

“Telling Your Story – Scout Finch”

February 6, 2022

The Faith of a Mockingbird series

Media: Week 1 intro - Scout Finch, then prayer

I’m excited for this series and have been challenged all over again by Harper Lee’s story and how she puts themes like justice, mercy, mystery, and love in our faces so that we have to look at ourselves and our lives. I loved this book when I read it in high school; it was memorable and meaningful - and sometimes uncomfortable. I reached out to my close high school friends and asked them about their memories, which were similar to mine - a powerful story. Lee’s life in Monroeville, AL and her Methodist Christian faith reflects in the story and calls us to consider who we are, how we’re a part of God’s bigger story, and how we keep a hopeful faith in a broken world.

We look at ourselves and our lives through God’s story of redemption, hope, and love - or at least that’s the invitation from God as we follow Jesus. With all that swirling around us, there are times when God’s grace shows through stories, art, music, movies, and other cultural parts and pieces. Even this week, God showed up powerfully in a two-minute segment on a late-night talk show when musician Dua Lipa asked host Stephen Colbert to talk about the connection between his faith and comedy.

Colbert has been open about his faith before and did say that he hopes Jesus has a sense of humor, but then he got more serious and was very clear about how his faith calls him to values of love and sacrifice. And he offered a powerful witness that “death is not defeat” and that laughter and humor can overcome fear. It’s moments like that when the line between sacred and secular blurs, and we understand transformation in a new way. By God’s grace, we experience moments when God is so close we can feel it, and we’re inspired to keep on going.

I heard another inspiring story about Dillon Helbig, a 2nd grader from Idaho, who wrote a homemade book (81 pages long) complete with illustrations, and he snuck it onto a shelf when he went to his local library. *The Adventures of Dillon Helbig’s Crismis* (by Dillon his self) wasn’t on the shelf when Dillon went back to look for it after he told his mom what he did. It’s become a hit. The one copy now has a legitimate barcode and a waiting list for checkout - all because Dillon wanted to

share his story with the world. It's inspiring and challenging as we think about telling our stories.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout is our narrator. She is young, very bright, observant, and very honest. She is making her way in the world along with her brother, Jem, and Atticus, her widower father who is an attorney in their small town. Atticus is patient with Scout's questions and attentive to her wonderings. His respect for his children is clear, even as he'd like to spare them the difficulties of life.

Part of the power of this story is that it's told from a child's point of view. It's honesty and innocence move us deeply. I asked my sister, a recently retired middle school language arts teacher, why this book is so beloved, and she lifted up the power of a child's perspective of figuring things out the world. If it were told from a different character's perspective, it would be different.

Even as Scripture is the inspired word of God, we know it represents the work of many different authors. We have four Gospels - four books that tell us the story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. When we read them all, we understand that they tell the same story with different emphases. The basics are the same, but Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the Messiah and takes time to give us family history. Mark is sparse on details, but probably was written down first and is source material for Matthew and Luke. Luke is a Gentile who writes from that perspective and includes more stories about how Jesus reaches out to Gentiles. John's Gospel is very different from the others - starting with a wider scope and offering longer encounters with specific people like Nicodemus and the woman at the well.

Each Gospel offers a unique perspective on the story of Jesus - on the Good News of God for the world. Each of them is important, even though we might have a favorite. Each of us has a unique experience of God and a unique role in telling God's story. Maybe there's a part of the Gospel that resonates with you and moves you deeply. We find ourselves in the Gospel story, and God uses our perspective to tell the story.

Maybe you know the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, and there's a line in one song that says, "*Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?*" It's a good question. *Who tells your story?* Each week of this series, I'll offer some questions to respond to - including on Facebook - as a way to tell our stories. **(SLIDE)** *How do your daily habits reveal your faith and values? For what do you give thanks?*

Just like the body has many parts that are important to the whole, our experiences of coming to faith in Jesus and living our faith are important. Paul's word to the community affirms that everyone (and every story) has value. We truly need each other to get the most complete understanding of who God is and what God is like. Scout is learning her place in the community as she stands against the norms for a young girl (like not loving to wear dresses), asks honest and hard questions, tries to understand justice, and tries to make sense of the world.

With the blessing of four Gospels comes a caution. Scripture is living and active - and it always meets us where we are, but there is a caution. What are the stories we tell ourselves about God? Are they true? We know people who struggle to believe that God really loves them because of painful life experiences or because someone made Christ's love out to be conditional rather than gracious and steadfast.

What are the stories we tell about others? Have you ever been wrong? Harper Lee's story reminds us that our prejudices and assumptions - and sometimes what others tell us - aren't the truth. The children's constant wonder and the community gossip about Boo Radley along with the very public trial for Tom Robinson challenge us to consider whom we're listening to and how we seek truth.

When do we come to the place where we understand that the world isn't idyllic? Do you remember when you learned that the world isn't perfect? When it feels like evil will win, how do we respond? How do we hold the brokenness around us and still live with hope that God is at work for good - that God is doing a new thing - that "death is not defeat"?

We talk about our own stories, but what about our story as a community of faith? For more than 65 years, we've been here making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Some of us have been here a long time; some of us not so long. No matter the timeline, we're called to use the gifts we have - each of us uniquely gifted as a part of the Body of Christ - to serve God and serve others. Our role is to offer Christ's love to others - to tell the story of God's grace.

We do that now in many ways. This week, I was especially moved at our GriefShare meeting when the Holy Spirit's presence was very real in the community of people who were gathered - none of us knowing one another well, but called together to journey through grief. It's amazing how God keeps transforming us as we connect to each other - and hear their stories.

I attended a lunch this week for Faith Partners where the focus was literacy and what the church can do to partner with our community to reach out and help

people who need help. We have a connection to children at Ross Park, but there are lots of opportunities to help adults who struggle - perhaps more than we realize. This is an opportunity, and I'll be sharing more as I get more information.

You may have a vision and dream for a new thing that God is doing - that God has laid on your heart. If you do, share it. Scout's willingness to ask hard questions can inspire us to ask them, too, especially as we seek to understand God's will and way - and how we might be open to God's leading to places we didn't expect. We do it together, and we do it as we nurture our relationship with God.

We have a handout with some powerful questions that might challenge us as we tell our stories. **(SLIDE)** Image of handout

Did I offer peace today?

Did I bring a smile to someone's face?

Did I say words of healing?

Did I let go of my anger and resentment?

Did I forgive?

Did I love?

These are the real questions.

Henri Nouwen

Ultimately our story begins with brokenness and struggle, but that's not the end. There is healing, grace, and resurrection - and we're called to be a part of that story. Even as we come to the table where bread is broken for us and the love of God is poured out for us, we know that broken bread and cup of salvation offer us new life and hope. There are many connections that we have with others, and sometimes those connections bring expectations for who we are, how we are, and what our place is.

Today we're offered a reminder of whose we are - and the place where we find rest, peace, and grace. This is a holy meal and holy moment when we remember our part in God's bigger story of grace and love that offers redemption - and ultimately promises redemption for the whole world God loves.

Let us pray as we come to the table...