



## Redemption Stories

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**Associate General Minister**

*Hear this, elders; pay attention, everyone in the land!  
Has anything like this ever happened in your days,  
or in the days of your ancestors? Tell it to your children,  
and have your children tell their children, and their children tell their children.* --Joel  
**1:2-3 CEB**

One of the gifts of scripture is how it constantly reminds us of the power of story. The Bible is the story of a people's amazingly complex journey with a holy God. It is the story of a people's successes and failures as they learned how to be both relational and faithful to the God of the Universe. It is a story of conquests and consequences, faith and fears, goodness and evil. Over and over again the people are redeemed and reminded to preserve the stories of their complex journey for generations to come. God issues this command often to ensure that the faithfulness of God is known in each generation and throughout time, but in the book of Joel this directive is given so that generations to come will also know what grieves the heart of God and brings woe upon the people. It is only through the knowledge of both of these truths that redemption is possible.

The preservation of story is not only necessary theologically—it is critical to the grounding of historical, political, and social truths, truths that are essential to this nation's healing and hopes for a democracy.

Yet since January 2021, 36 states have introduced bills or taken other steps to censure any attempt of schools to offer historically accurate, culturally inclusive education, and 14 of them have already imposed such bans. In addition to scrubbing curricula of any semblance of historical accuracy, a St. Louis school district recently banned the Toni Morrison novel, *The Bluest Eye*. In Tennessee a school board voted unanimously to ban the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Maus*, which details the horrors of the Holocaust and a Seattle-area school board banned *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and several districts removed *The 1619 Project* from libraries and reading lists.

I was recently invited to speak to a capacity crowd of high schoolers in Iowa. A few days before the scheduled session I received the following message: *“We are not supposed to talk about the state or nation being systemically racist. And we can’t talk about white/male privilege. But we can acknowledge racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. We just can’t make anyone feel guilty.”*

Our nation is once again standing at the crossroads of courage and complacency, and there are some compromises we must not make. Neither the instructor nor the principal shared this rule because they agreed, but because non-compliance in public school jeopardizes school funding. Miseducation has always been profitable in this nation. I informed the school that I would not be intentionally inflammatory, nor would I distort the truth of our nation’s history in the interest of White fragility. Many may decide where I speak, but no one will determine what I say, ever. American author, poet, and scholar Clinton Smith III reminds us, *“Whether it is slavery, the Holocaust, the Bible, or the genocides of indigenous peoples across the world, literature can help us cultivate public memory so that it doesn’t happen again.”* For the sake of our children and our children’s children, the truth of this nation must always be told. Only through the learnings of these stories can the soul of this nation be redeemed.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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