

Tell Your Story | Peter 3:15,16; I Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15; John 9:24-25 8/15/21

Five years ago, I asked Paul Wilson, a retired Presbyterian pastor, to talk about his faith journey for a few minutes during worship. He did a great job, but Paul told me afterwards that no one had ever asked him to talk about his personal faith in church before! Through over 30 years of ordained ministry and many volunteer years with Christian ministries in retirement, no one had ever asked him to talk about his faith journey! No wonder we Presbyterians struggle to share our faith with others!

This morning brings us to the second sermon in a two-part series about sharing our faith. Last Sunday we looked at the “Big Story,” a summary of what God is up to in the world. We used a presentation developed by James Choung, illustrated by my outstanding artwork! Let’s review!

1. Designed for Good. When God created us, we were in harmony with the creation, with one another and with God. It was very good, in the words of Genesis 1!

2. Damaged by Evil. But we were damaged by evil. By rebelling against God, deciding we could do very well without God, thank you very much, we broke our relationship with him, with each other and with the creation. And we continue to go our own way, reaping the awful fruits of our unfaithful decisions as we experience horribly broken relationships

between individuals, communities, and whole countries. We have all been damaged by evil, and we are unable to fix our problems.

3. Restored for Better. The good news is that God has intervened by sending his Son, Jesus, to teach us how God intends for us to live. Jesus then offered his life as a sacrifice to make us right with God, and restore the world to the way it is supposed to be. Recently, I was working on my Apple watch, trying to get it to work with a new password and download, but no matter what I did, I kept getting stuck at the same place. It was very frustrating! Finally, it gave me the option to “restore factory settings.” And that’s what I needed.

That’s similar to what God has done through Jesus in order to put the world right again. We respond by accepting God’s good gift offering us a “factory re-set.” We trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, and we are restored for better.

4. Sent Together to Heal. Finally, as God heals us, he gathers us together to participate in his work of healing relationships, restoring justice, and properly managing the creation. God calls each of us into this exciting mission of healing the world!

That’s a summary of the Big Story. This morning we’re going to talk about how our stories intersect with that Big Story. That will give us a

foundation on which to share our faith with others. And God asks us all to do just that. As we read in I Peter 3, *Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;* ¹⁶*yet do it with gentleness and reverence.* (I Peter 3:15b, 16a) We should be ready to explain to others the hope that is in us. A simple way to do that is to talk about your own experience of faith.

Keep in mind that people come to faith in Jesus in all kinds of ways, even in the Bible. The Apostle Paul, then known as Saul, was a highly educated, powerful Jewish leader, who was convinced that those who followed Jesus represented a threat to good Jewish religion. So he actively persecuted Christians, jailing them and even supervising their executions.

While on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him, told him to stop harassing his followers, and gave him a new mission as his chosen representative. Paul then did a 180 degree turn and became the most important missionary for Jesus in the history of the church, writing most of our New Testament in the process! That's a dramatic story of coming to faith, and there are a number of dramatic conversion stories like that in the Bible, including Zaccheus and Matthew. Maybe that's how you came to faith- with a dramatic turnaround.

But not everyone in the Bible had that kind of experience. Consider Timothy, one of Paul's proteges. In a letter to Timothy, Paul writes, ⁵*I am*

reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (II Tim. 1:5; 3:15,16)

When our staff gathered this past week for our weekly meeting, we told each other the stories of how we had come to faith. Almost every one of us had a foundation of faith laid in our childhood through parents and churches that taught and nurtured our belief. That was Timothy's experience, too. Rather than having a dramatic conversion experience, he learned the faith through his mother and grandmother, and eventually made it his own.

Let me just pause to say a word to our parents and grandparents. God has entrusted the Christian education of your children and grandchildren to you! We here at church can and will help you. But you need to be sure your kids get here regularly for Sunday School, youth club, youth group, worship, or other activities. When we talk about sharing our faith with others, an important starting place is sharing our faith with our children and youth.

So, some people in the Bible came to faith in dramatic ways, while others had a nurtured faith. Some came to faith when they were healed. Others over dinner or through a conversation. Some were invited to meet Jesus by a friend or family member. The point is that we come to faith in different ways, just like people in the Bible came to faith in a variety of ways. And no particular way is better than another!

So, how have you come to faith? Who were the people involved in sharing or demonstrating faith to you? Parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, coaches, pastors, or fellow church members? I remember my 6th grade Sunday School teacher, who wrote a postcard to each of the dozen or so boys in our class every week, letting us know he was thinking about us and praying for us! Who helped guide you to where you are in faith today? That's part of your story.

Another part of your story has to do with what sustains your faith today. It is Bible reading? Prayer? Worship? Music? Reading books or blogs or watching vlogs? Quiet time with God? Small groups or classes? What sustains your faith today?

And here's another good question to consider when you are thinking about your story and the Big Story: What difference does the Big Story and your experience with it make in your life? Has it affected your character or temperament? Does it give you peace and comfort, or does it prod you to

work on behalf of others? Has it affected your behavior at work or at home? Has it affected your outlook on life and your political views? Has it affected how you spend your time and money? What difference does the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ make in the way you live?

Finally, keep in mind that none of us are finished products! There are several good examples of effective biblical witnesses who still had doubts and flaws and questions. When Jesus healed a blind man in John 9, the Pharisees grilled the poor man about who had healed him, insisting that whoever it was must be a sinner, because he had done this healing on the Sabbath. Here's the man's response, *"²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."* (John 9:24-25)

The man was not a theologian, and he didn't pretend to be! All he knew was that Jesus had healed him and that's what he testified to. Sometimes we are scared to share our faith because we're afraid someone will ask us a tough question that we don't have the answer to. Or, because we have our own doubts and questions. But, if you wait until you've got all the answers, you'll never share your faith! It's OK to say, "That issue bothers me, too, but it's not enough to make me give up on the faith." Or, "I

don't know the answer to that. Let me do a little research and get back to you." Then go ask Lou for the answer!

My challenge to you this morning is to continue to reflect on your own story in light of the Big Story. And pray that God will bring people into your life with whom you can talk about what God has done for you. Then engage in faith conversations with the people God will bring your way. Remember, God is already at work in the lives of those around you! You're just a link in the chain that will bring them to faith.