

I Love to Tell the Story– Luke 19:29-40
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – Palm Sunday (March 24) 2013

²⁹ When [Jesus] drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

Have you heard this story before? Raise your hand if you have.

Congratulations! And I mean that more so today than I would if I'd said it 25 years ago, because things have changed much in that time.

Someone told me about the story of **a pastor who was invited to a primary school to give an 'after hours' Bible study. He started the lesson with a question; "Can any one tell me who knocked down the walls of Jericho?"**

One young lad named Billy said, "I don't know who did it, but it wasn't me!"

The pastor felt this was a disrespectful remark and afterwards spoke to the school principal about it. The principal replied, "I know Billy, he is an honest boy, and if he said he didn't do it, then I would say he didn't do it."

The pastor was exasperated with this and felt the principal was either very rude or very ignorant, so he wrote to the county school superintendent about it. Finally he received a response from him. It read; "Dear Sir, We are sorry to hear about your unfortunate experience. If you will send us a damage estimate we will see what we can do to help repair the walls of Jericho."

It's not just a matter of technical skills – like a few years back I called the theater for the hours of the movie "Nativity" and the young man on the other line gave the times for [what sounds like] "GNAT-IH-VITY (like "city" with a "V").

Or where a public speaker this year referred to the Roman ruler who ordered Jesus' crucifixion as "PI-LATTEE" - like some sort of caffeinated drink.

No, we are living in time of not just of Biblical illiteracy, but we are living in a community and culture where people don't know the real story about our God and our Jesus and about the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because they are not hearing the Story told.

Tell me what are the two best movies you've ever seen. [wait for response. Tell folks to turn and tell their neighbors.]

OK! Now tell me your favorite part of the Apostles Creed (It's printed on the tear off strip of your bulletin.)

Methinks we know our movies better than we know our creeds. There's a reason for that. Movies involve us; Platitudes quickly bore us.

Although you might not know it, if you popped your head into a great number of churches today, the Bible is NOT a book of primarily holy PRINCIPLES or MORALS or PLATITUDES. There is no such thing in the Bible as "the Roman Road to Salvation" – a series of memorized faith principles.

- Stories pull us in.
- Stories cause us to chew on them.
- Stories are alive.
- Stories apply the fact of God's love to our lives.
- There are over 500 individual stories in the Bible.

Jesus used story telling as his favorite, and I'd say most effective, way of teaching the Good News. That **AND his life story** told the Good News itself.

Once upon a time, I was chosen by the voters of my county to serve them in an elected position of authority. People who had never given me the time of day suddenly came out of the woodwork to sing my praises, to be my friend, to let me know how much I meant to them, to tell me what a good person I was. The very marble stones of the courthouse seemed to sing my praise.

But, do you know what? I remembered the story of Palm Sunday.

And I remembered just how fickle human adoration can be, and how much people are guided by "What have you done for me lately," because I remembered what happened in the Jesus story between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday.

And, when things got really hard for me in life, and people turned on me, and deserted me, I remembered that the ROCK in my life was Jesus, Who had prayed, "Father, I don't like this so much. How 'bout

let's not do this" and "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" and Who was vindicated by God when it was all said and done – even though His friends had deserted him.

And I remembered that Jesus forgave them all; that it just happens this way with people sometimes – but they are to be forgiven. And I remembered that those same people must be forgiven in our lives, if we are going to claim the power that saved Jesus and us.

It was because I knew the Jesus story - and had made the Jesus story my story - and had not just reduced it to some platitudes or holy proverbs.

In the Adult Membership Class, we learn about theological concepts, particularly those with a Methodist flavor, like Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace.

A few years back, I was doing one of my Adult Membership Classes, in which one of the students was Tracy Dunnett. The homework assignment was to take TWELVE THEOLOGICAL TERMS which we had discussed and upon which I had lectured during the first class – they are listed at the bottom of the tear off sheet of the bulletin – and to draw a picture of a house. Then each of those twelve terms were to be drawn metaphorically into the house, *e.g. Prevenient Grace may be the sidewalk leading up to the house, and Baptism might be the front porch of the house, with perhaps justifying grace being the front door. Etc. etc.*

No wrong answers. Just a vehicle for putting these theological terms together into a complete package, based on how each person understood them at that moment in their life.

Tracy was not, as anyone who knew her, an academically advanced student. The following Sunday, each of the students held up their homework assignment and showed where each of the twelve terms was drawn into their house.

Tracy's turn came and she held up her picture. I asked her to explain, and Tracy spoke for a longer time than I had ever heard her speak before and afterward.

She had drawn a fairly well developed picture of a house. The front of the house, she explained, had a big flower garden. That was a beautiful thing, she said and giggled. Then, inside the house was the living room, where she and her friends would sit and have fun. Out back, behind the house, in the

yard, was where the dog liked to run and play, and she liked to play with the dog back there.

So far, none of my twelve terms had been discussed. So I took a stab: “Tracy, where is Jesus in your picture?”

She turned the picture around so she could look at it. She giggled. And then she said that **Jesus was everywhere. Everywhere in the house.**

And I was immediately reminded of what Jesus said: **“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

And I thanked Tracy for her wonderful picture. She smiled and giggled, and I knew that she knew better than me the peace and power of Christ.

That was a powerful story for me.

There was never a time that I served Holy Communion that Tracy did not come, with her hands outstretched, and saying **“Holy Communion. [Giggle.] Holy Communion. Yes. [Giggle.]”** I never served anyone Holy Communion who appreciated it more or who showed me more the smile of Jesus when she received it.

The Story of God’s Love for all of God’s children is one that so many people today have not heard. I regret to say it, but the church today is not only irrelevant to so many people, but even more: the Church today is really disliked by so many people because instead of hearing that story of love, they have heard principles of condemnation, and unworthiness, and judgmentalism.

Let me tell you one more story of God’s Love that I SAW recently. Although she never sat on a single administrative or ministry committee of this church, and never held an office, or never read as the lay liturgist, last Thursday, Tracy Dunnett’s funeral was held in the middle of the workday, in the middle of a snow squall, in another town, preached by the pastor of her parents’ church, but TWENTY PEOPLE FROM SAINT MARKS CHURCH were in attendance.

Because they understood the story of God’s Love that is for all of God’s Children. And because they understood that to be there was a thing of holy happiness as God’s beloved children, precious and beautiful to behold, for they knew that Tracy was just that, and Tracy knew she was that.

The STORY of Palm Sunday may be one that we all know as familiar as any.

But neither THAT story nor the STORY of God's love for all of God's Children is being told by us who know it, like we could or should.

If we don't tell the story, then we are allowing others to take God's story and twist it and turn it and make God and the Bride of His Son, the Church, into something which the world is not willing to receive.

- It's all about the STORY. Do you know it?
- It's all about the STORY. Do you share it, or count on someone else to do so?
- It's all about the STORY. Do others see it being told in how you are living your life?
- It's all about the STORY. If we don't tell it in words and living, then who will?

You don't have to have all the theological terms down pat. You just need to know the love, appreciate the love, and share the love. THAT's the story.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.