

2014

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Recommended Citation

Schmitt, David (2014) "Telling God's Story," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 40: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol40/iss2/2>

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Telling God's Story

David R. Schmitt

The theme of the 2013 Theological Symposium was “From the Creation to the New Creation: Seeing All Things in Light of the Entire Story.” With that theme, we focused on letting the fuller biblical story, not just the cross and the resurrection, but the movement from creation to the new creation, shape our witness, mercy, and life together as God's people.

The articles within this issue of the *Concordia Journal* explore what happens when we attend to a fuller proclamation of the Christian narrative, using as specific examples creation, the resurrection of Christ, and the new creation. To frame our reflections, this opening article explores the power of story both within the human experience and the divine revelation.

For a fuller explication and experience of the ideas summarized in this article, you are invited to view the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

Introduction

I would like to begin at a cultural moment that seems quite distant from our own. The year is 1674. The place is London. There, two poets (one famous and the other infamous) are situating God's story in the public realm.

John Dryden is the famous poet. He is poet laureate, historiographer royal, a literary critic, and a dramatist, well known for his heroic plays. He has cultivated a reputation for over-the-top dramas that reinforce the over-the-top culture of Charles II's court. In April 1674, John Dryden announced that he was writing a rimed opera of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He was turning that faithful Protestant epic into a fashionable play.

John Milton is the other poet and he is infamous. He is a regicide and a divorcer, having defended the beheading of Charles I and having written tracts biblically defending divorce. Some of his books were publically burned by the hangman and his blindness was seen as a sure sign of God's judgment upon him. Three months after Dryden's announcement, Milton publishes a second edition of *Paradise Lost*, complete with a commendatory poem, laughing at fashionable poets and their “tinkling rime.”

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In 1674, in London, we have a cultural moment when two poets were situating God's story in the public realm in two different ways.

Consider Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, at the end of the poem, Adam and Eve are about to be expelled from the garden of Eden. God, however, does not send them forth disconsolate. God sends the archangel Michael and, in Books 11 and 12, Michael delivers a long sermon to Adam. The sermon covers all of biblical history, extending from Cain and Abel to the return of Christ and the new creation. Adam sees and hears it all. As Adam experiences this telling of God's story, he asks questions and forms judgments and Michael remains in conversation with him. At the beginning, Adam gets it wrong. He is not able to see what God is doing in the world. Then, by the end of the sermon, Adam begins to get it right. Through interaction with the master story, Adam grows. He becomes more discerning about the ways of God, firmer in faith as he holds on to God's promises, and prepared to enter the world. Milton's work suggests that Christians are formed in the faith to live in the world by hearing God's story. Telling the master story is the way in which God prepares his people for life in the world.

In contrast, consider John Dryden. Dryden has seen how God's story has been told. On the one hand, it was used to defend the killing of a king; on the other hand, it was used to defend the restoration of a king. On the one hand, it was used to argue that the great fire and the plague were God's judgment on London because of the courtly corruption of Charles II; on the other hand, it was used to argue that the great fire and the plague were God's purging of a city that would kill its king.¹ When one story can be used for so many different things, it makes you wonder whether the story is valuable at all. It makes you wonder what it would be like to enter the world without any story at all. So, when Dryden comes to the end of his opera, Raphael visits Adam and Eve. He shows them death and he shows them eternal life . . . but nothing more. There is no recounting of the story of Noah and the flood, no Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, no Exodus, no Israel, no exile, no Christ, no crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, or return. As Adam and Eve leave the garden of Eden, they go without God's master story and they resign themselves to living without a master story in the world. Dryden takes a line from Milton's Satan and puts it on the lips of Eve. The last thing Eve says, in fact the last human words of the opera, are "Farthest from what I once enjoy'd is best" (5.4.259).²

In this one cultural moment, we have two ways of situating the divine story in the world. People can either be formed by that story or free of it. As with Milton, one can be formed by hearing the whole biblical story and interacting with it in dialog with others or, as with Dryden, one can be free of it completely, since the farther one is from the origins of this story, the better life will be in the world.

I begin with this cultural moment because, in some ways, it mirrors our own. In America, some feel like they have experienced the rule of the Puritans. They have seen the Christian story being told to justify so many things. They have seen how the story has been used to say that our nation is the City on a Hill, the beacon of hope to all nations. They have heard how this story has been used to justify acts of mercy in

hospitals and homeless shelters and they have also heard how this story has been used to justify violence at women's care clinics and protests at military funerals saying these deaths are the judgment of God. When the Christian story has been used for so many different things, it makes some people wonder whether we would be better off without any story. They seek to free people from this story, to erase it from the art and architecture of our public spaces, and to remove it from the classrooms of our public education and from the skies of our imagination.

How are Christians, who have been called to be the church within this culture, to tell God's story? As the American culture erases this story from our cultural memory, the church needs to be more attentive to the sacred story that it tells. What does it mean to live in, with, and under God's story? To begin answering that question, this article will consider the storied shape of faith experience both as people live in story and as God's people tell God's story.

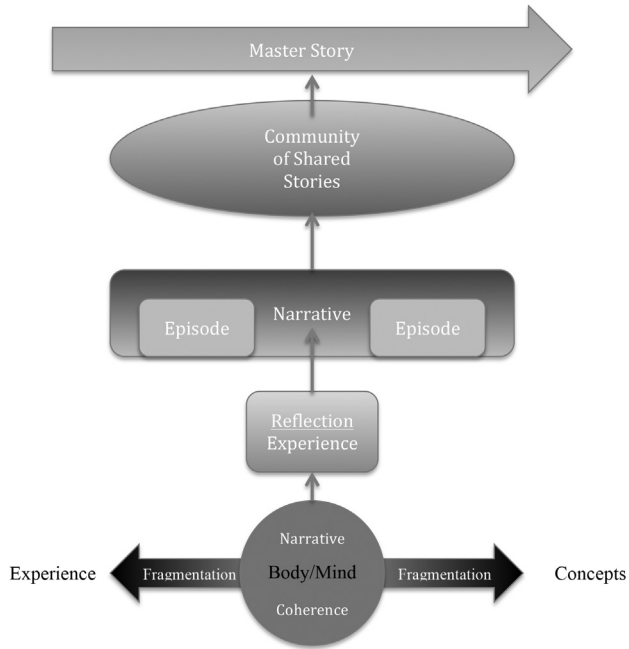
Living in Story

Recently there has been a rebirth of interest in narrative. Narrative is understood as another mode of knowing: you may know something by scientific investigation or you may know something by story. Narrative is thus being integrated into disciplines where traditionally science would be found. You have the development of narrative centered learning environments. Universities offer courses in narrative and geography, narrative law, narrative and public policy, narrative leadership, narrative physics, narrative engineering, narrative architecture, and you can even earn a master of science in narrative medicine.

The church is also undergoing a rebirth of narrative, both at the congregational level, where churches are going through Zondervan's thirty-one-week program called "The Story," and at the scholarly level, where narrative theology is returning to prominence. Even within Lutheran circles, we find a rebirth of interest in narrative. For example, Dr. Kolb's recent book, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narrative as a Foundation for Christian Living*, explores the role of narrative in Luther's preaching.

With such a large body of literature on narrative, this essay will only set forth the basic dynamics of a narrative approach to faith experience. To do this, we will consider the following diagram (next page) as a representation of how individuals live in stories.

Most works that explore the power of story in shaping human experience make reference to an article by Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience."³ This diagram attempts to articulate in visual form what Crites is exploring in critical theory. For the purpose of introducing the diagram, I will move from the bottom to the top. This movement is not a Platonic movement from the experiences of this world to the realm of ideas or from the body to the mind, but rather an expanding of one's individual life experience into larger narrative horizons, moving from episodes in one's life to a larger personal story to a community of shared stories and then to the master story of God's work in the world.



