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Our Saviour/St. Stephen  
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Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, there is a wonderful quote that is MIS-attributed to C.S. Lewis of *Chronicles of Narnia* fame.

The quote does appear in the movie *Shadowlands*, which is a biopic about Lewis' life.

The quote is spoken by Antony Hopkins who plays C.S. Lewis, and so the quote has been attributed to C.S. Lewis.

But the quote apparently does not appear in any of Lewis' writings.

The quote was a creation of the screenwriter of the movie, William Nicholson.

The quote is this. "We read to know we are not alone."

"We read to know we are not alone."

But even though C.S. Lewis did not originate this quote, it is still powerful.

For it is true, when we read a book, we connect to other people.

We connect with the author of the book.

We connect with the people in the story, whether be fictitious or real.

And we connect with all the other readers who have ever read that particular book, which is why many people enjoy book groups.

We are truly not alone when we read.

PAUSE

Hopefully each of us has that experience, that feeling of connection when reading a really good book.

Hopefully we have experienced what it is to be completely immersed in a book.

Hopefully, we have connected with the author's story such that we wonder how is it that the author knows us so well, knows human beings so well, as though the author understands our concerns, our longings, our dreams, as though the author is speaking directly to us.

It is amazing how the written word can impact us so, touching us deeply inside, calling forth emotions from us, just by reading some letters on a page.

PAUSE

I remember quite vividly a particular experience I had where my emotions were deeply stirred by a particular book.

I was in college at the time taking an English Lit class, as many of us may have done.

And in this class, we were assigned the book *Little Women* by Louis May Alcott.

Never read it before. But I got really into the story.

And I remember that I was reading the chapter about where Beth dies. (Spoil alert.)

And so immersed was I in my reading that I forgot where I was.

For you see, I was sitting in the Student Union Building, where many and varied students tend to gather for casual conversation on comfy furniture, where students lounge with friends, where students just migrate, you get the picture.

And there I was reading this book by myself in my chair, surrounded by all these strangers, and all of sudden tears are running down my face, because Beth has just died.

And suddenly I caught myself. I realized I was sitting amidst all these other students, these strangers.

And I quickly and discreetly wiped away the tears running down my face.

So yes, it is amazing that letters on a page can impact us so, as though the text reads us.

Yes, as much as we think we read the text on a page, it is just as true, if the author is any good, it is just as true that the text reads us.

PAUSE

And this notion that the text reads us is so VERY true of the Biblical Scripture.

Think about the story of Job. In that story Satan is allowed by God to test Job, to see if Job will remain faithful to God.

And Satan proceeds to upend Job's life, with disaster after disaster.

Job loses his family—his children, sons and daughters.

Job loses his wealth—his flocks, his slaves.

Job loses his health—he is afflicted with sores from head to foot.

And Satan says to God, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives."

Satan says to God that his servant Job will now curse God in response to his great suffering.

This text reads us. For it is not spot on that yes, human beings will resort to anything to save their lives—skin for skin.

Yet this is actually what makes Job such a unique character in the story, because he doesn't fall into this category.

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Or consider the story of Cain and Abel.

In that story God plays favorites, such that God accepts Abel's offering, but rejects Cain's offering.

As a result Cain becomes bitterly angry.

God asks Cain, “Why are you so angry? Is it not true that if you do well, you will be accepted? But if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

In other words, we need not worry about others so much.

Cain need not be so bothered by what his brother Abel receives.

No, Cain needs to be concerned about his own self.

Sin is specific to the person. Sin is me-shaped. It comes a-knocking at our specific door; it comes after us, the result of our particular feelings of inadequacy, the result of our particular feelings of pride.

Sin comes a-knocking and it is me-shaped. Sin is specific to the person.

Again, how astute the biblical text is here! How spot on the words of the author are here!

We read the text, but the text reads us.

PAUSE

And so, we come to the text today from Genesis 3, where again the text reads us.

And this text is as familiar as the back of our hand.

God is walking in the Garden of Eden, enjoying the evening breeze.

It is an idyllic scene, except Adam and Eve are hiding.

Why? Because they had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

They are hiding, and so they are missing out on enjoying the evening in the presence of God. How unfortunate, right?

And thus God calls out, “Where are you?”

And if there was ever an existential question in the history of human beings this is it.

Because it is probably not just a question about where Adam and Eve are location-wise.

No, it is also a question about “where they are emotionally, where they are spiritually?”

And Adam replies that he was afraid, because he was naked.

He and Eve were feeling vulnerable, and so Adam and Eve hid themselves.

Where are you? “Where am I? I am in fear,” says Adam.

This is what people do. This is what we do.

When we have sinned, when we are afraid, we hide.

The text again is reading us.

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Friends, this is the beauty of God’s Word.

This is the beauty of the Bible and its many stories.

We think we come to Bible, to read its stories, to recite its stories...

...the stories of Creation, of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Abel, of Noah’s ark...the stories of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...the stories of Moses and the Exodus.

We know these stories. We learned them growing up in Sunday School. We have heard them for years in Sunday worship.

But the Bible is more than just reading stories.

No, these stories have served as the focal point of ancient faith communities for millennia.

Think about that.

These stories have been the focal point of faith communities for thousands of years.

We read so that we know we are not alone.

And because we read the Bible, we are connected with these people who existed for millennia before us.

We are connected to them because we are engaging the same stories they engaged.

And it wasn't that these were just nice stories our ancestors wanted to tell themselves.

No, our ancestors told stories so that they could be changed by their stories.

And so, our ancestors wrote stories into which they weaved their deep understanding of the human psyche.

So that the stories would connect to the reader.

So that the stories would make us stop and say to ourselves, "These authors understand my human concerns, my human longings, my human dreams, my human actions"

The authors understand me and are speaking to me.

Talk about skilled story writers. These authors were exceptional, probably because they didn't have all the distractions of our modern society.

Their entertainment didn't consist of watching gameshows on TV or watching videos on their phones.

No, their entertainment was such that they told stories to each other around campfires, and these stories were not just for the sake of passing the time.

No, these stories were for the sake of building up their community, and for the building up of the individual.

They told stories so as to be changed.

These stories were told so as to speak to the human psyche.

It is unfortunate that our human society has lost the ability to engage in stories like this.

There was a time not so long ago when most everyone watched the same television programs and saw the same movies and at least shared a common experience in this regard.

But now with so many streaming services and so much programming, our society is much more fractured in terms of the stories we hear.

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And so places of worship may be the only commonality still when it comes to story telling, where people engage the same stories as found in the Bible, but even this is going to wayside as more and more people are becoming unchurched.

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What is the answer? How do we bring cohesion to our community once more? I don't know exactly.

Does it even matter? Oh, I think so, or I wouldn't be doing what I do as a pastor.

And the reason it matters is that a common story, a common frame of reference provides a moral compass to our human community, whereby we can be changed.

I once heard a professor describe the Bible as a site (S-I-T-E) of ethical debate.

The Bible is a place around which people can come to discuss what it means for us to be people in community who are *decent* and *good* and *virtuous*, especially when we look at texts like Adam and Eve, like Cain and Abel, like Job.

So, yes, it matters...these stories matter a whole lot.

PAUSE

We read to know we are not alone.

And indeed, the Bible speaks to this quote on such a profound level.

Because reading the Bible, as more than just literature...

Reading the Bible as a text that reads us, recognizes that God's Spirit is truly present in our engagement with God's Word.

And if God's Spirit is truly present among us as we read, and as we engage Scripture, then truly we are being changed.

So thanks be to God for God's Word and thanks be to the Spirit of God changing us even at this very moment. AMEN.