

I grew up in a family of story-tellers. I can remember family gatherings and grandparents telling stories about me, my brothers, my parents, aunts and uncles and cousins. Dinner time was also story time: stories about work or friends or our day or the old stories about "when we grew up." Still today, family gatherings are a time of stories, telling and re-telling the stories of family and friends. Telling and re-telling our stories.

I remember as a kid being impatient when I'd hear the same story again. I already know this story. I know all the facts. I know what gets said next. Why can't I go play? As an adult, though, I've learned about the great gift I was given in these stories. I didn't just learn the facts about the stories. The stories have helped me learn who I am. Not just the stories about me, but all the ones about cousins and uncles and aunts and grandparents and family friends have told me, taught me, about the people with whom I am and from whom I have come. I have told people that, although I grew up in California, I am culturally Minnesotan. I discovered this by listening to Garrison Keillor and thinking "I know these stories. I know these people. They are my people." I learned my heritage, my culture, by hearing the stories of my Minnesotan relatives again and again.

We are approaching the time when families gather and celebrate. We are approaching the holidays--the holy days--when we will again hear familiar stories of the promised coming, of the time when God draws near. It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of shopping and preparations. It's easy to get distracted by the arrangements and logistics. It's easy to think that we already know the facts about the stories we hear in church and don't need to pay attention.

But the repetition of the story is the gift the church gives us. It forms us. It shapes us. It tells us our past, our present, and our future. It tells us who we are in this world, and to whom we belong. It carries our identity. It molds us into family. It reminds us of our foibles and our gifts. It reminds us that we are God's children.

As we move through this month, take the time to listen to the stories around you, and to tell, or re-tell, your stories. Listen to the stories of veterans. Listen to the stories of family. Listen to the stories of the approaching God. Hear what they tell you about yourself, about humanity, about your family, and about our faith. Explore who you are and who we are as a church family. Celebrate the heritage of which you are a part. Give thanks for the gift of stories.

Shalom,
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