At the heart of Crites’s work lies an act of meditation: his meditation on Augustine who is, himself, meditating on his faith experience. After Augustine was bishop, he composed a spiritual autobiography, *The Confessions*, and in composing that autobiography, Augustine created a narrative expression of his faith. Crites focuses particularly on that moment in Books 10 and 11 when Augustine is meditating on time and memory. At the juncture of time and memory is the birth of narrative. Because we are creatures in time, we experience a flow of experiences. Because we have memory, we are able to remember past experiences and to project from that memory into possible future experiences. This juncture of time that passes and memory that holds such passing moments together creates a quality that Crites argues is fundamental to human experience: narrative. Crites argues that because we experience the passage of time and because we have memory, we live in stories.

At the very bottom of the diagram lies what for Crites is essential—the self in its concrete experience as indivisible, temporal, and whole. For Crites, faith is incarnate in bodily experience. Crites objects to theories that bifurcate this holistic experience, that divide the self into either reason or experience. That is, on the one hand, Crites objects to those who would take this holistic experience of life and simply distill it into teachings and then leave the experience behind. Fred Craddock once lamented that this is how some preachers work with the narratives of Scripture. They reduce them to bare teachings and lose the enfleshment of theology in life.⁴ On the other hand, Crites also objects to those who would take this holistic experience and distill it into mere experi-

ence, momentary, fleeting, and unconnected to anything else. Instead of having only experience or only teaching, Crites argues that meaning is incarnate in bodily experience. Human creatures are not disembodied minds or mindless bodies but rather temporal beings and what best reflects that unity and coherence of human experience is the power of narrative.

Narrative works, however, within various horizons. Beginning at the bottom of the diagram, with the episode, one has limited temporal and communal horizons.⁵ An individual selects from a variety of sensory experiences and orders those selected experiences in a way that constitutes an event, a moment of significance in life. Left by itself, this event could quickly pass from one's memory or could linger there for years.

As one moves upward in the diagram, the temporal horizons begin to expand. The episode is joined to other episodes to compose a much longer personal story, a narrative. Narrative, thus, is the purposeful ordering of selected episodes in a way that gives life meaning. Over time, this personal story changes as certain episodes are added, others forgotten, and others integrated into the story in a different way. Individuals frame and reframe their life stories in the complex art of spiritual autobiography, selecting, interpreting, and sequencing experiences in a meaningful or purposeful way.

As one moves upward again in the diagram, both the temporal and communal horizons begin to expand. One's personal story is joined to the stories of others in a shared community. This sharing of narrative within community is always somewhat tentative and exploratory. Within community, personal narratives can be questioned or affirmed. Communities can frame or reframe life narratives, supporting or subverting them, reinforcing or recreating the way in which individuals experience their lives and tell their stories. In 2007, Henry Corcoran published his research on the power of storied communities at points of life transition.⁶ He noted that at points of major transitions in life (e.g., the birth or death of a child, marriage or divorce, or the move to a new job, a new home, or a new school), people are prone to reframing their narratives. For example, as some young adults leave their families and congregations and enter college, they may learn to frame their life story not in terms of their baptismal identity in Christ (a way of telling their story that was supported by their family and church community at home) but in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation (ways of telling one's life story that can be highlighted within some collegiate social and educational communities).

Of course, for Christians, this attention to community and story is nothing new. The apostle Paul has already admonished and encouraged us to attend to the stories of the faith community. Paul's letters are filled with the call for imitation. He encourages the Philippians to "join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). Within this particular letter, he holds up for consideration not just himself but Timothy and Epaphroditus. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul encourages them to imitate him in working while they are engaged in ministry (2 Thes 3:7–9). In writing to Timothy, Paul tells him to set an example in his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tm 4:12). The writer to the Hebrews also

voices this theme, offering a chapter of the stories of people of faith. This rhetoric of exemplarity calls upon Christians to enter into the larger community of people of faith, living and interpreting life, reading and writing their lives in relationship to these witnesses of the Spirit's work.

