

Along the track

Story Telling

Is it time that we started telling new stories? We hear so many bad stories, bad news, talk of catastrophe and predictions of doom and gloom, so many twisted facts and opinions. It is easy to fall under their spell, to fall into despair and begin telling our own stories of woe, our own predictions of how the sky is falling in. When we are served such a diet, it is not difficult to see where fear and suspicion come from, where prejudice and hatred are born and fuelled. When we are continually fed stories of the corruption or misconduct of politicians or clergy or bankers or whoever, it is easy to take the next step and condemn them all, be they innocent or guilty.

That is not to say that there are not aberrant priests, politicians or bankers or whatever, but they should not enhance their crimes by being allowed to define who we are or what we stand for. The important thing is to own up and expose these crimes or this corruption.

In their own way, stories have played a very significant role in any society. In the ancient Irish tradition, story-catchers or story-sharers (*seanachies*), capture and pass on the stories of grace and courage and humour and love and tenderness. They form the compass points and lodestars, they carry within them traditions, ethics, values, the role models, the saints, the bravery, the vision of that particular society. For the rest of us too, if we don't gather and share stories that matter, stories that pass on our good news, the courage and commitment of those around us, the generosity and vision stories we will have nothing but misery, bad news, wrongdoing and corruption. Can't we do better than that? Isn't that why human beings were given the extraordinary gifts of imagination and humour, the ability to draw and paint, sing and tell stories?

I can do no better than use the words of the late poet and author, Brian Doyle:

We talk about how there are all sorts of illuminated beings in every sort of context, and how some beings serve their fellows by being great listeners, and others have healing hands, and others are good at getting everyone to come to a disgruntled agreement about the direction of the voyage, and others are terrific mothers and fathers and aunts and uncles and musicians and clowns and dancers and builders and fixers and

teachers and learners, and how some beings are lucky to discover that their skill, their gift, the thing they love to do and do really well, is to pay fierce attention to the holy of everything, to notice the flourish and song of holy and the awful of bruised and broken holy, and report on this to their brothers and sisters, which is, of course, everyone.

Isn't that the point of the best stories? Isn't that the point of awards or certificates or medals – to have the chance to tell the stories of selfless dedication, of generosity and courage, of love and commitment, be they in our street or our neighbourhood or in our nation? When do we tell the stories of our dreamers and visionaries, the ones that invite us to be bigger than the negative and too often the stories that bring people down?

Do we ever ask ourselves why there is so much goodness in the world? Why do so many good things happen, why are some people so loving, generous, patient, committed, selfless? Often these qualities shine in people who have felt pain, suffering, injustice. Their innate goodness shines through. We meet people in our own neighbourhood whose goodness is an inspiration, their generosity to others is selfless, their kindness is nothing short of inspiring. They act in selfless ways even when this is costly to themselves.

In many ways, our belief in the existence of a God who creates the world out of love depends largely on the strength of our experience of such a caring God. That comes from our experience of love, our experience and interaction with people of hope, of generosity and commitment, those who want to make the world a better place. We need to tell their stories. Goodness can be a problem because there are times when we want to ignore it, when we don't want to spread good news, when we find it hard to believe because the problem of evil suits how we see God, how we see the world in which we live.

Good people, goodness itself can be a real challenge! We need to talk about it, tell stories about it, celebrate it.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au