

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

<sup>1</sup> *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

<sup>2</sup> *Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble*

<sup>3</sup> *and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.*

<sup>4</sup> *Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;*

<sup>5</sup> *hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress;*

<sup>7</sup> *he led them by a straight way,  
until they reached an inhabited town.*

*He turns rivers into a desert,  
springs of water into thirsty ground,  
<sup>34</sup> a fruitful land into a salty waste,  
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.*

<sup>35</sup> *He turns a desert into pools of water,  
a parched land into springs of water.*

<sup>36</sup> *And there he lets the hungry live,  
and they establish a town to live in;*

<sup>37</sup> *they sow fields and plant vineyards  
and get a fruitful yield.*

On Thursday of this past week, Eddie Edmonds and I, along with other colleagues, were at Elizabethtown College to take a day-course planned by the Susquehanna Valley Ministry center. Ordained clergy are required to complete continuing education courses totaling 5 CEUs every five years for the renewal of their ordination. That, in part, is why we were there. My other reasons for attending were that I was interested in the topic; and I was interested in hearing from the speaker for the course who was my sociology professor at Elizabethtown College many moons ago. The subject for the course was the theologian and modern-day prophet, Walter Brueggeman. Conrad Kanagy was the speaker. He authored the newly released auto-biography of Walter Brueggeman.

It was an excellent event. We heard about Brueggeman’s life and beliefs. In other words, we heard his story. But we also heard some of Conrad’s story and how Brueggeman’s story impacted his life. I believe it was about five years ago that Conrad was diagnosed with Parkinsons disease. His outlook on the future was changed. But, until this past year it did not have a large impact on his day-to-day living. He was busy as a professor at Etown; and he and his wife were serving as pastors at a local Mennonite church.

Conrad shared that as his life began to change about a year ago, he was really struggling emotionally and spiritually.

Adding to his struggle, he began working on a project along with Carl Bowman, surveying and evaluating the state of the Mennonite and Church of the Brethren churches. It was a glum picture. Attendance was declining and churches were dying. His spirit was wading through dark waters, and he sought God's help. In the past, when walking through valleys, God led him to a book. He waited to hear something from God, and eventually he heard, “Jeremiah, Jeremiah, Jeremiah!” He read the book of Jeremiah and every book and commentary he could get his hands on about the book of Jeremiah. The pieces were not coming together. One day when he was looking for more to read on Jeremiah in the Etown library, he was led to a whole shelf of books written by Walter Brueggeman. He had no idea who Brueggeman was, but assumed he must have been knowledgeable, respected, even popular if he had a whole shelf of books. He signed-out one of Brueggeman's books, started reading and could not put the book down. Conrad felt a connection with Brueggeman. He wanted to know more about Walter; so he hoped to find an auto-biography on him, but he did not find one. Fortunately, Walter, was still living, he is 90 years old. Conrad contacted him, and from that conversation came an idea and eventually an agreement that Conrad would write Brueggeman's autobiography.

This was the book that God provided to Conrad to get him through his dark time. This time the book Conrad really needed—he was going to need to write himself. Brueggeman's life story and insight's on the bible that emerged as they discussed his life spoke to Conrad the words he needed to hear. I don't believe he said it yesterday, but Conrad says many times on his podcasts that he experienced a renewal and recommitted his life to Jesus as a result of hearing Walter's story. His spirit was revived; and he had a new perspective on his future.

Think about it for a moment, are there life stories you have heard, or even watched played out before your eyes, that have impacted your life and hopefully, strengthened your relationship with God and our Savior, Jesus? I can think of several life stories that have made a difference on my life journey. Perhaps, for us, some of those people who we are remembering today have done this for us. As I've pastored some of these people, I have had the opportunity to hear their stories, and yes, I have been blessed and strengthened in my faith.

We all have a story to tell about our life journey. Perhaps some of us don't take our life story very seriously, thinking it has been uneventful and in telling our story, no one would find inspiration from it. Let me assure you, that is not the case. Our lives have been full of highs and lows, times we felt close to God and other times when we felt abandoned, times when we purposely did whatever we could to draw closer to him and times when we put more effort into selfish-matters. We all have a story to share, and we never know upon telling our story, who may need to hear it and how someone may be impacted by it.

Today's scripture from the Psalmist. My bible says the author of this particular Psalm is unknown. It is a Psalm that praises God for His mighty deeds in the lives of his people. Right there in verse 2 we read, “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story. The psalm speaks of four different types of people enduring suffering and how God comes to their aid: those who find themselves wandering, lost, those being held hostage in darkness, those who are sick, and those who are storm-tossed by challenges and circumstances in life.

The Psalmist goes on to tell of the greatness, the love and the faithfulness of God, which sustained the people enduring these circumstances, the Living God who walked with people through their valley experiences, helped people to overcome their fears and anxieties so that they could face their circumstances and feelings and took them into a new day with hope and joy.

Think about it, the stories we read in the bible about various people like, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, Esther, Ruth, Jeremiah, Mary the mother of Jesus, Peter, The Apostle Paul, and most importantly, our brother and Savior, Jesus, their stories and many others inspire, challenge and guide us. Without them, we would not know the greatness of God, we would not know Jesus, we would not know about salvation, we would be without hope, we would live in a world with more chaos than we already know. We need to tell God’s story, and we need to tell God’s story lived out through our lives.

If you have ever been to a celebration of life service that I have officiated, you know that my messages are not of hell, fire and brimstone nature. My goal is to weave together stories from the life of the one we are celebrating that point us towards the presence of the Living God as He is revealed through the common experiences, challenges or maybe even tragedies that occurred through the individuals daily living. Their stories point us towards faithfulness and trust in God, and hope for this lifetime and the lifetime to come.

As I look over the list of those from our church family who we are remembering today, particularly, those whom I had the opportunity to know personally, I recall moments in their lives that have touched me deeply and strengthen my faith.

I recall Wilam Clark’s deep desire to recommit her life to Christ, but knew baptism wasn’t an option for her because she was too frail to get into the baptistry, so she made her recommitment through an anointing service I did for her. John Nalley inspired me as he wanted to preach a sermon but was unable physically to do it; so he wrote a meaningful sermon that I shared with you one Sunday morning on his behalf. Ed Brewer, full of biblical knowledge taught Sunday School as long as his body would allow, and at the same time he was content doing the simple task of cleaning the candle holders of the candelabras. Miss Elly always reminded me about the gift of God’s creation and encouraged me to enjoy the outdoors as she did. Gloria testified through word and her living on the last day of her life in this lifetime, that trusting God took away fear of the journey towards death, and giving peace and joy through the assurance of the promise for eternal life in God’s heavenly kingdom. Mary’s story, while she was quite a private person was inspiring because of her perseverance through life challenges, never seeing herself as being elderly, at least not until the last months of her life, perhaps, and her commitment to the church.

The experiences and beliefs we possess shape who we are and what we do....weaving together our life story, a story to be told by us, or to continue to be told beyond our lifetime here in this world. Our story, as Christians, is God’s story, a story of praise that our God is a Living God, a Living God who lives in and through us. Our stories communicate the faithfulness and sovereignty of God; and as our stories are told, we want our lives to point others to God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Thank you God, for all the saints and their stories that point us towards you and inspire our living in faithfulness to you. Amen.