

Today, we celebrate the festival of the Christian home.
And this year, more than others, we are realizing the true treasure in "home".
Our homes have become our shelters, our sanctuaries,
and places to share our hearts like never before.

Perhaps, lately your home has been filled with extra stressors.
But I pray it's also been filled with love to care for each other.
Perhaps, your home has become a wreck of work, school, hobbies, and dirty dishes.
But I pray it's also been filled with gratitude for purpose and connection.
And that you've found unmeasurable grace in the mess.

So on this festival of the Christian home,
and on our cultural celebration of motherhood,
We take pause to remember our families.

God, we thank you for our family of faith, and our family of origin.
Neither are perfect.
Yet in them we come to know grace.
In our families our stories are shaped,
and you the author of life, know each line and chapter so well.
We ask your healing for any wounds that remain fresh,
we ask your blessing for everything we hold dear,
and we ask your presence to be with us as we strive to love as you love. Amen.

Once upon a time...

We have asked about the stories that have shaped you, and shaped your family....
The stories that you loved read to you as a child,
And the ones you've loved to share with your family.
Thanks to you all, we've compiled quite a long list!
They can be found in today's bulletin.

I was impressed at the variety of very meaningful books, fun books, stories with meaning and metaphor,
and stories with great humor.

We are certainly a family of faith that values story.
It's in our roots as both humanity, and followers of Christ, who is our most precious story-teller: Christ
shaped the world through the power of the Word,
And our hearts through the power of teaching through stories, through Jesus.

Stories tell us who we are by illuminating matters of the heart and soul,
Like struggle and challenge, creativity and courage, justice and injustice,
Sin and redemption, and so much more.
By diving deeping to story, we discover that
how we react and interact with the story tells us more about ourselves,
than about the author.

The stories we cherished as children helped us discover who we are in the world,
What makes us laugh, what makes us our hearts quicken,
What makes us resonate with one another, and so much more.

While we captured many of the books that contain stories that shaped us,
What we couldn't capture are the stories of your ancestors -
You know - the ones you begged your parents to tell over and over...

When I was little, we'd beg my mom to tell us stories of Great Grandma Johnson in Tennessee.
She had 10 children and lived on a farm,
And my mother would regularly spend her summers there as a child.
She'd tell us stories of going to the outhouse and chickens pecking at the other side.
In fact, most of the stories were about chickens.

Like how she'd have to collect eggs and was terrified of the rooster.
She made the best chicken and rooster sounds so we'd beg and beg for these stories.
We also cherished stories of Nana finding a child in town with no shoes,
and her giving her own to that child.
She was our first image of a person who'd "give you the shirt off their back",
but only in these stories, it was shoes.

For us, Nana was alive and well in these stories, teaching us both about caring for a farmhouse,
and caring for community.

And now, our kids ask for stories about our childhood.

(Picture of my Dad reading *Twas the Night*, a family picture, puppy Arthur)

High on the repeat list is the story of how a bat got into my house when I was about Hope's age.
There's very dramatic screaming as we discovered the little fellow sleeping next to our exhausted cat,
who was not a mouse, but a great winged creature.

And for Jason, they want to hear over and over about how when his parents weren't looking,
he climbed a ladder as a toddler to the roof and got stuck in tar,
as his Dad was repairing the roof that day.

The funny stories are the best... but at the heart of it..

Is that even as children, we seek to be grounded in something before us and beyond us.

Peter, or whoever wrote in Peter's name, in 1 Peter writes to the Gentile Christians
to help them in this same matter - to find grounding and identity.

They who are now identifying as Christ's followers,
need something solid to base their identity on.

And in these verses, the author tells them "desire the pure milk of the word",
or in other words, the Gospel message.

By this, he says, they will grow and mature as believers,
and know more deeply the goodness of God.

Desire.

Peter tells them to focus on desiring the Gospel message -
the redemption, the hope, the grace, the healing, and the work of justice and compassion,
that are embodied in the Risen Jesus Christ.

What better way to desire these things, than to know the story better and better.

We aren't encouraged here to desire to believe a certain list of facts or dogmas or creeds...
We are encouraged to be nourished by the story and song of the Gospel.
We will be tripping all over ourselves if we try to live as Christians
but not live into the story of the Gospel.

We will stumble in our faith if we neglect learning the story...
How can we discover our own place in God's story,
without knowing the beginning?

Truth be told, the story of the Gospel isn't all puppies and kittens.
It's not a sweet story with an immediate happy ending.
It's one of foreign occupation and injustice,
one of challenging authority and the consequences that gets you.
It's one of a brutal and unjust death sentence, and disciples fearing for their own lives.
Jesus calls us to give up our lives and carry crosses!

Living a gospel-centered life is not an easy road...
THAT is why we need to desire the whole story.
The story that is sewn up with stitches of grace and opens our eyes to a grander picture
Of a world, of creation, being born anew to a world that is unfolding into God's purposes.

We need to desire the word, the Gospel story, as one we can own and live into,
So that, even through the real struggles of a world still healing from sin and brokenness,
we can look with hope to the next page,
and see that God *is* still at work,
and *we (the people of God)* are *becoming* the people who fill the next pages of the story,
moving us more and more toward a beloved community
that *is* one that looks like what you'd find at the end of a children's book.
And not just a happy ending.
Not just a happily ever after,
But closer and closer to God's original design for creation.
Closer to a just world.
Closer to a world of compassion and peace.
With each page turn, something a little more beautiful.

Even though we are mostly at home, we are moving about, in this living story...

As I've said many times before, let's let the children lead us...

Yes, we share the Gospel story with them in age-appropriate ways...
But they also want to hear our life stories.
And we should share those as a part of the Gospel story.

They ask, "tell us a story about when you were a kid."
So we reach back into our memories to share something good,
sometimes meaningful, something that echoes with grace,
and maybe something that started with pain,
but ended with healing and something new and brighter.

Recently, Hope asked me to tell her a story of a time when things were scary, but were ok.
You can imagine why she asked this.

I told her the story of 9/11.
I think she was disappointed.
What she, and all the children right now are living through, is so different.
There's not an end in sight.
And everyone has the potential to get sick.
Their losses are different, and without end at this point.

Yet, our stories of resilience, courage, and family and community pulling together still hold weight.

She's heard about when my Dad died, and how that led to a sequence of events that led me to faith, and to church, and my calling, and even meeting her Daddy...

Right now, I imagine that all of the children and young people... and not so young people,
are wondering, what good this might lead to.
Some are beginning to make hopeful guesses...

After all, we are people of hope.
We are a people who know that God works for the good of those whom God loves.
We are people that know redemption.
We are God's people.

And our God is our refuge, our rock.
That's such a good image in this shifty time isn't it?
We know who we can depend on, and from where our help comes.

So we wait.
With expectancy for the good God will bring from this chapter in the story.
We see glimpses of all the helpers,
all the good that is already coming, and we crave more.
Tell me more good news stories, we beg.

Story Analyst, Lisa Cron, says "*Story, as it turns out, was crucial to evolution -- more so than opposable thumbs. Opposable thumbs let us hang on; story told us what to hold on to.*"
The story of God's love, hope, and redemption.
That's what we're holding on to. Amen.

