

Christian Perspectives: Telling the Story

By Rev. Stephanie Pellow

?Each of us lives in our own time,? I recall my mother saying as she struggled to learn how to use email and type on a keyboard that required much less pressure than her old typewriter.

I am very comfortable using my computer to compose and for email, but am totally befuddled by LinkedIn and Facebook, which would require far more time to use than I care to spend on them. So, I tend to dismiss them as being instruments that are not of my time.

The religious communities of our time have inherited the legacy of print.

Our holy writings and commentaries of every sort are all readily available in print. We have lost any sense of wonder that the printing press was as revolutionary in its time as the invention of personal computers today.

Nothing was ever the same again once written language could be reproduced so much more rapidly than when books had to be painstakingly copied out by hand.

In the Town of Grand Valley, the ministerial group sponsors a learning series each winter in the season of Lent. One session this year featured Pastor Andrew Vis of the Christian Reformed Church in Orangeville who spoke on the early history of the writing of the Christian gospels, including those that are not contained in the Canon of Scripture as we know it now.

He reminded us of the origin of the scriptures in the oral tradition. The apostles spread the story by telling and retelling what they had experienced in the time that they travelled with and learned from Jesus.

Their responsibility was to tell the story with some detail in an engaging way that would encourage people to want to listen.

Some of those listeners had either been a part of the stories themselves, or heard them before. There was pressure to maintain consistency from one telling to another, from one place to another. Eventually it was considered important to record the stories in the scroll form of the Jewish tradition or early book form (codex) of that time.

Reading scripture publically and later privately became the norm and the wonderful art of telling the story was replaced by the consistency of the printed text.

Last year, I was introduced to the Network of Biblical Story Tellers.

This is a well organized international group that encourages and teaches the art of Biblical story telling. A storyteller presents a passage of scripture using the text from a translation of their choice, or the choice of the group if several are working together.

The goal is to learn the work by heart with 90% accuracy of the content and a somewhat lower demand for the exact words.

This recognizes that in each translation the order of the material sometimes differs slightly and the connecting vocabulary (and, then, when, and so forth) is not as crucial in most instances. The second goal is to present the piece with expression and feeling while keeping in mind it is not exactly the kind of dramatic presentation we would expect at the theatre.

My first experience of biblical storytelling in this way came about almost a year ago.

Several clergy and parishioners of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara gathered at their cathedral in Hamilton, ON, and took turns telling the entire Gospel of Mark. As a storyteller, you do experience some nervousness but, as time goes on, and you become intimately familiar with your passage, and with being in front of an audience, that fades.

Listening to other storytellers truly brings the story to life.

This Good Friday, March 25, at the community service at 10 a.m. in the Mel Lloyd Centre Auditorium, biblical storytellers will be presenting the story.

These tellers come from three different congregations in Shelburne and have been preparing for a few weeks for their part in this service of story, song and prayer.

You are cordially invited to attend the service. The storytellers would be delighted to share their work with you.