Making Sense of Time and Experience
We look at life from the back of the tapestry, seeing the loose ends and the knots. But occasionally the light is bright enough to shine through the fabric, and we discern the beautiful design of both dark and light colors on the other side.

Narrative is, from a theoretical view,

- the structure that we use to make sense of things
- a kind of *metacode*
- a way to reflect on the very nature of culture
- the way that transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted
- subject to cultural, interpersonal, linguistic and cognitive variables.
Literature has narrative elements, sometimes more than others

- For example, *Dedication for a Plot of Ground*, William Carlos Williams (1883 - 1963 / USA)

- Williams: *I tried to put / Truth in a cage*
- Truth is put into boundaries with narrative
Our own life stories are narrative; we make ourselves up with these stories

- We all carry around invisible time lines…

- Birth  important times  today  tomorrow
  __x____________xx____________________x____
Narratives go beyond a snapshot of one moment to make meaning over time.
They reflect the times in which we live
And are made up of myths we create
And they change over time, as we do, if only in our own imaginations.
Our stories have plots
events
characters
And plot breakers--both bad (tragic)
And happy (comic)
Stories may be playful and flexible
But they are always enclosed in a beginning, a middle and an end
A narrative is a "discourse", made by someone, performed language, not language as a potential but static system.
Narratives are both **created** and **received**

- They represent one of the great anthropological forms of **perception** (for the 'consumers' of narratives), as well as of **operation** (for the inventors of narratives) (Metz, 1991).
- There is always a “writer” and an “audience”
Even though often the “audience” exists only in the imagination
Paul Ricoeur wrote often of narrative, from a philosophical point of view...
Among his many wise quotes…

- Narrative identity takes part in the story's movement, in the dialectic between order and disorder.
- It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.
- If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal.
Narrative is more than theory – it is also a form of therapy and counseling—one way of making sense of the puzzle, human life.
Michael White was a primary founder.
White believes that people's lives and relationships are shaped by the stories they tell and engage in to give meaning to their experiences.

that we construct certain habits and relationships that make up ways of life by staying true to these internalized stories
What does someone do with narrative therapy?

- A "Narrative Therapist" assists persons to resolve problems by enabling them to deconstruct the meaning of the reality of their lives and relationships, and to show the difference between the reality and the internalized stories of self.
This contrast, between a false, constructed self, and both possible and real selves, is often dramatic.
Narrative therapists also

- encourage clients to re-author their own lives according to alternative and preferred stories of self-identity, and according to preferred ways of life
- Thus narrative can be an amazingly hopeful and encouraging way to work
To say nothing of empowering and freeing!
Can pastoral care givers use narrative?

- We are already quite at home with hermeneutics.
- We are already accustomed to encouraging people to re-author their own lives.
- We already have an alternative and preferred story of self-identity—namely, as a baptized child of God.
- We already strive to live according to preferred ways of life—namely, the ways of God’s Kingdom.
Our values also are at home with narrative work...

- We wish to show respect for the “other.”
- We acknowledge the importance of context
- We know that people are formed in relationship, just as God is relational (triune).
- We understand some of the ways that meanings are socially constructed, e.g. through our study of Acts and the early church.
Above all,

- We see each person as unique
- We resist labeling people
- We are more interested in wholeness than in cures
- We are quite accustomed to being counter-cultural
Christian understandings of narrative practices (my interpretation) include:

- The cross is the ultimate externalization
- Baptism is our new identity
- Conversion is the “ah ha” moment
- Being in but not of the world is deconstruction
- Being made new by Christ is similar to embracing new roles
- Christian community supports and sustains
- Discipleship is the result of our freedom
In some ways, however, we are less comfortable with narrative theory

- We maintain that there can exist a meta-narrative
- We do not see all truth as relative and thus capable of being de-constructed
- We are audacious enough to believe that there is ultimate truth, albeit God’s truth, not human truth.
Christian faith, narrative work, and relational psychology come together:

From: Ramsey & Blieszner, S & A:
Healthy spiritual community offers a different (third) vantage point from which the advantages of avoiding “Subject-Object oppositions” become more visible (Benjamin, 2006, p. 9). It is a perspective formed by a vision of unity and mutuality, a lively perspective that leads to the creativity so vital for spiritual resiliency.
Yet we can, with these provisions, safely use both narrative theory and tools in pastoral care
Recognizing that we can co-create, with God and with those who come for help, a new future.