

Cigars

Who told you stories when you were a child? I don't recall having too many teachers read to us when we were in school. I was in awe when, as principal, I encountered teachers taking some time in the day to read a chapter of "Charlotte's Web" or some other story with the students. When we were in school, I believe the idea was that students should read the stories to themselves or aloud in the painful "round robin" style. When I became a Language Arts teacher, I always read novels with my students. I had hoped that my interpretation of the story would help them to remember it.

At home, things were a little different. My mother would attempt to read a story to us, but my maternal grandmother was the consummate storyteller who even allowed us to tell the story. Grandma Callanan's version of "Little Red Riding Hood" always came with the question, "What do you think was in the basket?" We would list the things that were appropriate or things we liked, i.e., cookies, pies, cakes, etc. One day, my brother, Leo, piped up with

“cigars.” Now, that just brought fits of laughter to my two younger brothers and me. She managed to get us settled so that we could go to sleep after the story. (On a side note, in her version, the wolf locked the grandmother in the closet, and the woodman chased away the wolf, who was so frightened that he was never to return to Grandmother’s house.) The stories my grandmother told were also to teach us to stay on the paths, not to go where it was dangerous, and to be nice to your grandmother!

Jesus also told stories, or parables, to his disciples to teach them how to live, how to get into the Kingdom of Heaven, or how to establish or make firm their relationship with God. Even when not telling a story or parable, the Gospel authors tell when Jesus used imagery to make his point.

What are some images, things, or parables did Jesus tell that would have been familiar to his first disciples? Things like mustard seeds, vineyard owners, where seeds were planted, how things

were nurtured, and who was likely to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, even if they had been a (gasp) Samaritan.

Any hearers of the Gospels would have been familiar with shepherds and sheep. The people of the Jewish faith knew Psalm 23 in the same way that many people here know it. Therefore, it made sense for Jesus to use the imagery of shepherd and sheep. The sheep were very familiar with the shepherd, much like our household pets know our voice and smell. They were also very familiar with thieves and bandits. It was the reason that women were never alone, as well as why no one traveled at night. They were “too easy” targets for thieves and bandits. Also, the shepherds had to stay awake at night, lest the thieves and bandits attack their sheep and take them.

What does this imagery do for us today in 2026? First of all, as we just stated, those sheep know the shepherd’s voice. If we listen carefully, we can hear our Shepherd call us. We know that God calls us each by name and leaves it up to us to respond. What is our

response when we are called? Hopefully, our relationship with God allows us to recognize the “Shepherd” from other people who may call us and lead us into temptation.

We can also draw upon Psalm 23. The beloved psalm that most of us know by heart (the King James version, no less) is often used in times of comfort. Today we prayed the traditional version but I’d like you to hear a few others:

This one from a translation called "The Message"

1-3 GOD, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word,
you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.

4

Even when the way goes through
Death Valley,

I'm not afraid
when you walk at my side.

Your trusty shepherd's crook
makes me feel secure.

5

You serve me a six-course dinner
right in front of my enemies.

You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.

6

Your beauty and love chase after me
every day of my life.

I'm back home in the house of GOD
for the rest of my life.

I am uncertain how this would make us feel in the middle of a service.

Some people prefer to use a translation of the Bible that does not assign God any pronoun at all except for “You.”

The Lord is my shepherd; * I shall not be in want. 2 You make me lie down in green pastures * and lead me beside still waters. 3 You revive my soul * and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake. 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, * I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; * your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You spread a table before me * in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil, * and my cup is running over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Then we have the New Revised Standard Version (Updated Edition), which is the translation we usually use for our Scripture readings in both churches:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;^[a]
he restores my soul.^[b]
He leads me in right paths^[c]
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long

For me, the important thing is that we allow ourselves to use the imagery that works for us and our relationship with God. I firmly believe that God invites us to be in a relationship. It is up to us to figure out if we accept, how we accept, and how we do our part to keep the relationship there. We can use whatever version of Sacred Scripture to keep us going so that we can tell our story and tell God's story as well.

It up to each one of us to decide When we tell our story, we want people to be able to relate to it. We will be called to do so by our deeds and actions. And, if necessary, use words.