

A STORY FOR ALL PEOPLE

One of the great gifts and joys of the Word of God is that through the eyes of faith it is not just the story of other people. It is our story, too. As we hear the Good News, we are invited regularly to identify with and put ourselves into the places of the people in the story. We read the Prodigal Son and imagine ourselves as the younger son, or the older son, or the father – or all three. We imagine ourselves as the woman at the well, or Peter confessing Jesus as Lord. We hear our own hearts in Martha’s words to Jesus, saying, ‘Lord, if you’d been here, my brother would not have died. Yet even now.....’ At times we are the crowd, shouting “Hosanna,” or the Pharisees protecting and defending the Law at the expense of others, or Pilate, washing his hands of the crucifixion. To me, this is part of what makes the bible a “Living Word.” It doesn’t just sit there on the page. It pulls us in, time and time again. And while the stories don’t change, we re-visit them and get values in different places.

Every once in a while, we are left without a place in the story, or left wondering where we would be if the script had been different. I had an encounter with a story of faith, healing, and overcoming enormous odds earlier today. It was a story that was inspiring and unforgettable, but also left me very selfishly wondering things – things that are probably quite unfair but that I couldn’t ignore. Let me explain.

The story, sent by a friend, was actually a video witnessing by members of my friend’s church. The story was told by a young couple with three children. It was the story of their most recent pregnancy. With about 4 months left to go, the wife went in with concerns, not feeling well. She found out from the doctors that the baby that she was expecting to carry for another 4 months was coming, right now, ready or not. The family’s life was turned upside down and their faith was greatly tested as their son struggled on a ventilator – a hole in his heart, a hole in his abdominal area, and numerous other very serious medical issues. In spite of being given a 1% chance of survival, this child is still alive today, an active toddler, and a living testament to the life-giving and life-sustaining power and grace of God. It is a truly remarkable and wonderful story that is worth being shouted from the rooftops.

But as I came to the end of the story, I found myself very strangely identifying not with the dad, or the mom, but with an anonymous couple not appearing in this story, wondering to myself that the ending in this story clearly points to God’s protective and benevolent care for this innocent life, and his miraculous ways of working wonders for us, but what about the message in those whose stories do not end as this one did? As one who has a child, I rejoiced with the family in the story. As one who has lost a child during pregnancy, my heart longed to hear and reflect on God’s response and presence in the midst of a different outcome. For certain, God’s place in the midst of it all would be just as real, but manifest in the comfort, strength, compassion, and daily outpourings of grace for those who mourn.

The wonderful gift of the Word of God for us is that it is a story for all people, for all times and places. It is the story of God and the people God would give anything to restore and reclaim. It is a story of such intense pain and consolation, bitterness and hope, anguish and renewal, death and life, that we are never beyond its grasp, its calling out to us, its invitation to step into the word made flesh and to come and see. Below is a song about this great gift we find in the Word of God.

A Story for All People

*As people wait in darkness, in fear of endless night.
Send forth your word of comfort, a message of great light
The world stands proud before you, conflicted, hungry, poor
Come, scatter pride and foolishness, and mend all souls with Savior love once more*

*Refrain: A story for all people, old story new today
 A song of love and healing, a light to show the way .*

*We come into your presence, in hope and joy restored
With eager hearts we listen, and gather round your word.
We watch and wait your coming and pray for greater trust
To know that while we wait for you, Emmanuel, you watch and wait with us.*

Refrain

*A time of preparation, the guest is drawing near
As mountain places crumble and straightened paths appear
Prepare a humble welcome in every heart and home
And celebrate the promise of our God who is, and was, and is to come.*

Refrain

*You call us to repentance, to turn and start again
You send your Holy Spirit to drown the power of sin
We wonder in your mercy, your singing festal voice
And in your meal of bread and wine we join the invitation to rejoice.*

Refrain

*Renewed by this encounter we'll go out and proclaim
We'll tell of your salvation, and magnify your name
The servant words of Mary will swell the faithful soul
And you will bring your children home that day when all creation will be whole*

Refrain.