As Alan Jacobs has noted in his work on spiritual autobiography, unfortunately some communities of faith can take these patterns and turn them into stereotypes.⁷ Such stereotypes alienate individuals, making them question whether their life experiences can be part of the larger community of faith. For example, conversion narratives that are modeled upon Paul's Damascus road experience can leave some Christians, brought to the faith in infant baptism, wondering what story they have to tell. What is needed for the health of the church is not the enforcement of a selected stereotype but the faithful awareness of the chorus of witnesses in Scripture, a sacred seeing of the variety of patterns their lives offer, a holy handling of the variety of ways in which God works in the lives of his people, so that Christians may faithfully appropriate these patterns from Scripture among the community of the faithful and contextualize them for meaningful self-interpretation and confession of the faith.

Finally, as one moves toward the top of the diagram, one encounters the master story. While our personal story is part of a community and its story, that community is also part of a larger story, the sacred story. This sacred story is the master story precisely because it is the Master's story. The one who created all things and set them into being with his word continues to create and order our lives through his word. This master story gives us the language to think about and form our stories. This master story not only reflects reality but it also constructs reality. It is this master story that gives us the lens to see God's work in our lives. So, the apostle Paul is able to listen to pagan poetry, the hymn to Zeus by Epimenedes of Crete, and hear within those words the song of creation—that God created all things and “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The apostle Paul is able to look at his present sufferings, his beatings and imprisonment, and speak about these as the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 1:5). The apostle Paul is able to look at the gathering of God's people in a fractured church around bread and wine, body and blood, and speak to them of proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes, seeing a foretaste of the feast to come (1 Cor 11:26). The master story, past, present, and future, provides the lens through which we live, shaping how we experience, understand, speak, and share with one another and with the world the stories of faith.

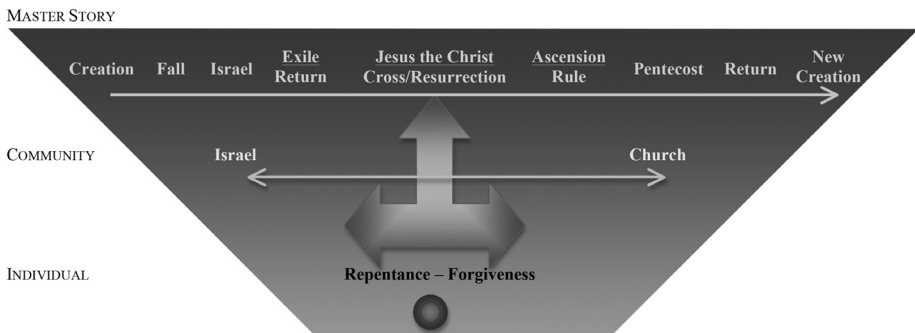
Narratives have a way of forming community and, through this master story, Jesus brings us into the community of God. Here, he forms and treasures the stories of his people, leading us to a new creation where peoples from “every tribe and language and people and nation” are gathered before the throne (Rv 5:9–10). Notice how individuals do not lose their identity as a tribe, people, nation, or language in Christ. Instead, when they are brought into God's kingdom, they find their identity as the people of God. In all of their individual and communal complexity, they are made part of God's purpose and mission in the world.

As we gathered for this symposium and as we publish these papers, then, we do so to listen more closely to that sacred story and to ponder its telling. Such theological reflection is important not just because of shifts in our culture that silence this story, but because people live in this telling. As the master story is told from generation to generation, it forms people who are part of the unfolding of God's kingdom from creation to the new creation.

Having considered what it means to be living in story, we now turn our attention to telling God's story.

Telling God's Story

In *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation*, John Wright examines the tensions that arise as Christians retell the biblical story in the American culture.⁸ One of the fundamental insights that Wright offers is the contrast between what I will call telescoping God's story and telling God's story. In order to explore this tension and how it can manifest itself within the Lutheran tradition, I would like to use the following diagram:⁹



This diagram enables one to see how the art of telling God's story involves both a vertical and a horizontal movement from a fundamental sacred experience to larger narrative horizons.

At the bottom of the diagram is that moment of repentance and forgiveness, the heart of God's gracious work, bringing individuals into his kingdom and sustaining them in the faith. Why, however, should we frame this event through the language of story? Isn't that simply allowing current critical trends to shape the confession of the faith? No. It is speaking the words we have been given to speak.

