

# Along the track

## My Story

Jewish philosopher Elie Wiesel wrote that God made us because God loves stories. It is a reminder that each of us has a story. It is unique, it is special. It is ours alone. If we look back with the eyes of faith, our story can reveal how we first came to experience the presence of God in our lives and how God's Spirit has been at work in our journey, in the experiences, people and events which have shaped our faith. That is, for each of us, a very personal story of discovery. In a sense, God is a story being told in our lives.

Story is important in our own lives and in our faith journey. The great truths of our faith have been handed down to us in story. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with stories that tell us of God - the creation story reveals God as the loving creator, the Exodus story reveals God as liberator, guide, and protector. Abraham's story of his encounter with God changed him for ever – not to mention his family and the thousands of generations of his descendants to follow; the prophets all recount the story of their encounter with God to their community and how this has been a call to change. Stories were handed down in songs (the psalms) and rituals. We still listen to them today.

Many people came to Jesus through stories – some had seen him, encountered him, heard him. They went back to their towns and villages and told their stories; the Samaritan woman for example. News of the healing of the man possessed by a demon in Capernaum 'spread quickly through the entire area of Galilee': when Jesus raised the son of the widow of the town of Nain, 'the story about Him spread throughout Judea, and all the surrounding country'. After healing two blind men, 'they went away and spread the news about Him throughout that district'. People came, often in great numbers, to see and hear him, to be in his presence. They reflected on what they had heard and seen and felt – some followed, some rejected Jesus and his message, some were hostile.

When Jesus rose from the dead, Mary Magdalene saw him and ran to the other disciples and told her story. Peter saw the resurrected Lord and told his story. So did Paul. The disciples on the road to Emmaus saw him and went back to Jerusalem to tell their story. These are the stories we have come to know.

Over thousands of years, people have told stories of their encounter with God in their lives. For some it was a relatively easy road, others a much more difficult journey and God seemed absent. Sometimes our greatest insights come in moments when God seems absent and our journey has required commitment and patience. Recently I read this piece of wisdom: *patience with others is love, patience with self is hope, patience with God is faith.*

Stories help us in our faith journey - they enable us to reflect, to re-imagine. If we do not reflect back on our encounters with God, with Jesus, and with the movement of the Spirit in our hearts then our faith can be reduced to adherence to formulas and doctrines, instead of the

realities they attempt to describe for us. Those formulas are invitations to go deeper. Our faith can become observance of rules rather than something that invites us to let the Spirit free, to deepen our relationship and respond in love.

There is a key incident where Peter was called to account for eating with Gentiles, a real 'no no' because that technically made him 'unclean', He told his inquisitors the story of a recent vision which challenged his long held practise and caused him to make a radical change. Starting from the beginning, Peter told his accusers the whole story – how he had been challenged to eat what was 'unclean' and how the voice had said:

'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean... Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.' Acts 11:1-18

That story changed Peter and as the early church reflected on it, it brought about a radical change of mind and heart. Stories are not just ours alone – stories are the glue that hold 'us' together. It is through stories that we remember, we recall family and friends who have died and, through them, they in a sense take life again. We feel their presence and their continuing influence. Family histories and stories are important in our identity, in our coming to know who we are and to whom we 'belong'. It is the same with our faith story. When we gather together in community to share in the rituals which celebrate our faith, these stories are retold to us.

When we look back over our own journey, it is good to reflect on those who have contributed to it, those who have been our mentors in faith. One generation passes on its religious heritage to the next – one generation helps the young to hear the truths it received from its parents and grandparents. So it is always helpful to ask, who were my mentors in my journey of faith? What was their life experience that made them tell such a story and in that way? In turn, we tell our faith story and hope that it will resonate with the experience of our young people, that it will speak to them in their here and now as it did to generations past.

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)