

6 June 2021
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Romans 13:11-14
Gift of Stories, Faith Stories Sunday
First Mennonite Church



We all have them. No, I'm not talking about camels; I'm talking about stories! We all have stories. Stories of love; stories of hate. Stories of hope; stories of despair. Stories of conviction; stories of doubt. Funny stories; sad stories. Stories that inspire; stories that cause us to ponder.

We love stories. We love to listen to them. We love telling them. Even when we can't think of an actual story, we make one up! In his book, *the Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Jonathan Gottschall writes, "We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories."¹

Today is Faith Story Sunday. A little later in our service we're going to listen to some stories, personal stories, faith stories, stories of how God Spirit guided three people on a journey to a specific point in history where they seek to become part of FMC, one small part of the global body of Christ. These are stories of mystery and of praise!

In our Deuteronomy story Sandra read a short time ago, the people of Israel were poised to enter Promised Land. Before they entered a land that wasn't theirs, took over cities they didn't build, harvest grapes from vineyards they didn't plant, they were instructed to remember their story. Central to their story was God:

¹ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*

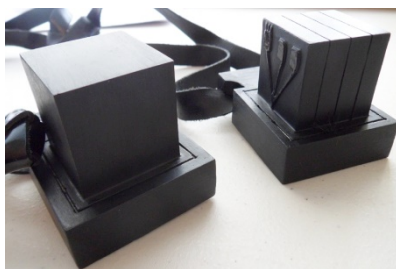
Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

This God they were to remember was the One who saved them from Pharaoh, delivered them from bondage in Egypt and set them free—not to do whatever they wanted—but set free to follow God. This God gifted them with the Torah, the first five books of our Bible. This was the story Israel was supposed to keep in their hearts.

The instruction continues. Note how people of faith were to share their story:

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

You see, Israel was not only instructed to remember their story, but instructed to recite their story, share their story, even write their story on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates. This story was so critical to their well-being, they were even told to **wear the story**.

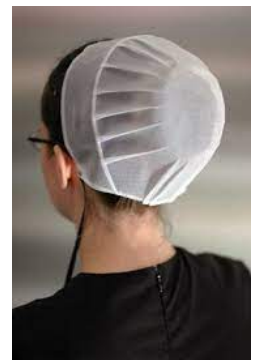


Wear the story? Today, some faithful Jews wear Tefillin.² What are Tefillin (תְּפִלִּין)? Tefillin are a pair of black leather boxes, one for the head

and one for the arm. One box contains Hebrew scrolls and the other a strap, which the person wraps around his or her arm, in keeping with the instructions in Deuteronomy: *bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead.*



Christians don't wear Tefillin to remind us of God's story, but many wear crosses. Some wear clothes with specific words on them, not so much as a personal reminder but rather to tell others about the story. Certain groups of



² https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1918251/jewish/What-Are-Tefillin.htm



Mennonites wear head coverings while others, such as the Hutterites, wear a clothing style that originated from the German and Austrian national costumes hundreds of years ago. For the Hutterites, their clothing reminds them who they are, that a key aspect of faith is non-conformity to the outside world.

In many parts of the NT, writers, especially the apostle Paul talks about wearing Christ. In Romans, Paul says, *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*. Put on here carries the meaning of wearing Christ. How do we wear Christ?

Those who were here about a month ago, may remember a sermon where I spoke about the meaning of putting on Christ, or wearing Christ. In the early Church, before baptismal candidates entered the baptismal pool, they took off their old clothes symbolizing their old life, went into the baptismal pool, were baptised, and emerged at the other end, and put on a new set of clothes symbolizing their new life in Christ. You may recall that I did a demonstration where I wore an old pair of coveralls, took them off and put on a white gown. Like the Jews who literally wear God's story on their foreheads, so too are Christians called to wear God. The fruits of the Spirit as found in various parts of the NT are the things we are called to put on, to wear. By wearing Christ like we wear our clothes, we allow God to shape and transform us as individuals and communities into the likeness of Christ.

In a little while we are going to listen to several people share their stories of how wearing Christ has shaped them as people. For many of us, sharing our story of faith is not easy because it involves speaking in public. Most people would rather get a root canal than speak in front of people.

But sharing our stories is important for so many reasons.

1. All our stories of faith are unique, even if we don't think they are.
2. Sharing our story helps us relate to others on a human level.
3. Sharing our story requires us to be honest, and this is important in a world that avoids and glosses over the truth. If any church is going to survive in the 21st century, it needs people who can talk honestly about their faith.
4. Sharing our story of how God has worked in my life can make you a resource for others who are struggling.
5. Sharing your story of faith can reveal where God is moving in our lives. It's not about us, but about how God is working in the world through us.
6. We are commanded to remember our story and recite them to our children, write them down, and even wear them.

7. Finally, our story provides meaning to us.

Years ago, a prominent journalist interviewed a Mennonite author on CBC radio. At one point the interviewer asked, “You’re a Mennonite, aren’t you? What do you Mennonites believe?” The author’s response was fascinating. He said, “we trace our story back to the 16th century, to the city of Zurich, and the reforms of Zwingli...”. In a few sentences he presented the basic outline of the Anabaptist story. One can quibble with the content, but the manner of the response was consistent with the answer in Deuteronomy 6.

I would simply add that a weakness in the author’s response lies in beginning the story in the 16th century. Of course, Anabaptism began in the 16th century, but “our story” goes back much further. It begins where the biblical story begins, with the promise to the ancestors recorded in Genesis, and continues through the Hebrew Bible and the NT, climaxing in the incarnation of Christ; then our story continues in the story of the church, in NT times, in medieval times, through the Reformation and the origin of the Anabaptist movement, up until today.

The challenge for us is to learn to tell this story in our own unique way—in a way where your story of faith, where my story of faith, where all our individual stories of faith merge together with the larger story of God’s ongoing relationship with God’s people and with all creation.

Our stories of faith are rooted in the gospel—the indiscriminate gift of grace that God in Christ has given everybody. God has called each of us to be part of this grand story of faith. Sharing our stories of faith is but one small way of remembering everything God has done in the past, is doing in the present, and will do in the future. Thanks be to God!