When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus Christ entered into human experience and lived a story. The story of his life, death, and resurrection, however, is not merely a story of a person who dies and is raised from the dead but rather is the story of the Son of God who loses his life to give all life. It is the sacred saving story into which we are baptized.

In Jesus Christ, God the Father reveals how he has established his reign on earth and will bring to fulfillment the restoration of all things. Extending from creation to the new creation, this master story gives all of life meaning (whether people acknowledge this story or not). In Jesus Christ, the eternal is made known in the particular and, to those who believe, it is savingly made known. In baptism, we are brought into this saving story, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is Lord, has ascended into heaven, rules over all, and will return to raise the dead, judge the world, and bring about a new creation, where all who believe in him will live with him eternally. This is our Master's story and it becomes our saving story as we are brought by grace through faith into the unfolding of God's kingdom.¹⁰

As God's people tell their Master's story, the Spirit calls all people to live in this story through repentance, faith, and new life in the community of God's people, awaiting the restoration of all things in the new creation. Each believer is thus incorporated by the Spirit through Christ into the Father's kingdom. This incorporation delivers all believers from eternal damnation and reframes their life experiences, condemning false stories that separate them from God's kingdom and revealing the true story that gives them life and forms their identity as children of God and heirs of his eternal kingdom.

As God brings individuals into his kingdom, each person is made part of a people who live by his proclamation and have a holy purpose in the unfolding of his kingdom in this world. This is what is articulated by moving both upward vertically and outward horizontally in the diagram. As one moves upward vertically, one confesses how God is at work, not only in one's individual life but also in the formation of a community of people and in the larger saving story of the reign and rule of Jesus Christ. God is doing more than simply acting in your personal life. He is calling you and forming you to be part of his people who live by his proclamation and serve his holy purposes as he rules the world. As one moves outward horizontally in the diagram, one confesses how God's rule extends throughout history. God is doing more than enabling you to name his work in your life. He is leading you to confess that you are part of a much larger people who live in a much longer history. You worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who called forth a people, Israel, and through that people brought forth his Son, Jesus Christ, through whom he blesses all nations. This God was there at the creation of the world and he will be there on that final day, bringing about a new creation, and gathering all nations before the throne.

In his work, Wright insightfully argues that the church in America has distorted the contours of this larger story. The narrative horizons have been narrowed. In terms of the horizontal breadth of God's story, the American nation has replaced the church. God's people mistakenly identify America with the Church, mourning its fall as a Christian nation and desiring its rebirth and rise. Because they identify America with the church, they assume that the status of Christianity in this country is a faithful testimony to the reign and rule of God. In terms of the vertical movement, the direction has actually been reversed. Rather than individuals being incorporated into the larger saving story of God's work in the world, God is being incorporated into the lives of individuals and asked to serve their self-chosen narrative horizons. God becomes a supporting actor

in the individual's life story and the experience of repentance and forgiveness becomes part of a process enabling individuals to succeed and achieve their goals. Thus, the larger story of God and his work in the world has been diminished to a nationalistic and therapeutic agenda for self-actualization in a capitalistic consumerist culture.

What about the Lutheran tradition? Is it possible that our telling of God's story has narrowed as well?¹¹ Consider the activity of preaching. In past articles and symposia, I have reflected on how the law/gospel dynamics of faithful proclamation have been practiced in a way that limits the scope of our public proclamation of the faith.¹² In essence, at times, we reduce the larger story of God, which moves from creation to the new creation, to simply the proclamation of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins is the heart of preaching but the art of preaching involves integrating that proclamation into the larger telling of God's story. At this point, let me be clear. This is not a problem with the dynamics of law/gospel. I am not pitting law/gospel proclamation against the telling of God's story. I am not arguing that one of these is better than the other. I am not proposing a false either/or but rather calling for a faithful both/and in preaching. Preachers proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins as part of God's much larger story. I am seeking to expand our telling of God's story, broadening rather than narrowing our narrative horizons. The problem is not with the proclamation of law/gospel but with the use of law/gospel to telescope God's story.

