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ESSAY

Telling the Covid-19 Virus Story

By Amanda W. Benckhuysen March 26, 2020 6 Comments

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As I write this, my two teenagers are “zooming” their classmates and friends and working away at the assignments their teachers have given them during this period of online learning. Life has changed for us drastically in the last week as I imagine it has for many of you.

When my girls found out that their classes were moving online and that events they had long been looking forward to were canceled, the seriousness of this global pandemic began to set in. As we talked together about the different ways our lives would be affected by the Covid-19 virus and what commitments we would make as a family to help curb its spread, one of my daughters commented, “When I am grown up and have kids of my own, I’ll be able to tell them how I lived through the coronavirus.”

When I am grown up . . .” It was a much needed reminder that things won’t always be like this. The days of social distancing and self-isolation, of the fear of getting sick, of teaching and learning exclusively online, of canceled church services and other occasions for face to face interaction, of stock market volatility, and of whatever else is part of our current normal, won’t last forever.

This will eventually pass. We will be able to gather for worship again, greet each other with the peace of Christ again, shake hands and give each other hugs again. Our lives and our calendars will be full again of social engagements and opportunities to be with others. And while there will no doubt be lasting effects of this global virus, in time, for many of us, life will return to some semblance of normal. Life will go on.

But when my daughter is grown up, when she tells her children about this time, I wonder what she will say? How will she tell the story of living during the time of the Covid-19 virus? How will she

describe the response of our nation, our community, our family?
What will she say of the actions we took, the attitude we exhibited,
the choices we made, the places where we put our energies? How
will she tell this story?

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The stories we tell from one generation to the next is one of the key ways children form an understanding of the world and their place in it. Family stories in particular can help children feel connected to something larger than themselves, learn from past wisdom and past mistakes, and inspire their own religious, moral, and character formation.

Perhaps this is why stories have such a prominent place in the Old Testament and why, throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites are commanded to remember, teach, tell these stories to their children.

Remember, teach, tell

“**W**atch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. *Teach* them to your

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Jeronomy 4:9.

Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the
promises he has uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.” (Psalm 105:5)

“Hear this, O elders, give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such
a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your ancestors?
Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children and
their children another generation.” (Joel 1:2-3)

Remember, teach, tell — so that your children know who they are and
whose they are.

One consistent theme that runs through the stories of Scripture is
God’s faithfulness to his people. [Psalm 105](#) and [136](#) rehearse the
mighty acts of God in Israel’s history, remembering “the
wonderful works he has done (v. 5).” These psalms illustrate and
celebrate God’s steadfast love for his people from generation to
generation.

Through it all, Israel's disobedience and waywardness, through their trials and sufferings, God remains faithful, refusing to let his people go, refusing even to let them suffer alone. Certainly, in the midst of these trying times, this is our source of comfort and strength as well. God is faithful. He is our refuge and our strength . . . an ever present help in times of trouble!

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: another theme in these stories is the response of the people of d to life's opportunities, challenges, temptations, and dships. At times, they responded in courage and faith — like eekah who went with Abraham's servant to a land far from ne to marry a man she didn't know, trusting this was the Lord's leading ([Genesis 24:57-58](#)). At other times, they responded with grumbling and complaining, like the motley crew of Hebrews that God rescued from Egypt ([Exodus 16](#)). Some, like Boaz and Ruth responded with generosity, putting the needs of others before themselves. Others, like Abigail responded with wisdom and discernment ([1 Samuel 25](#)). Still others respond with fear and cowardice. One has only to think of Abraham when he tried to pass Sarah off as his sister, not once, but twice.

What story will she tell?

A

ll of this makes me wonder how my daughter will tell the story of this challenging time. Certainly it will include the theme of God's faithfulness. God's steadfast love endures forever. No matter what

happens in the days to come, whether we recognize it or not, we know we are not alone in this. God is with us.

But what will she tell her children about the response of our family or our church? Did we respond with grumbling and complaining, fear and cowardice, or did we act with courage and faith, wisdom ² generosity, caring for others as we would also want to be ed for?

ly time will tell. However, I hope her story-telling is kind to us. ter yet, I hope our actions and behavior during this crisis give reason to tell this story with pride.

“Let me tell you about your grandma and grandpa,” she might say. “They taught me what love and faith looks like.”

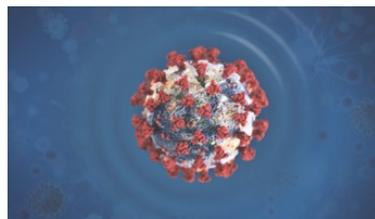
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Amanda Benckhuysen teaches Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her special interests include the Psalms, wisdom literature, and the classical prophets. An ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, Amanda enjoys hiking and biking with her husband and two daughters.

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6 Comments

RLG

March 26, 2020 at 9:45 am

Thanks, Amanda, for your encouragement in this article. I agree that this endemic will long be remembered by many people world wide. Nearly every nation has been affected and stories of remembrance will vary. I listen, now with appreciation, to our governor and city mayor and the encouragement and cautions they give to their citizens. I hear numerous stories of good will and help offered by all kinds of people.

But what baffles me more than anything are the stories and hope that Christians offer in times such as this. Christians believe in an all knowing, all loving, all powerful and personal God who takes an interest in every individual. He is a God who listens to and responds to those who call out in prayer. And yet, despite the countless prayers that have been raised in Christ's name, this endemic continues to grow and get worse. What do we say? Is God not ready or able to answer our prayers? Is he saying, "in my own good time; until then, watch and learn?" Learn what? How do you make sense of a God who is able to stop such devastation but won't? And even if many or even most people recover from Covid-19, is that God's doing, that he spare some but not others? Is this an aspect of God's sovereign common grace, that he will choose to save or spare those he wishes to spare when he could have as easily spared all? And if Christians are God's chosen people, why doesn't he heal his elect? Why isn't his focus on his chosen ones, as a testament of his special love and choosing? On so many levels, Christians, especially in times like this, try to rationalize and justify their triune God. But to increasing numbers of people, such a God as Christians confess simply does not make sense. Maybe the title to Jeff Munroe's article of several days ago got it right, "Corona Virus and the Useless God." His article goes on to suggest that we trust him anyway. Maybe that's what we tell our children. Where's the common sense, Amanda?

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jack roeda

March 26, 2020 at 10:21 am

Fools can ask more questions than the wise can answer.

↳ Reply

RLG

March 26, 2020 at 11:04 am



So I guess Christians don't have an answer. But doesn't the Bible say, always be ready to give an answer ...?

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Mark William Ennis

March 27, 2020 at 6:11 am

Thank you for this Godly wisdom. It is a reminder to us all.

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carl kammeraad

March 27, 2020 at 8:00 am

"We suffer because we are part of the planet, not because of a plan." Rev. Dr. Ernest T. Campbell, when he was pastor of Riverside Church, NYC, in one of his newsletters for pastors which he called, Campbell's Notebook. Around 1970. "The whole creation is groaning in travail..." Romans 8.

 Reply

RLG

March 28, 2020 at 7:58 am

Thanks, Carl, for your infralapsarian perspective. But then it must be God's plan to save only some from physical harm and death while leaving the rest of humanity to the ravages of a fallen world. When God could have saved all from this endemic, he saves only some, similar to his saving of the elect unto salvation and leaving the rest unto damnation. Thanks Carl, for your perspective, but I can't say it makes much sense.

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