

“The Difference Makers: Story”
John 9

This is the third week in our series about difference makers, people who make a difference in the world by building up the kingdom of God. Our focus today is on the power of stories and the importance of stories for our lives. Advertisers know that and often use stories to help promote their products. Here is an example from Subaru.

Subaru Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=St3dTT9ybBk>

Stories have an incredible power in helping us connect on an emotional level with the experiences of others and of our lives. Stories give meaning to our experiences and that is why the Bible is full of stories of faith. It is not a book of doctrines and theoretical information. It is about people, their lives, their struggles, and their faith. As we enter these stories, we also enter more deeply into our own stories. As Rabbi Lawrence Kushner teaches, “The stories of the Torah tell not only of what happened long ago, but also what happens in each generation. They are true not because they happened but because they happen.”

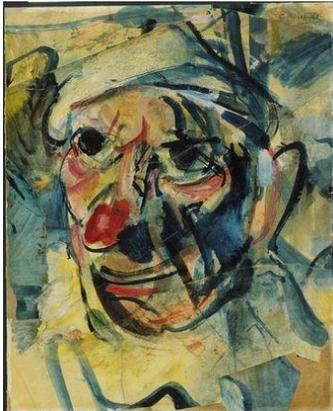
Today’s Bible story is about a blind man who gets healed by Jesus (John 9). This is a very dramatic story with a lot of action and conflict. We know that the conflict was building up between Jesus and the religious authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus was proclaiming the message of God’s light coming into the world through him to renew the faith of the people of Israel. In the Gospel of John there are seven signs that show us Jesus’ message to the world. Today’s story is the sixth sign. It is a story of healing which has a lot more to it than just the cure to physical blindness. From earlier chapters in John’s Gospel, we know how important seeing is for following Jesus. People had to see for themselves and not just be told about Jesus. There were social and spiritual kinds of blindness which Jesus was seeking to heal. There were more people who needed to be healed from blindness than the one who was identified as the blind man. According to the understanding of the people in Jesus’ time, the blind man was an outcast in society. Blindness and other ailments were often viewed in ancient times as punishment for sin. The disciples of Jesus and the leaders who opposed him assumed this. Many in that culture and time saw that the blind man did not deserve love or healing. He only deserved scorn and disrespect. This is hard for us to relate to but think back on our understanding (or lack of it) of AIDS or alcoholism and the social prejudices that went with those diseases. The blindness of the disciples and society was evident from the debate that ensued after the healing about whose fault it was that the man was blind. But through God’s wisdom and love Jesus broke the rules of his day to share God’s light. Biblical scholar Richard Rohrbaugh speaks of an ancient custom of spitting in the presence of the blind in order to protect oneself from the “evil eye.” Jesus transformed that act of disdain into one of healing.

The blind man who is healed became an example for many who were blind around him. He became a difference maker because of his ability to share his story. I love what he does through the whole story. He does not get into the debate whether he was

deserving of healing or not. He does not get into the arguments of the religious leaders with him. Instead, he stays focused on the healing and on sharing his own story. He proclaims his truth not an overpowering way, but through his story. The arguments he got were all about beliefs and rules: no healing on the Sabbath, defining people as sinners because of disabilities, and going through the proper channels for healing. But the man's focus was not on any of these things because when people truly allow God to transform them, all the other falsehoods fall away.

We could sit here and judge the religious leaders of Jesus' time and think that we would not do the same things. But in reality, it is very hard for us to get to that naked and vulnerable state of sharing our pain and how God is healing us.

The French painter Georges Rouault was walking past a circus caravan one evening and saw an old clown repairing his costume. (See one of Rouault's clown pictures on the screen) What struck him was the contrast between the costume and make-up worn by the clown and the 'infinite sadness' that rested just below the paint. Rouault wrote, "I have seen clearly that the clown was I, was us, almost all of us... That sumptuous sequin covered costume is given to us by life, we are all clowns to a greater or lesser extent, we all wear a 'sequin covered costume.' But if someone surprises us as I have surprised the old clown, oh! Who would then dare say that he has not been overwhelmed, down to the pit of his stomach, by an immense pity?"



The story for today invites us to allow God and others to see our vulnerabilities and to share how God has or is healing us. That is real power! That is real witness to the good news! That is how God transforms us and others through us. That is how we become difference makers. So today, I would like to invite you to consider sharing your story of how God is healing you and freeing you from pain. Maybe you have never shared that with anyone before. Maybe you have not even reflected on it yourself. Maybe you are struggling with doubts and questions which is completely okay. This is not about sharing specific events per se. It is more about sharing the healing that took place (or is taking place right now). I know that we are all here because we have experienced something of the sacred in our lives. We have known in our own lives the power of God's love. Here are two questions to ponder:

1. What has God done in your life that you need to share with others who are struggling through difficult circumstances?
2. How has someone else's story inspired or transformed you?

Since I am asking you to be vulnerable, I will share with you my answers. Growing up in a culture that did not value girls the same way they value boys, I struggled for many years with a sense of inadequacy and of shame. Being told at early age, over and over again, that we needed to worry so much about what people thought of us, especially as a girl, made me feel scared to be myself, to make mistakes, or to have my own dreams. I have struggled with needing approval from others and with really accepting my shadow parts, faults and shortcomings. But through my study of scripture and learning that Jesus came to liberate us from all that holds us back and from the powers of oppression, I began to let go of fear and to trust my inner guidance. Then through friends who showed me the ways of contemplative and deep prayer, God finally broke through to me. The grace of God was not something that I knew in my head, but something that I experienced deep within my soul. I remember the first time, during silent prayer, when I felt this deep sense of love for God and for life. I found myself saying to God, "I love you" and I really meant and felt it deep within my soul. Major blockages to love were removed from my life. This has been an ongoing process and God is not done with healing me yet. But now, I have a deep and abiding sense of peace in my heart that the world and all of its circumstances cannot take away from me. The good news of the love of God in Jesus is something that saves my life each and every day. It does not take me out of the struggles of life, it instead helps me know that nothing can separate me from the love of God. I am so grateful and indeed feel so blessed. This is the good news I feel compelled to share with others who are struggling. This is the good news several people have shared with me in their own lives and it changed my life.

Today, I invite you to reflect on your own story. Take time to respond to the two questions before you (reflective music playing in the background). Then, I invite you to pray about sharing your good news of God's love with one person in your life. If it is too difficult to do that, take time in prayer to share your gratitude for God has done in your life. Also, if there is someone who has made a difference in your life through sharing their story, take time this week to share with that person, your gratitude for what they shared. If they have moved to more life, give thanks to God for their witness.

May we go out into the world to connect with others remembering that the shortest distance between two people is a story. Amen.