

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/13/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

You're probably pretty familiar with the expression, "There are two sides to every story." How often have we found this to be true? Rob Bell points this out, but with reference to GOD in his book, Love Wins. In particular, he illustrates this with the parable of the Prodigal Son.

First, there is the younger son who ask for his inheritance, and upon receiving it squanders it in loose living. Realizing his terrible and disrespectful actions toward his family, he returns home to tell his side of the story: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." On the other hand, his father, who represents GOD, tells a different story. "Bring the best robe and put a ring on his finger. Let's have a feast for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." If you were that son (and often we are), which side of the story would you want to believe?

Then there's the older son, the brother, who actually has his side of the younger son's story, too. "When this son of yours who has squandered your property comes home, you throw him a party!" (Read that with great indignation.) Then he tells his own story: "All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed you, yet you never even gave me a goat (scrawny with not much meat) so I could celebrate with my friends." Again, the father (GOD) tells a different story: "You are always with me and everything I have is yours." It was all his. All he had to do was ask. Which version of that story would you want to believe?

We all have our own version of our story. Sometimes we lie to ourselves about it (like the older son). Sometimes we are brutally honest about our story (like the younger son). Too often, however, we fail to look for or listen to GOD'S side of our story.

A woman came to me and told me that GOD could never forgive her for the things she had done. We talked about JESUS death on the cross for the sins of all. We looked at John 3:16, of GOD'S gift of JESUS for all who believe in HIM. When I asked, she told me that she did believe deeply in GOD. She just didn't believe GOD could ever forgive her. I asked her why she was so special, that GOD could forgive everyone else, but just not her, and I then said, "Isn't the problem that you just can't forgive yourself?" Now, she acknowledged that this was really the case, that she just couldn't excuse herself for previous mistakes in life. (She was choosing her version of her story, rather than GOD'S). I asked her whose forgiveness mattered more, hers or GOD'S. We did the rite of Private Confession and Forgiveness. (Yes, we do confession and forgiveness in the Lutheran Church.) And she finally began to believe GOD'S story. Over the years, I watched her claim that story and saw how it changed her and her life. It truly was a beautiful thing.

We've all done things we regret, we grieve having done, the memory of which we carry with us, and too often obsess about. Sometimes we even let it define who we are. But, again, that's our version of the story. GOD has a different version in which we are loved, and forgiven, and of infinite value. Two sides to your story. Which one are you going to believe?

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey

