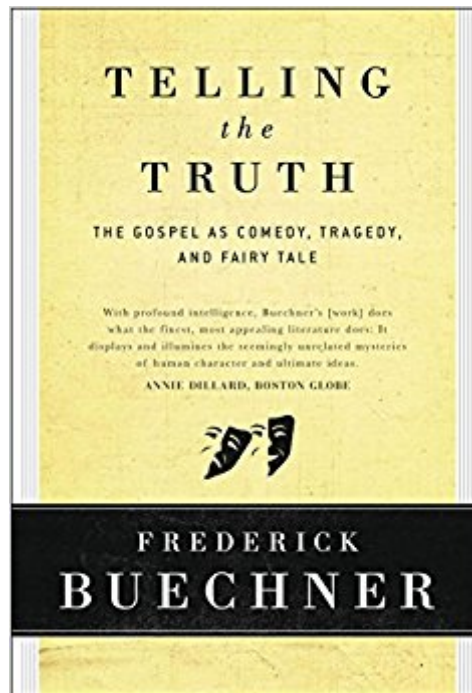




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Telling The Truth: The Gospel As Tragedy, Comedy, And Fairy Tale



Synopsis

A fresh, creative look at the underlying meaning of the Gospels that stresses the many dimensions of God's relationship to humanity.

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Customer Reviews

A sermon arises out of silence, preacher and writer Frederick Buechner reminds us, and that silence is both an opportunity and a warning. An audience sits in the pews waiting, and each of those who sit there bring with them a long and complicated history. How will you reach them? How will you awaken them? "Tell them the truth," Buechner says in this brief and powerful book. The Gospel begins here, out of this silence: "It is life with the sound turned off so that for a moment or two you can experience it not in terms of the words you make it bearable by but for the unutterable mystery that it is." Out of this silence, he writes, the "real news comes, which is sad news before it is glad news and that is fairy tale last of all." This series of lectures explores these three ways of seeing the Gospel: first as tragedy, as honest sorrow and suffering--this must be faced before anything else becomes possible. From this comes the comedy of new life: a child born to Abraham and Sarah in old age, Lazarus raised from the dead. This is the folly of the Gospel--what Buechner will ultimately call the fairy tale. Drawing deeply from the well of The Wizard of Oz and other stories, he reminds us in this final chapter that "there is a child in all of us," a child in touch with a truth deeper than the logic of tragedy. --Doug Thorpe

"The same stylistic power, subtlety and originality that have distinguished Frederick Buechner's novels lift *Wishful Thinking* far above commonplace religion books nearly to the level of C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*. An artist is at work here in the vineyard of theology, a wit with wisdom."-- "The New York Times Book Review"

"A beguiling book Buechner handles difficult subjects (eternity immortality prayer) with a casual aplomb and easy analogy"-- "Time"

"Thoughtful, spirited, entertaining a dictionary for doubters and restless believers." -- "Chicago Tribune"

"Original, pungent and joyful." -- "The Christian Century"

This book has confirmed deep musings and convictions I've held for years, and has provided fodder for years of thought and consideration. Already it seems to have provided language for these deep and vague, but foundational convictions. The book is well written, poetic....a gem. Its main point seems to be this - that as bearers of gospel truth, our task is to tell THE TRUTH, which is never so simple or neatly bundled as we might like, but wrought with our complex and difficult and sometimes seemingly contradictory experiences....that the gospel truth is ALL of these - horrendous tragedy, absurd comedy, incredible fairy tale. READ THIS BOOK!!!!

Jesus does not answer the question "What is truth?" and neither does Buechner. His perspective on letting silence speak was excellent. Very nice how he brings in the prophets with their poetry - "It is the experience that they stun us with, speaking it out in poetry which transcends all other language in its power to open the doors of the heart. The man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The one with the cauliflower ear and the split lip. By whose swollen eye and ruptured spleen we are somehow healed. Who can put a word to him and who needs to?"

Chapter two presenting the gospel as tragedy Buechner addresses the Real Absence using Jesus in Gethsemane and at the cross, and also Elijah. And then this with Job: "It is out of the absence of God that God makes himself present, and it is not just the whirlwind that stands for his absence ... but God is absent also from all Job's words about God, and the words of his comforters, because they are words without knowledge that obscure the issue of God by trying to define him as present in ways and places where he is not present, to define him as moral order, as the best answer man can give to the problem of his life. God is not an answer man can give, God says. God himself does not give answers. He gives himself ..."

With the gospel as comedy in chapter three he begins with Sarah having Isaac in old age. He then goes into Jesus using parables as "holy jokes" that no one got, and towards the end summarizes: "God in his unending greatness and glory and man in his unending littleness, prepared for the worst but rarely for the best, prepared for the possible but rarely for the

impossible. The good news breaks into a world where the news has been so bad for so long that when it is good nobody hears it much except for a few. And who are the few? ... The ones who labor and are heavy-laden like everybody else but who, unlike everybody else, know that they labor and are heavy-laden. ... They are the ones who are willing to believe in miracles because they know it will take a miracle to fill the empty place inside them where grace and peace belong with grace and peace. ... Maybe the truth of it is that it's too good not to be true." A few quotes from the final chapter with the gospel as fairy tale: "Maybe the first thing to say is that it is a world full of darkness and danger and ambiguity." Another one: "Not only does evil come disguised in the world of the fairy tale but often good does too." And then I especially like how he brings out the wonder of the gospel: "The preacher as apologist instead of fabulist tries as best he can to pare it down to a size he thinks the world will swallow." Really good stuff to chew on in this book.

This book was published 45 years ago and is showing its age. 25 years ago, when I was in seminary, I loved Buechner's language. Some of his published sermons are still wonderful and challenge anyone preaching to rise to the powerful and beauty of his expression and the deeply human point he found in the text. That said, I found this book disappointing in the way many texts or helps for preaching are disappointing. The challenge of preaching is not to be able to talk about a passage as tragedy or comedy or even a meaningful fairy tale. These categories are too broad to convey the power of the word when you need to make it specific to the people you are preaching for. The challenge of preaching is to figure out WHAT important thing God is striving to get across to those listeners. Otherwise, beautiful preaching is like cotton candy: you get this big whorl that tastes really sweet but has little substance and no nutrition. Perhaps, it would have meant more to me if I had read the Shakespeare plays that were so obviously meaningful to him. Don't get me wrong, he nailed the angst of getting up in a pulpit and facing a mass of people whose minds are other places. And, he tried here to talk about why preaching is still crucial. But, I would get to the end of section and think "Whatever moving point he wanted to make eluded me." There is nothing I could take with me when I put the book down. To be honest, I bought this for devotional reading. It didn't work on that level either.

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