

More on Story, Culture & Language: Love Makes a Way

Year C Epiphany 4 _3.2.19

Luke 4.21-30, 1 Cor 13.1-13, Jeremiah 4.1-10

We have been talking the last few weeks about story. So, I thought it might be good to define our terms!

The Cambridge dictionary definition of story is: a description, either true or imagined, of a connected series of events:

1. an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment.

a plot or storyline.

a report of an item of news in a newspaper, magazine, or broadcast.
" a piece of gossip; a rumour.

Story tells our history but isn't necessarily factually accurate. Story may also convey meaning beyond accurate historical facts. The gospel story tells of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth but isn't completely historically factual in its details; likewise, the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament. It's the meaning that matters. And what we say is that the gospel is a story that contains a truth necessary for salvation. It's a story that is more than a description of a series of connected events.

The first nations people of this country have the stories of the dreaming; the creation stories that convey both meaning and connection to country for aboriginal people. They are not factually true but are essential for the culture of the people.

And we each have our personal stories. We can talk about our lives as a series of inter-connected events. That is so say, what has happened in our lives and our relationships. And, at the same time, we may add a lens to our story. Because of our particular circumstances and the way we experience the world we can create a story that casts us a particular figure – as in a play or drama. For instance, if I have experienced abuse or trauma or rejection it may be that I begin to see myself as a victim. I start to tell myself a story about being a victim and then filter reality through that story or belief or self-image.

In other words, I put myself in that box lined with mirrors (spoken of previously) and everything that is reflected to me is just what I believe about myself already rather than seeing reality as it is. For example, if my personal story is one of the victim, I will tend to interpret other people's words and actions as victimising me even when they actually are not. We may have had the experience of being surprised by a person's reaction to something seemingly innocuous we've said and wondered why? Perhaps what we have said has been filtered through that person's lens and is not what we meant to communicate at all.

So, it's important that we grow in our capacity to see reality as it is, rather than interpreted through the story I tell myself about myself. In other words, we need to turn the mirrors into clear windows so that we see outside our box the world as it is. 'For now, we see in a mirror dimly, then we will see face to face'.

So, those stories we tell ourselves about ourselves such as I'm a victim, I'm the one who always has to get everything done (martyr), I'm the one who saves others (hero/messiah), I'm the truly religious or Christian one and so on, are not the true story of who we, are not the true self, and they can limit us and become a cause of suffering for ourselves and others.

So, Jesus, using this image, is the One who is right outside of the box. He recognises the True Self and represents the True Self. The

true self is the one healed of all our limiting stories and self-image. Our true self is the self-made in the image of God.

And culturally our stories can be self-limiting. The story of our country, as others are saying, is to date a story of 3 chapters – aboriginal, colonial and multi-cultural. We have been telling only part of that story since white invasion – the story of colonialism. And we do ourselves a disservice. Now its time to embrace the truth of our collective story; to accept the incredibly gracious gift that our aboriginal sisters and brothers are offering us as well as the gift of multi-culturalism – both of which expand our vision, our horizon and grow our collective story. And as I said the other day its time the religious story and the science story each expanded the other. And this is happening. Because story is continuous. History is never static. Creation is not finished – the unfolding evolutionary process of Life is dynamic and always transforming.

In our gospel story today, Jesus has first been acknowledged. The people have spoken well of him and been amazed by his insight into scripture. Very quickly, as he challenges them the people reject him and become violent towards him – driving him out towards a cliff. They are stuck in a box of mirrors metaphorically speaking. But Jesus is part of the unfolding story of human consciousness. And it seems he is aware of this. He challenges the people of his own time, place and culture to grow. Not to become cut off from their story but to grow it. (I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it).

And it is people like Paul who continue the story of Jesus of Nazareth – who communicate truth in ways that a wider audience than just the Jewish people can hear. Paul speaks in the language of those whom he is addressing. And I don't mean that in terms of speaking French to French people or Japanese to Japanese people. What it means is to use language that is culturally appropriate – to use symbols and images that will mean something to those with whom we are trying to communicate.

In our epistle today, Paul speaks the language of Love.

Today we need a universal language. A language that connects us, as a whole earth community. A language that doesn't eliminate difference and diversity but acknowledges and respects difference whilst at the same time it unites us. Perhaps it is the language of love. And even today Paul's words about love in Corinthians speak to many.

The gospel is a good news story of love. Of love that gives of itself.

Agape or divine love is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love. It is the highest of the four types of love. Agape describes the kind of love Jesus has for God and for his followers. Agape is the term that defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is God's ongoing, outgoing, self-sacrificing concern for all. God gives this love without condition, unreservedly to all. Regardless of their story. There is no ulterior motive in such love. Its giving is not dependant on the worth or value of the one given to. It pays no heed to whether the love given is reciprocated, deserved or valued.

It is the love that heals and redeems when it is known – even if only in part. And when known, even only in part, it reveals to us our true worth as one who shares in God's divinity. This is true self-respect or self-worth as compared to narcissistic self-esteem. It is love that is far more than a feeling. It is active and loves even in the face of rejection and victimisation because it will not be held down by such human brokenness. We can only love this way when we know we ourselves are loved this way – by God. Love is not merely an attribute of God, love is God's essence. God is fundamentally love.

The mob turn on Jesus to drive him out of town. They are furious and holding fast to their self-righteousness in the face of Jesus prophetic words and his challenge to their own lack of love. They

are so enraged that they want to drive him over a cliff. But Love passes through the midst of all this and goes on its way.