

R – Retelling Your Faith Story

Acts 2:1-21

INTRODUCTION

If you are reading through the Old Testament at the same pace I am, this week you read the story of Elijah when he was on the run from the wicked Queen Jezebel. That phrase alone tells you this is going to be a great story ...

The wicked Queen Jezebel!

In my mind I picture every evil woman in every Disney animated film I've ever seen.

The part of that story that I really like is where Elijah is hiding in a cave when God shows up and wants to have a conversation. The text reads:

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper...Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-13)

I don't know if there was a Mrs. Elijah or not, but can you imagine the conversation when he went home that night?

Honey, have I got a story for you!

Or take today's reading from Acts 2. Picture 120 people scrunched into a room when suddenly a roaring wind comes into the room. The noise was so loud that people from all across the city of Jerusalem came running to find out what was going on. And don't forget everyone in that room had a flame glowing on the top of their heads – without burning their hair!

Honey, have I got a story for you!

The Bible is filled with such stories! It is one of the reasons it is such an amazing book!

- When Saul was on his way to persecute Christians, he was knocked to the ground by a bright light that caused him to become a Christian.
- The parting of the Red Sea and a million people walked between the walls of water on dry ground.
- Blind people received their sight. Lame people walked.
- Balaam heard his donkey talking to him.
- That night even the donkey went home and told Mrs. donkey: Honey, have I got a story for you!

Everyone who has an encounter with Jesus has a story to tell.

Even today some of those stories may be amazing enough that they published and people read about them.

- I don't know if it is still published or not, but years ago there was a magazine titled "Guideposts." Each issue was filled with amazing stories about how God interacted with people.

I personally have never had a story awesome enough for Guideposts. My God stories probably seem boring.

- I don't have a talking donkey or bright lights or any kind of miraculous healing.
- But I still have a story, because everyone who has an encounter with Jesus has a story to tell.
- That means ... you have a story too.

Last Sunday I re-introduced the phrase "Growing in G.R.A.C.E." as more than our church's name or a nice theological slogan for a church-wide capital campaign. I called it "a description of the discipleship pathway" our congregation has created to help you mature in your faith.

- Each letter in that acronym stands for a characteristic of someone who wants to know Jesus better ... someone who wants to grow in their faith.

Last week I talked about the letter "G" which stands for someone who is growing in God's word.

- I told you that nothing will help you grow in your faith faster than reading the Bible.
- And I encouraged you to memorize some verses so they would be "hidden in your heart" for future use.
- And I showed you how Jesus regularly took people back to the Scriptures when He was talking about matters of faith.

One part of our congregational focus on making disciples is to Grow in God's Word.

This week our focus is on the letter "R" in our Discipleship pathway. It stands for ...

Retelling Your Faith Story

That is exactly what happened to those 120 people who gathered in that room on the first Pentecost Sunday. They had that amazing encounter with God the Holy Spirit and spilled out into the streets ...

...declaring the wonders of God ... (Acts 2:11)

They re-told the story of what God had just done for them. In a miraculous way, God made it possible for these uneducated people from Galilee to share their stories in languages they had never learned and in such a way that other people became Christians ... and then had their own stories to tell.

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:6, 41)

The Scriptures are filled with verses that emphasize our need as disciples to share our stories with other people, both for our own benefit as well as theirs. Scriptures like ...

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15)

Jesus ... said (to the formerly demon possessed man), "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19)

One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. (Psalm 145:4)

This is how the Christian faith is passed along from generation to generation, so it is one of the primary tasks of a disciple.

An old legend imagines Jesus arriving in heaven right after the Ascension, welcomed by all the angels. Then the angel Gabriel asks Jesus, "You suffered much, dying for the sins of mankind. Does everyone down on earth know it?"

- "Oh, no," replied the Savior, "just a handful of folks in Jerusalem and Galilee know about it."
- "Well, Master," continued Gabriel, "what is your plan for everyone to know of your great love?"
- The Master replies, "I asked all my apostles to carry the message into all the world. I told them to tell others, who will in turn tell others until the last person in the farthest corner has heard the story."
- Gabriel's face clouds, for he spots a flaw in the plan. "What if after awhile Peter forgets, and goes back to his fishing on Galilee, also James and John and Andrew? Suppose Matthew returns to his tax booth in Capernaum, and all the others lose their zeal and just don't tell others. What then?"
- After a pause comes the calm voice of the Lord Jesus, "Gabriel, I have no other plan."

So how do we re-tell our story? As with the letter "G" – and as it will be with each of the letters of G.R.A.C.E. – our Discipleship Pathway identifies three skills and practices.

#1: BE ASSURED OF YOUR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

First, is being certain of your own relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that may "know" that we have life eternal in Jesus.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

That eternal life begins once we place our faith in Jesus. Today's text states it simply:

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:21)

Knowing that Jesus Christ saved you gives you the confidence to share the good news with others, so this is an important step. In "churchy" terms, we call that ...

Assurance

Our Women of Grace just completed a Bible study on this subject, so there are a host of people sitting in these pews who can help you know for certain that Jesus has saved you and that you are on your way to heaven.

#2: ARTICULATE YOUR STORY IN SIMPLE TERMS

The second skill is the ability to articulate the story of your walk with Jesus in a simple and clear way.

One thing I do know. Once I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25)

Our goal is for you to tell it in three minutes or less, because often that is the amount of time someone will graciously listen before they start to tune you out.

- Everyone's story is different and therefore uniquely special. Being able to articulate it will not only help you share your faith, but help you recognize the key moments you and God have had on your journey.

#3: BE INTENTIONAL

The third skill is a strategic one. Here you are intentionally building relationships with people who need to hear your story.

- These might be people you already know or people you've not yet met.
- But either way, you are seeking out opportunities to let people know what Jesus has done for you.

You are constantly listening to that still small voice of God that Elijah heard that day, listening for the prompting of God to tell your story. If you are prayerfully intentional, you will know when it is the right moment.

- In Acts, the disciples knew it was the right moment because the crowds heard the commotion and asked:

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12)

APPLICATION

Two important things to remember:

First, Your story isn't about the words you use.

- You don't need big, fancy words to tell what happened to you.
- Once I was blind ... there's nothing big about that.

Second, YOUR story is always a part of HIS story.

- That is, ultimately it is the story of Jesus that we are telling and re-telling. It must always be about "Christ in us" (Colossians 1:27).
- It's never about you; it is the story of Jesus has done for, in and through you.
- So don't avoid this part of your spiritual growth just because you don't like to call attention to yourself. Talk about Jesus!

Every day, maybe even every hour of the day, our lives intersect with people who need Jesus. Imagine ... what if your story with Jesus could be the missing step in their story with Jesus? Imagine!

Friend, do I have a story for you!

Keep growing in G.R.A.C.E.!

Amen.