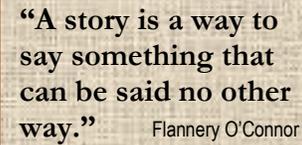


"The Power of Story"

July 19, 2015

Deuteronomy 26:1-15

Matthew 13:10-23



"A story is a way to say something that can be said no other way." Flannery O'Connor

Every Sunday a church school teacher would tell the children about stories of the Bible, stories of the people of Israel. One day a little boy raised his hand, and said, "Teacher, can I ask you a question?" Of course, the teacher said. "Well, the boy replied, "the Bible says that the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and the children of Israel built the temple and the children of Israel did this and the children of Israel did that. Didn't the grown ups ever do anything?"

Story is making a comeback in our society. We are leaving behind the age of modernity and entering into post modernity. Now I don't pretend to know all of what that means but in some way it means that we are leaving behind an exclusive trust in reason as the only thing that helps us to better understand ourselves, the world we live in and our relationship to each other and to the larger world. Reason, in effect, doesn't give us everything we need to know. And mystery is getting a second chance. And stories contain mystery.

The Bible is full of stories and if we can let go of the circular debates about whether the stories are literally true or not, perhaps we can begin to understand what the stories teach us about ourselves, each other and the world we live in.

Indeed as Christians, we are defined by stories - stories of God's relationship to people as seen in both the old and new Testaments. Stories of Jesus - his birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection. Indeed we are called people of the Way - we are followers of the Way - the Way being one of love and compassion, tenderness and forgiveness, joy and peace, freedom and hope. And the one we are following, namely Jesus, was a storyteller.

But Biblical stories are not the only stories we hear and learn from. We also have stories within this community of faith. Beautiful stories, wonderful stories, stories of love and compassion, hope and struggle, pain and healing.

Today we listened to some of these stories:

We heard about Charlie at Vacation bible school - how he felt loved in this place - so much so that he said, "I am not very popular at school, but here it seems everyone likes me"

We heard Diana's story about their first born child. She called the story "The baby who never lived in this world". She talked about how she was in a new country, far from home with a husband who was very busy at work. And their child was stillborn. But this community gathered around her and her husband. This community held a funeral service for her child and cried with her and showed compassion to her. And in this community she found home.

We heard Margaret's story about a loaf of banana bread baked for someone having a hard time - but that someone was not home and so Margaret went to the church and there June told her to go visit a woman who was recently bereaved. And she did. And that woman welcomed her with open arms saying she had just been praying asking God to help her to know that her husband was okay. And she saw this gift as an answer to prayer.

We heard Alison's story about being in Peru, delayed their for ten months waiting for passports for herself and the child she was adopting. She talked about the loneliness and then how her church family supported her by writing cards and cards of encouragement and love.

We heard Lisa's story about an everyday casserole and the power of reaching out to people in pain with everyday items.

All these stories and many more are part of the very fabric of this church and of this community. And these stories tell us so much about God's graciousness and God's love and what it means to follow Jesus on the way.

So what are the stories you can tell? What are stories in your life?

Stories are created to be shared. And when we as Christians share our stories, God in all mystery appears.

Thanks be to God