

Kerry Mansir  
February 28, 2021-Lent 2  
Christ Church Gardiner

On one of my favorite podcasts called “Unlocking Us,” Brené Brown begins the conversations with her guests by saying, “tell me your story.”

“Tell me your story” implies a curiosity about someone—a sense that we believe their story is worth sharing and that we might see ourselves somewhere in it. For Brené Brown who studies courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy—sharing our stories is crucial for all of us.

As I listened to our Gospel story today. And in fact, I went back to hear the details of the chapters that came before today’s selection. I kept thinking. I want to hear Peter’s story. I think we forget that these characters we read about in the Gospels were living, breathing humans, just like you and me. With all our human “stuff”—the insecurity and baggage...the joy and excitement...the grievances and sorrows.

What might we learn if we could hear Peter’s story? The Gospels alone don’t actually tell us that much. We know that Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. He had a brother named, Andrew. He had a mother-in-law that was healed by Jesus so Peter must have been married. But his wife isn’t mentioned or the children they likely had, though I imagine that Peter’s decision to become a follower of Jesus impacted *all* of their lives tremendously.

In a Brené Brown interview, after asking folks to tell their story, she will often ask them to describe a “sliding door moment” in their lives. These are moments, that we all have, when we have to make a choice, a decision that fundamentally changes our lives and who we are.

And it’s that kind of moment that we are watching as this encounter between Peter and Jesus unfolds in the Gospel. The kind of moment I wish we could hear about from Peter, himself.

But to take a step back first, we can see that Peter has already had some sliding door moments with Jesus. Imagine when Jesus first called to him while he was fishing on the shore of the Galilean Sea. Peter made a decision to leave behind his livelihood and his family to go on this mission of teaching and healing with Jesus. And after many months of following Jesus, he is finally the one, of all the disciples, to proclaim that Jesus is not just a great teacher, not just a prophet and miracle worker. Jesus is the messiah—the anointed one sent by God to save Israel.

And then we arrive at today’s encounter. Imagine the mood of Peter and the other disciples. In their travels with Jesus, they had seen his great power. He healed. He drove out demonic powers. He raised people from the dead. He argued with Pharisees and scribes, often making them look foolish. He was wildly popular, and people were following him everywhere to hear his preaching and to be healed. Seeing all of those things emboldened their belief that Jesus was indeed the messiah.

So what Jesus tells them in this passage must have been shocking. It doesn’t make any sense in light of all the other things they have observed about who Jesus is. Jesus tells them that he will suffer. He will be rejected by the Jewish leadership, and then he will be killed. Those things aren’t supposed to happen to the long-awaited Messiah.

You know how sometimes it takes a while for a truth to sink in. And if it's a truth that we don't want to believe, oftentimes we respond with anger. That's Peter in today's Gospel. He just doesn't want to believe what Jesus is saying. The disciples think of messiahs as powerful and victorious over the oppressor. Not murdered. So it's no wonder that Peter got angry and rebuked Jesus and his words.

But Jesus won't allow that. He insisted that the disciples and all his followers know the truth. Because not only will he suffer. If they choose to follow him, their lives will be at risk, too. Jesus needs them to understand that you can't proclaim an alternate reality, a new kingdom, breaking in that will favor the poor and the downtrodden and take away the power of the empire without the empire trying to destroy you. Think of Mahatma Gandhi. Of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Peter and the disciples will have to make a choice. Will they follow him, knowing this truth—that the only way to the kingdom is through the cross?

This is a sliding door moment for Peter. He has discovered a truth that will break him open and expose his vulnerability. If he chooses to follow Jesus, now knowing the truth about what that means, he will never be able to go back to who he was before. This moment doesn't mean that Peter has everything figured out. He will still falter in his role as disciple. He will deny Jesus and abandon him to the cross. But in this moment, he stays. He doesn't turn around and go home.

Do we have sliding door moments in our discipleship? Moments where we make a choice to follow even when we don't know what will be asked of us or what we might have to give up? Losing our lives for the sake of the Gospel, as Jesus calls us to do, means to stop clinging to this idea that our responsibility is to only look out for ourselves, an idea that is a powerful one in our modern culture. When we begin to see our interconnectedness with the people and even the earth and animals around us, we will begin to discover the power of seeking the good of all rather than the individual. We'll see that the kingdom of God calls us to a place of abundance where it's not about each of us fighting for a piece of the pie but about learning how to make enough pie for everyone to share.

The cost of discipleship for Peter was immense. Looking back on his story, we know that choosing to stay with Jesus, and a hundred other choices after that to continue in his discipleship despite the risks, would eventually mean his own death at the hands of the state.

In light of Peter's great sacrifice, what things might we need to give up in our own mission of discipleship? Where are the uncomfortable places we need to go...the hard truths we need to admit...to more fully open ourselves up to following the way of Jesus? I hope we will spend some time in this Lenten season to ask those questions. And may we find the courage to look for that sliding door that will open for us a path in our own discipleship. A path that will move the world closer to the abundance promised in the kingdom of God. Amen.

