

LUKE 8:4-15

Gordon E. Ellis  
June 8, 2008**WHY WE READ & LEARN BIBLE STORIES**

I BEGIN my sermon today by singing you a SONG, a song called *Seeds*, recorded a few years ago by Kathy Mattea. And I think it PERTAINS to what I want to say to you today.

**SONG: *Seeds*** (by Kathy Mattea)

When I was about 12 years old, I decided to read the Bible, the WHOLE Bible – all the way through, from beginning to end, cover to cover. You see: we had this BIG, white family Bible lying on our coffee table for as long as I could remember, but I'd NEVER seen one READ it, or even OPEN it. So I decided to READ it. And I made it ALL the way to the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of GENESIS, the very FIRST book in the Bible. And about HALF way through the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis, I came to a lot of BEGOTS and BEGATS -- WHO begot WHOM (this was a *King James Version* of the Bible, with its begats and begots). And the list of UNPRONOUNCEABLE names seemed ENDLESS, so I QUIT! And while I WISH that I had made it at LEAST through Genesis and Exodus at that time, because there are some GREAT stories in those 2 books, my project was actually DOOMED to FAIL from the start. Oh, SOME people read the Bible through, COVER to COVER, but very FEW can get past the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> books of the Bible, Leviticus and Numbers -- and it's EXTREMELY rare for a 12-year old to DO it.

You see: what I didn't realize at THAT time is that the BIBLE is not a BOOK. It's a whole LIBRARY of books, written by MANY people, in MANY styles, for MANY reasons, over THOUSANDS of years. And it's not MEANT to be read from cover to cover. Oh, there IS one basic THEME that runs through ALL the books of the Bible, which is OUR search for GOD and GOD'S search for US, and our RELATIONSHIP with God and GOD'S with US. But the Bible is NOT a single book that we can just sit down and READ from cover to cover. And ALMOST everyone who TRIES it QUILTS. There are SOME books that are nothing but LAWS and RULES, for example. And there are some VERY long LISTS of BEGOTS and BEGATS. SO, I think it's better to at least START by taking certain BOOKS from that Bible Library, and reading THEM. And I always tell people to start with the GOSPELS, with the story of JESUS.

But the BIGGER question is: *WHY should we read the Bible at all?* I mean: we're always TELLING you: *READ your Bible*. WHY? Well, it's because, IN the Bible, there are MANY stories that tell us important TRUTHS about who WE are, and who GOD is, and how to LIVE our lives to the FULLEST, with meaning and purpose and joy, according to GOD'S ways and GOD'S values. And IN the characters of the Bible stories, WE find OURSELVES, and our OWN feelings of LOVE and LUST, ANGER and HATRED, jealousy and compassion, confusion and HOPE, SIN and doubt, FEAR and FAITH. When Joseph's brothers, for example, are JEALOUS of him because Dad LOVES him BEST, we KNOW that feeling! WHO among us hasn't FELT that feeling? Or when Adam and Eve have ALL that they NEED in the Garden of Eden to be HAPPY and SECURE, but are TEMPTED to want even MORE, we can see our OWN temptation to ALWAYS want MORE, even when we have ENOUGH and to SPARE. And LATER, when Adam and Eve try to HIDE what they've done from GOD, and then BLAME it on somebody ELSE, who among us hasn't done THAT? OR, when Jesus calls the scoundrel, Zacchaeus, to come DOWN from the sycamore tree, and makes him feel GOOD about himself in SPITE of his SIN, WE realize that even WE are PRECIOUS in God's sight. Or when Peter

DENIES Jesus, and CLAIMS that he doesn't even KNOW Jesus, we can't HELP but think of all the ways that WE deny Jesus as well. Yes, so MANY of the stories in the Bible are OUR stories, and so MANY of the characters are US, because we're ALL human beings, after all. And we're ALL just trying to get to KNOW ourselves better! We're ALL trying to learn more about God and RELATING to God! And we're ALL trying to LIVE a little more FULLY and completely.

And THAT'S why we need to LEARN the stories of the Bible, and TEACH them over and over again to our CHILDREN. And that's why attending Church School CONSISTENTLY is SO important! Don't you see: IF we really LEARN those stories, and learn them WELL, and INTERNALIZE them, we CARRY them WITH us, no matter WHERE we are or WHAT we're facing! And they SPEAK to us, and HELP us grow and change, and MOVE through the various STAGES and TRANSITIONS of life in more HEALTHY ways. I'VE found that the OLDER I get, the MORE the stories of the Bible SPEAK to me, and MOVE me, and HELP me on my journey. And it's because the stories of the Bible are like ONIONS! The MORE we get INTO them, the more LAYERS of meaning we FIND there. I always tell Church School teachers and parents that when we make SURE that our children are really LEARNING, and internalizing, the stories of the Bible, it's like we're giving them a GIFT. And our children will carry that gift WITH them into the future. And AS the years go by, they will slowly but surely UNWRAP the precious gift that we've GIVEN them. And IT will be like PEELING an ONION. In THIS stage of life, they'll peel it back and understand their lives -- or their dilemmas and struggles -- a little bit BETTER, so that they can LIVE their lives more MEANINGFULLY. And at THAT stage of life, they'll peel it back and have a sense of WHERE they need to go NEXT in their search for JOY and FULFILLMENT. But don't you SEE: right NOW we're giving them the GIFT. THAT'S why it's so IMPORTANT for them to come CONSISTENTLY to Church School. And ONCE they've RECEIVED the gift, and made it part of themselves, THEY will spend their WHOLE lives UNWRAPPING it, and GROWING from it!

And friends, THAT'S why having a STRONG and VIBRANT Church School program is SO important. AS the SONG says, these kids are like SEEDS that NEED fertile SOIL! They are just WAITING to be FED the STORIES and the LESSONS of the Bible, stories and lessons that they will carry WITH them forever, IF they come here CONSISTENTLY so that they have a chance to truly LEARN the stories and lessons. And that's why I keep encouraging CONSISTENT attendance. And I will KEEP encouraging it, because WHAT we're DOING here and now is ESSENTIAL for the health and well-being of our children for the REST of their lives. WHAT they RECEIVE here and now is JUST as important, IF not MORE important, than anything they are going to receive at SCHOOL or on the BALL field. And CONSISTENCY is the KEY! Otherwise, they WON'T really LEARN those stories and lessons. They WON'T really DIGEST them into themselves in ways that will NOURISH them later on.

AND, in addition to having a strong and vibrant Church School, and CONSISTENT attendance, that's ALSO why we need to recognize and THANK our TEACHERS and ADVISORS, who work so HARD to MAKE the soil here FERTILE and life-giving for our children. What THEY do in this church, and IN our children's lives, is absolutely CRITICAL, and I CAN'T thank them ENOUGH, because AS I said, the GIFT that they give our KIDS, our kids will spend their WHOLE lives UNWRAPPING. So, let's RECOGNIZE them today, and be THANKFUL to them, for THEY are IMPORTANT people, ESSENTIAL people, in the life of this church, and more importantly, in the lives of our CHILDREN. Thanks be to GOD for each and every ONE of them! Amen.