

## Story and Spiritual Growth

Storytelling conveys the realities and the relationships of our faith better than any other form of communication. In story, the believer is invited and challenged to do more than think, analyze, solve and remember. In the hearing and the telling, the believer actually experiences God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian faith would not exist without doctrines and theologies. These help us put rational form to intuitive understanding. But, underlying and more fundamentally important is the relational and narrative aspect of faith. None of the great world religions has ever existed without a story at its core, not as an illustration of some doctrine, but rather as the very truth, the evidence and the testimony of God's action for the sake of the believers that the doctrine seeks to formalize.

But a story that is only heard and never told short-circuits the very purpose of sacred story. Stories that are heard and never retold by the hearer tend to become the object of intellectual analysis or objects of admiration and every inspiration but not of life change. Sacred story fulfills its life changing function by not only being heard and taken to heart but told by the one who heard it as “their story”. In the hearing and the telling, the hearer becomes a part of the story and example of the power of that which the story proclaims.

If we never have, by means of the sacred story (the gospel) heard and told, experienced the presence, love, activity of Christ, then several things will result. We will inevitably fall back upon lesser experience – we will fulfill our natural need of religious experience with mere sentimentalities and silly diminutions of God. What is more, the very sacred story itself will be viewed as irrelevant and of diminished or no value whatsoever. And so the vitality of our faith, too, will be diminished. Third, we will begin to worship the most subtle idol of all: our own words about Jesus, as if they were the Christ, the Word of God. We will create our own sacred story that fits our need for a relevant story that is bigger than ourselves of which we can be a part. The subtle destructive character of this is that the story we create out of the bits and pieces of the REAL story will serve to sponsor our view of ourselves and our behaviors. Such a blindness will never recognize that it is blind. And not only the blind but those who trust them will fall into the pit as Jesus said.

When I was a child, I had the blessing of growing up being completely absorbed in the stories of some great story-tellers. Story gives us the opportunity to be engaged as children in the “great adventure” of the faith. The story-tellers were great not just because they told stories well, but because they invited me into the story and the telling of it. Little by little, as a result, the story became MINE and changed the way I lived to match what it proclaimed. I am who I am because of not only the STORY but the STORY TELLER and the challenge and blessing of TELLING THE STORY.

## **I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY**

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.  
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.

### *Refrain*

*I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory,  
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.*

I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems  
Than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams.  
I love to tell the story, it did so much for me;  
And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

### *Refrain*

I love to tell the story; 'tis pleasant to repeat  
What seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.  
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard  
The message of salvation from God's own holy Word.

### *Refrain*

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best  
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,  
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

### *Refrain*

*(Based on "Let me tell you what He has done for me." Psalm 66:16)*

## **Arabella Katherine Hankey, 1834-1911**

Known as Kate to her friends, Hankey, a banker's daughter, belonged to an evangelical group known as the Clapham Sect. The group was mainly known for its anti-slavery and pro-missionary stances. While still a teenager, Hankey taught Sunday school for girls. Later, she traveled to South Africa to be a nurse, and to help her invalid brother.

In her early 30's, Hankey contracted a severe illness. During her protracted recovery, she wrote a long poem about Jesus. It is in two parts, with the first, 50 stanzas in length, asking about Him, and the second answering the question. I Love to Tell the Story and Tell Me the Old, Old Story both come from this poem.