ministry? Check out Omaha’s childcare/preschool program from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. East Bridgewater hosts a youth coffeehouse. Kearney, Missouri, runs a group called Network, a self-discovery class to help people find their ideal place of service in the church.

Prayer is encouraged on East Bridgewater’s site, which offers an opportunity to email in a prayer request for their prayer chain. In Kirkwood, Missouri, a group meets every Sunday morning before worship to pray for the music team, the pastor’s message, sound-system crew, children’s ministry workers, and for God’s blessings on those who attend the service.

Mission is an integral part of many of these churches. Kearney’s youth participated in a World Vision 30-Hour Famine fundraiser. Scotts Valley, California, is having an all church talent show as a camping fundraiser. Rocklin, California, supports sixteen missionaries or missionary organizations.

Eagle River, Alaska, the newest I believe of these eleven churches, included a list of values, which I loved. Some of them are:

- We want to be a real place where real people meet a real God.
- We believe we are called to excellence and creativity in all we do.
- We take God seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.
- We are not perfect, but we strive to remain healthy.
- Our main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

I would definitely visit all of these churches if I was in their area, thanks to their websites. If you don’t have a website, your light might not shine as far. If you need help starting one, there is a page on www.covchurch.org that offers suggestions. I hope to visit your church someday by site if not in person.

I wish I could join the Scotts Valley women’s Bible study/journaling group on Monday nights in the Fireside Room. Keep the light bright, ladies. May your lights shine brightly. □

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