When law/gospel telescopes God's story, preachers read a passage of Scripture and meditate only on how that passage reveals sin and proclaims grace. Rather than meditate on how that passage leads God's people into a larger broader story, they ask "where's the law?" and "where's the gospel?" in preparation for a sermon.¹³ Suddenly, the stories of Scripture become disconnected from one another. They serve the preacher and God's people merely as examples of sin and forgiveness, dislocated from the larger biblical narrative and useful only for a momentary proclamation of law and gospel, revealing sin and proclaiming grace.

Over time, rather than tell God's story, preachers telescope God's story. Sunday after Sunday, God's people come and hear fragments of Scripture. Sermons use those fragments to proclaim only one part of the story: sin and forgiveness. People see sin and grace at work in the text and, by analogy, hear about sin and grace at work in their lives, yet all the while they miss the larger story unfolding in Scripture: the eternal fellowship of the Triune God and this God's mission in creating, redeeming, and recreating the world to live in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture becomes a collection of stories of various people who have sinned and been forgiven and we join them as individuals who sin and are forgiven rather than experience how God makes us part of his holy people, people who live by his proclamation and whose lives have a holy purpose in the unfolding of his kingdom.

Although we see and identify with individual stories and hear about the death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin, the stories of Scripture remain individual stories and we miss the coherent revelation of the larger story of God. God suddenly becomes

a supporting actor in our stories, helping us with forgiveness, rather than one who brings us into his story, taking us as individuals and forming us into a people, his people who have a purpose and live by his proclamation in his world. Suddenly, preachers are taking God and making him relevant, fitting him into our small human stories, having him meet our fragile needs, rather than proclaiming how God makes us relevant, taking us into his kingdom, and giving our lives purpose in his world that lies beyond our fallen imagination and is yet to be revealed. The sermon becomes an individualized moment of sin and forgiveness rather than an integration of individuals, through repentance and forgiveness, into the community of faith that lives in the unfolding of God's kingdom in the life, death, resurrection, rule, and return of Jesus Christ.

How does one move from telescoping God's story to telling God's story? One way would be to consider the dynamics of this diagram and see how it fosters interpretation and proclamation of the larger master story. For example, consider a preacher working on a sermon based on Nathan's rebuke of David (2 Samuel 11 and 12, the Old Testament reading for Proper 6, Series C). At the heart of this narrative selection lies the dynamic of repentance and forgiveness, a dynamic highlighted on the individual horizon on the diagram. A preacher reading and proclaiming this text recognizes the reality of sin (in this case, adultery, deception, murder, and more) and the reality of forgiveness (as Nathan absolves the repentant David of his sins). Telescoping God's story would mean moving immediately from this experience of sin and forgiveness to one's hearers and their experiences of sin and forgiveness without attending to the larger dynamics that are revealed when one reads this text within its expanding narrative horizons.

The diagram, however, encourages one to consider this same reading in the narrative horizon of community (moving upward and outward). Here, one begins to see David not only as an individual man who sins but also as a leader of God's people who indulges his own desires rather than fulfills his vocational service to God's people. God's people had asked for a king to "judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sm 8:20) and God, in response, had given them a king. Now, however, when it is "the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle . . . David remained at Jerusalem" (2 Sm 11:1). His activities are private rather than public, indulging his own desires rather than fulfilling the ways of God as he serves God's people. He makes judgments for himself and fights for his own interests. While the battle rages against the Ammonites, David fights against his own people. While Israel besieges the city of Rabbah, David besieges Jerusalem and orchestrates a battle plan that kills Uriah the Hittite who fights for Israel. Whereas a Hittite refrains from the lawful embrace of his wife for the sake of Israel's battle, David engages in the unlawful embrace of Uriah's wife for the sake of his own pleasure and strategically interferes with Israel's battle to secure his own private victory at home. Suddenly, this story reveals more than the private sins of an individual person and it begins to reveal the public corruption of God's chosen people through the passionate self-interest of God's chosen servant.

