

## **A Story Worth Telling**

A sermon delivered August 8th, 2010, at Foley UMC, by Dr. Lance Moore.

### **2 Timothy 2:2:**

“And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.”

### **Romans 10:14-17:**

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message... the word of Christ.”

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I believe the Christian story is one worth telling. Do you? Jesus obviously thought so. His last words before leaving earth were these: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18–19) Jesus did not give a lot of strict, strident, bold commands and mandates. He mainly said, (John 13:34), “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another....” So when we find an imperative mandate from Jesus like this—to go and tell and teach—we

ought to take it very seriously. The first duty of a Christian is to love, but the closely-related second duty is to tell the Christian story to others.

There are many Scriptures that command and remind us to share the good news of Christ's life and love. Here's a few:

**2nd Corinthians 5:20:** "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us."

**Acts 1:8:** "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**Romans 10:14-15:** "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?"

So have you given much thought of WHAT kind of story you are going to tell? Maybe it will be helpful to ask yourself some questions first: What is it about Christ that excites you? Without going into a long autobiography, what does Jesus mean to you, how did Jesus change your life? What is it about your Christian life that means the most to you? What has Christ done for you, or what misery would you have without Christ? What has he rescued you from? Addiction, depression, a meaningless life, a hopeless life? Get in touch with those things first and maybe you'll get excited about telling the story from a personal level. Jesus used stories—parables—to tell The Story. Likewise, you can use true life stories to tell people about Jesus.

But maybe you've been a lifelong Christian and led a boring life

and you don't have any grand story of how Jesus changed your life. In that case, go back to the gospels and look at the life and teachings of Jesus, learn that story and re-tell it... find something there that resonates with you.

For me, there are several things that resonate. One is this story... and when we use the word "story," we don't mean a lie or a fable, but a true story, a true account... though in the spirit of story-telling, I'm going to paraphrase and use modern lingo. Here's one of my favorite true stories: once upon a time, Jesus was teaching his radical stuff about how religion should set you free from the Jewish law—we talked about that last Sunday—and some of the traditional Jewish believers decided it was TOO radical, too new, too hard to accept, and they abandoned Jesus. They went back to their old, burdensome religion. And Jesus saw this, and it probably hurt that some were turning their backs on him, so he asked his closest twelve friends: "What about you guys? Are you going to abandon me, also?" And Peter said the most amazing thing: "Well, if we did leave you, where would we go? What other religious leader or philosophy could we follow? Because YOU alone have the words of life!"

I feel so much like Peter at times. Peter was a man who vacillated between great faith and heavy doubt, great courage and marked cowardice, even oscillating between brilliance and stupidity. I'm that way sometimes, and I bet you are too. And at times, I have moments of questioning and doubt, like when I go, "Oh God, why do you allow suffering in this world, why do you allow the evil to prosper and the good people to go poor?" And I get mad at God and decide I'm just going to get even with

God and quit following Christianity! And then I remember the words of Peter, “Where else will you go, Lance, for the words of truth!” Jesus is the best and only game in town. I’ve studied other religions. They just don’t make sense! And nowhere in the history of humanity will you find anyone as loving and perfect as Jesus Christ. So that’s one of the stories I would tell people! Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Another story that resonates with me is when Jesus described God as like the patient father with a rebellious son. I’ve always been a bit of a rebel, I’ve tried my hand at prodigality, and yet God still comes running to meet me. What is compelling about the Prodigal Son story is how it runs counter to a common image of God as a wrathful giant who throws thunderbolts of wrath down upon us. Yes, there are some stories wherein Jesus compares God to a judge. But there are more stories about a God who so loves us that he worries about the one lost sheep, or sweeps the house searching for the one lost coin, who does anything and everything to find, save and redeem even the most criminal and worthless human being. The stories of Jesus paint a relentless God: unrelenting in his love, unwilling to give up on his creation, his children. That is a powerful story. It is a love story.

Of course, speaking of love epics, one of the defining accounts of Jesus is the story of the cross and the resurrection. The so-called “Passion Narrative” is one of the most intense and powerful stories ever written. One movie producer made a film about this and called it “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” It is the story of the most powerful being in the universe being willing to become the weakest and most aggrieved victim, a

story of humility that turns into a story of triumph. It is a non-fiction story but a fiction writer would be hard-pressed to write something as gripping.

If you believe in a kind of evolutionary advancement of human civilization, some anthropologists suggest that human intelligence, creativity and civilization itself was fostered by a simple but compelling act: telling stories around the campfire at night. Joseph Campbell talks about the Power of Myth, by which he doesn't mean a false fairy tale but how a story of mythic proportion has the power to change people, to stick in the collective unconscious and propel society forward.

“Story-telling” is powerful. I was taught and encouraged to be an author, a writer, by some of the greatest teachers and writers of English: Evelyn Anderson, Madison Jones, Stephen Gresham, Ward Allen, even Harper Lee. And they all will tell you a great story requires a challenge or conflict that ends with a satisfying resolution. The betrayal, arrest, torture and crucifixion of Jesus is a moving story... but it has the most astounding resolution of any story: a man comes back from the dead! That's more than just a happy ending, it's a triumphant promise of a better life to come. Why would you not want to tell people that story?

Maybe you think everyone has heard it. Let me tell you: they have not! Oh, a lot of people have heard *of* Jesus. But at least half of our population has no real idea the full story of Jesus and his grace and his love and his gift of eternal life.

Let me tell you a story: I remember vividly, some 20 years ago, I was teaching some kids in Vacation Bible School at a little backwoods church. Some of the kids who came to Bible school

were the children of ne'er-do-well parents who never bothered to take their kids to church on Sunday. But VBS was during the week, it was a like a free babysitter, a free daycare, so we had scores of kids who had rarely been on a church pew. Anyway, we had these little leaflets, kinda like comic books, that were the class lesson books, and I was reading with the children the story of Jesus on the cross... and how he was buried in a rock tomb... dead for three days... and then we turned the page and I read how Jesus had come back alive.

And one of the little girls, about 8 years old, with eyes as wide as silver dollars, exclaimed with absolute seriousness and surprise: "Wow! You're pulling my leg!?! That's not for real, is it!?" And I had the joy of telling her, "Yes, it really did happen, in real life. Just because it looks like a comic book doesn't mean it is a made-up story. It's a true story."

So friends, don't you ever make the assumption that the story has been told to everyone. The gospel still is good news, surprising news, and there's a whole world full of people who near to hear a good story.

I've devoted most of my life to telling the stories of Jesus. I don't plan to ever stop telling the greatest story ever told.

How about you?

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