

# “BE A WITNESS”

Pastor Brad Smith

## **We’ve a Story To Tell to the Nations**

An old evangelical missionary hymn reminds us that “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations.” We will be singing it as our closing hymn at the end of our service today. The hymn was written by Henry Ernest Nichol. Henry was born in 1862 in Hull, a port city of north London. He was a musician, poet, artist, and writer who actually planned to be a civil engineer according to Robert J. Morgan who wrote several volumes about many of our great hymns of our faith. Because Henry excelled in music, art, poetry, and writing, he taught music, wrote musical textbooks, composed popular poetry, wrote on diverse themes, and established a wide-ranging reputation in his day for what has been referred to as “literary dexterity and excellence.”

Henry wrote about 130 hymn tunes and on occasion, like with “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations,” supplied the words. This song was first published in 1896 in London in The Sunday School Hymnary. As a “rousing anthem with an enthusiastic refrain that practically shoves us out the door and across the seas” (Morgan, 131) ... Carlton R. Young, in the Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal, reminds us that “This hymn . . . was typical of hundreds that were written to express #1) the determined, dynamic, energetic, and expansive attributes of Christian missions, and #2) the peace and unity found in Jesus Christ.”

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
And the dawning to noonday bright;  
And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth,  
The kingdom of love and light.

*So ... What is this story we have to tell to the nations? What is the story that will turn the hearts of the nations to the right? What is the story of truth and mercy, the story of peace and light, that we have to tell?*

Well, it very may well be one's own faith story ... but, collectively as the Body of Christ, it will ultimately be God's story of Redemption and Love.

### **Beginning with My Faith Story ...**

It was during my childhood through baptism and confirmation, in Sunday School and Worship, at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) in Toledo OH, that I came to know about God and personally accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, even as I began to consider pastoral ministry. I have worshipped at various Churches throughout the years, including, but not limited to, as previously mentioned Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Toledo, King of Glory Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) in Sylvania, as well as the Sylvania Church of God, a Pentecostal church based in Cleveland Tennessee, and Salem United Church of Christ, Toledo. Since entering into ministry I have served the Radnor United Church of Christ while the pastor was on sabbatical providing pulpit supply and visitation, pastor of the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) here in Bucyrus for 20 years, a visitation minister at the First United Church of Christ Galion for 13 years, Chaplain at Altercare since 2001, Visitation Pastor here at the Bucyrus UMC since 2015 serving the homebound and shut-in members of the church, and, alongside my ministry here, serve as pastor at the Plankton and Lemert United Methodist Churches. It was a joy to belong to, but more importantly, to serve God, these churches, especially alongside my wife Cindy. She has been an excellent source of support and encouragement and I am very pleased that her spiritual gifts compliment mine in God's service. I believe I am fulfilling my purpose by "walking by faith - step by step, day by day - trusting and obeying God to help me reflect and bring the light and presence of Christ to others by staying faithful to my calling glorifying God and edifying others in all that I am and do!" (Psalm 46:10). And that folks, not necessarily comprehensive of my faith journey, provides the structure, or foundation for "my" story.

### **God's Story (in 50 words)**

God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, *Abraham split*, Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled, bush talked, Moses balked, Pharaoh plagued, people walked, sea divided, tablets guided, promise landed, Saul freaked, David peeked, prophets warned, Jesus born, God walked, love talked, anger crucified, hope died, Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread, God remained.

### **Abraham's Story**

And picking up on God's Story when *Abraham split*, the scripture lesson today from Romans 4:13-25 provides for us a moving description of Abraham's faith, a structure or foundation for "our" story, by which Abraham, in the Apostle Paul's lifetime, as well as

for us, should be “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised, including the resurrection of Jesus. And it all began with God’s call and covenant with him as recorded for us in Genesis 12:1-9 (NRSV).

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. *I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Friends in Christ, plainly Abraham’s story included a faith in the promise of God to make him the father of many nations. It was a faith that glorified God (and edified or built up “nations” – which is inclusive of “us” and “our” story) because it called attention to all of God’s resources that would be required to fulfill it. John Piper, teacher and pastor, reminds us that that’s no doubt what God meant in Genesis 12:3 when he said to Abraham, “*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” From the very beginning, God had in view that Jesus Christ would be the descendant of Abraham and that everyone who trusts in Christ would become an heir of Abraham’s promise, for in as much, Galatians 3:29 says, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

**Good News.** For it is here that all of us who hope in Christ and follow him in the obedience of faith are Abraham’s descendants and heirs of his covenant promises. So when God said to Abraham 4,000+ years ago, “*Behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations,*” he opened the way for anyone of us, no matter what nation we belong to, to become children of Abraham and an heir of God’s

promises – making us all a part of God’s story! All we have to do is tell and retell the story – the good news - of Abraham’s faith and put our hope in/on God’s promises!

### **“Our” Story**

So back to this “story” we have to tell to the nations. The “story” that will turn the hearts of the nations to the right. The “story” of truth and mercy, the “story” of peace and light that we have to tell!

What is this “story”? Ultimately, yes it’s God’s Story. But God’s story includes my story. God’s story includes Abraham’s story ... and “your” story. Which in turn makes it “Our” story. Why? Because for those of us who have come to believe in Him, we have been transformed by God’s only begotten Son since he has touched our hearts and changed our lives. So now it is your turn to share His truth with others. (And be reminded: now is the perfect time to share your testimony because later may quite simply be too late.)

Charles Stanley said once, “His voice leads us not into timid discipleship but into bold witness.”

### **Conclusion**

Do you remember the 3 Ps of Pentecost I left you with several weeks ago?

The 3 P’s of Pentecost: #1) Promises fulfilled; #2) the Pricelist gifts of presence, peace, and protection; and #3) the Power of God. The 3<sup>rd</sup> P – the Power of God – has been made manifest for us in God’s story, particularly the story of a) Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; b) the coming of the Holy Spirit; and c) in the proclamation of the gospel – the spreading of the word. And we do that by sharing the story ... that is “your” story, “my” story, “Abraham’s” story, “God’s” story. “Our story.” So, SHARE IT. Why? Because it gives hope, builds faith, and ultimately witnesses to the Power and the glory of God.

If you don’t believe me, think back two weeks ago when Sheba Sulser shared her story. (Now I will definitely need a witness here.) Do remember what she preached on Pentecost Sunday 2 weeks ago. She did exactly what I am encouraging you do today. She SHARED “her” story and witnessed to the power and glory of God. And because we are one in the Body of Christ, it became “Our Story” and part of God’s story. So, as you SHARE your story, know this: Your story will become a song ... and that song will become a message ... and that message will show Jesus to the world.

Be a Witness! Tell the Story! And be reminded that ... *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* 1 Peter 2:9 (NRSV)