

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 9/3/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I was a kid, during breakfast my family would listen to Paul Harvey on the radio. Harvey, on his ten-minute program called, “The Rest of the Story,” would tell you about someone called Charlie or Aggie or Frank. The story would be about how the person’s life was miraculously saved, or about someone important with whose path they crossed, or about a significant event in her/his life. Each story helped you to understand how the person’s life was shaped by this incident or encounter. And then Harvey would tell you “the rest of the story,” that the person was someone whose name you knew well—that Charlie was Charles Lindberg, or that Aggie was Agatha Christie, or that Frank was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And suddenly you would make connections between what happened to that person and what you knew about who that person had become.

From time to time, I have suggested different ways of reading the Bible: from the perspective of power and who has it and how it changes hands; or restored relationships; or leaving the past to find a new future; or empowering the powerless. Another way that I’ve been playing with Bible reading lately might be called “the Paul Harvey method,” or “the Rest of the Story method.” It has to do with considering how a person is changed after an encounter with God or Jesus.

Certainly, there are narratives from the Bible that give us the answer. Abram and Sarai, after receiving God’s invitation to go to a promised land leave their homeland and become Abraham and Sarah, the parents of a great nation. Zacchaeus, who is demeaned and shunned by his neighbors for being a corrupt tax collector (and short in stature), is called by Jesus to host Him for dinner and is changed so that he pays back several times what he has overcharged others. Mary Magdalene becomes a devout follower of Jesus after having demons cast out of her, and becomes the first to announce to the world that He is risen. Saul, the Christian killer, becomes Paul, the Christian maker, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus.

But there are others for whom we don’t know the rest of the story, but we can always speculate on what their lives might be like after their encounter with the divine. Especially in the Gospels, there are many such occasions. How is the woman who touches Jesus’ robe changed beyond just the healing she receives? What does the man do after having a legion of demons cast out of him once Jesus tells him to stay in his hometown rather than leaving with Jesus? How does the woman caught in adultery live her life after Jesus shames her accusers into leaving and then also forgives her? What must life have been like for Lazarus (and his sisters) after Jesus raises him from the dead? It can be an intriguing exercise to speculate about “the rest of the story.”

Beyond these narratives from the Bible, we can also consider our own lives. Though we may not have had a dramatic encounter with our triune God, each of us has been touched by the Divine in some way. What would we name as our encounter with God? How has it shaped who we are today? What does it say to us about our future? How do we share that story with others? We would not be believers if someone or something hadn’t been the instrument through which God touched us. And like He did with those He met during His time on earth, Jesus invites us to think about our own lives and then tell others the rest of the story.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey