

The Power of Story

Thursday night saw some fifteen of us gather at the Manse to commence a new Study. This time we were watching and discussing a DVD of Ched Myers, the New Testament scholar, on the Gospel of Mark. A lively night! But his opening remarks contained a quote that set my mind racing. Quoting the Native American novelist Leslie Marmon Silko, in her book "Ceremony" he began:

"I will tell you something about stories. They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories..... There evil is mighty, but it can't stand up to our stories. So they try to destroy the stories, let the stories be confused or forgotten. They would like that because we would be defenceless then."

More than most, indigenous people around the globe understand what it means when their stories are lost, replaced with the stories of "western civilization". Here in Australia, aboriginal people have languished as they were introduced to the dominant story of colonialisation. The Rainbow Serpent and the Dreaming were replaced by enforced Christianisation, and unsurprisingly many lost their way. Stories do matter. And so do the stories of our faith.

But increasingly even our stories of faith are being lost, or being subsumed, like those of the aboriginal peoples before us, by stories of market economics, nationalism, in jingoistic militarism. Sometimes our stories of faith are even appropriated to support these destructive stories, so we have the "prosperity gospel" preached, and we see God enlisted for nationalistic and militaristic ends.

However, more destructive than this appropriation is the loss of the faith story because people learn the story as children in Sunday School and stop learning as adults. We sentimentalise and tame the stories of Scripture, ignoring the universal truths contained in them. Our Creation myths contained in the first three chapters of Genesis are weakened by literal interpretations. The story of the Exodus which we have been following over the past few Sundays has been seen merely as history and less about humanity's searching for a promised land, stumbling around in our contemporary wildernesses, failing to see God there in our midst. The story of Exile, applied only to a particular people at a particular time when it has so much to say about people of our age living in alienation from the dominant culture. And the story of the Incarnation, sentimentalised and reduced to a children's story of baby Jesus, Santa and his elves, and death and resurrection is for Jesus only. Heaven forbid that we might have to die so we can live! We've grown comfortable as our faith stories are slowly being eroded away.

As I See It, we don't take the stories of our faith seriously enough. If we did, we would see the need to change our world, where so many grow poorer, hungrier and sicker as we live and enjoy a privileged lifestyle, listening to and believing stories that claim we can continue to grow our economies and exploit our natural resources and not pay an ultimate price. Stories of faith point to the lies – so let's tell them.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article.

*Rev Tony Duncan
6 November 2011
pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au*