

What story are we telling?

The sermon given by Rev Liz Crumlish
at the St Margaret's Sung Eucharist on 29 May 2022
speaking in our sermon series
'Countering the Darkness: Stories of Hope and Resurrection'.

The readings were: Acts 16.16-34; Psalm 97;
Revelation 22.12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17.20-26

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."
(John 17:20-26)

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

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That is an incredibly hopeful statement of Jesus – that others should believe because of the story we tell. That the way we speak about and live out our faith will influence others and cause them to believe.

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This year – 2022 has been designated – the Year of Stories in Scotland. You may have seen various events advertised ... Designed to bring communities together to continue – or perhaps to resurrect – the ancient tradition of story-telling, where stories of communities were passed on from generation to generation.

What faith stories are we sharing in our community? What is the story we are passing on – to our contemporaries and to the next generation?

One of my mantras is: You don't need to have written the story to find yourself in it. In other words, often, in the stories of others and in our faith stories, we can discern great wisdom for our own lives. We find a resonance that calls deeply to us. A resonance that helps us make sense of our story and of where we might go next.

What are we resonating most with just now, in all the stories of faith that have been passed on to us?

Perhaps, most of all, just now, we resonate with the story of a God who weeps. A God who weeps at how careless we are with creation and how little we regard human life. As war continues to rage in so many places throughout the world. As children become collateral. As those in power disregard the poorest in our communities.





As people of faith, we are storied people. Our faith is built on ancient myths, legends, and stories of folk who, through every age, have sought and found God who brings together and makes sense of all our stories.

How will we make sense of God's story today? How will we live, together, in the story of God – of the past, the present and the future.

Reading today's gospel, in the light of Ascension that we celebrated on Thursday, I'm struck again by how Jesus entrusts us with his story, with the story of faith.

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We are entrusted with the good news. So what story are we telling? How are we portraying a life of following God? Is it a story that, even today, in the midst of the darkness, holds out light? Are we still able to share the story of hope and of resurrection? Are we living as those who make a positive difference in the lives of our communities?

Jesus told a lot of stories, He also went about inviting others to tell their stories. And, as he listened to the stories of others, Jesus invited them to imagine a different ending.

I wonder how often we invite others to tell their stories. And, when we do, can we listen without judgement? Can we invite others to imagine a different, more hopeful ending – without assuming that we know what's best?

Throughout history – and still today – there are so many whose stories are told by others, others who have not listened and whose perspective is very different.



This is the way for women, for children, for the poor, for migrants, for refugees ... The list goes on. And, as if it were not enough that their authentic stories are not heard, often the ending of those stories becomes prescribed by those who do not listen. What they need ... What would be best ... What they deserve ...

So many assumptions are made – without listening first to the one whose story we are editing! Today, we can point to government ministers who are completely missing the point. Who, from their positions of comfort, are telling the stories of vulnerable people to whom they have never listened, and prescribing a way out of their predicament with glib sound bytes.

It seems that so many of those who make policy pronouncements are so far removed from the plight of those they govern today. And deaf to so many of our local politicians who are listening, day in, day out, to local stories of how years of austerity are taking their toll. Public life is littered today with folk making decisions on behalf of those to whom they have never listened.

But what about us? When is the last time that we took time to hear another's story? When did we last reserve judgement on the chaotic lifestyle of addiction, or the choices imposed by poverty and benefit sanctions.





When did we reach out, not with advice on how to manage better, or with judgement on choices made, but with compassion that listens first to the child of God who has a story to tell, a story that matters, a story that affords insight into a very different way of life, a story in which we are invited to participate, not because we know best but because we are willing to listen?

And what are the stories of faith that we are passing on to this and to the next generations? We believe in a God who listens. We believe in a God whose will is harmony for all of creation. We believe in a God who invites us to be involved in the plot line. Writing, together with God, the next chapter.

So what is the story we're telling? God gives to us the power to change the narrative. To move from despair to hope ... From hatred to love ... From isolation to community ... From judgment to acceptance ... From exclusion to inclusion ... From death to life.

In the days ahead, may we find ways to see folk – and to *hear* folk. To enter into their story, not by prescribing an ending, but by listening, with the eyes of love – those eyes with which God looks on us. And may we be complicit, with God, in inviting them into the story of hope and resurrection, the story of the people of God through all ages. For the love of God.

The image comes from an article written for World Refugee Day 2021 by Defne Gursoy, which you can read at <https://tinyurl.com/473d9kep>.