Were one to consider then this reading in the larger narrative horizon of the master story, one begins to see God's work through Nathan the prophet as more than a rebuke of individual sin and as more than the restitution of a fallen public leader.

Earlier, God promised David a house that would endure forever and, now, God works through Nathan his prophet to continue to unfold his plan of salvation for all people, remaining faithful to his promises, even when his people fall into sin. Earlier, when David desired to build a house for God, God revealed his desire to raise up a descendent from David who “shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sm 7:13). In this text, we begin to see how this covenant promise of God will be fulfilled, in spite of the sinfulness of God’s people. Ironically, David’s descendent through the wife of Uriah (Mt 1:6) will be the Son of God who establishes God’s kingdom and will “save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). God’s overall plan, however, does not sanction sin. Rather, God rebukes sin and forgives his creatures, even as he remains faithful to his promise to deliver all people from the kingdom of Satan and bring them into the eternal kingdom of his Son whom he loves (Gn 3:15). In this text, we see that moment when God sends his prophet Nathan to rebuke the sin of David and, through repentance and forgiveness, bring David once again to God’s people, to rule over them, even as Yahweh himself remains faithful to his covenant promise and works to bring about the kingdom of his Son through whom he will gather a holy people from all nations and restore his fallen creation.

This is simply one small example of how God’s people can engage in practices that foster a telling of God’s story rather than a telescoping of it. Such practices of interpretation and proclamation, when cultivated in ministry and mission, pastoral care and personal devotion, will address a culture that has all but erased God’s story from its public memory and form individuals who live as part of God’s people who live by God’s proclamation and have a holy purpose in the larger saving story of God’s work in the world.

What might such a telling look like? How might this fuller story shape our approach to interpretation, proclamation, and witness? Such questions lie behind the papers of this symposium and the plans for the 2014 Theological Symposium. For now, I invite you to reflect with the following authors on what such a telling might look like, particularly in relationship to resurrection, creation, and the new creation.

Endnotes

¹ For an example of Dryden negotiating these different uses of the biblical story, see his 1667 poem *Annus Mirabilis*.

² John Dryden, *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 12, ed. Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 146.

³ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (1971): 291–311.

⁴ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 123.

⁵ In the opening plenary of the symposium, I present this theoretical distinction of temporal and communal narrative horizons through the mode of story, offering a constellation of stories to communicate how this plays out in real life. In this article, however, I have chosen to approach the topic through reason and explanation. For a storied presentation of this material, see the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

⁶ Henry A. Corcoran, “A Synthesis of Narratives: Religious Undergraduate Students Making Meaning in the Context of a Secular University,” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 4 (2007): 357–374.

⁷ Alan Jacobs, *Looking Before and After: Testimony and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 19–39.

⁸ John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007).

⁹ This diagram is a visualization of the theory of how to interpret selections from the biblical narrative first introduced by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart in *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 74-75. This theory has frequently been adopted and adapted by homiletics. For example, consider Sidney Greidanus's use of this theory to speak about preaching redemptive historical progression in his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 238-239.

¹⁰ Luther's Flood Prayer offers a beautiful example of how the church can give voice to the larger narrative horizons that surround baptism.

¹¹ In the opening plenary of the symposium, I examine this contrast of telescoping God's story and telling God's story using examples from biblical interpretation, preaching, and witness. In this article, I have situated this discussion in a larger conversation our church has been having about preaching. For examples of how this plays out in biblical interpretation, preaching, and witness, see the opening plenary at concordiatheology.org.

¹² See David R. Schmitt, "Freedom of Form: Law/Gospel and Sermon Structure in Contemporary Lutheran Homiletics," *Concordia Journal* 25, no. 1 (1999): 42-45; David R. Schmitt, "Richard Caemmerer's Goal, Malady, Means: A Retrospective Glance," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 1-2 (2010): 3-18; and David R. Schmitt, "Law and Gospel in Sermon and Service," in *Preaching Is Worship: The Sermon in Context*, eds. Paul J. Grime and Dean W. Nadasdy (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 15-33.

¹³ Richard Lischer has discussed this reductive interpretative approach in his *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1992), 43.