

Once upon a time there was a Storyteller. He would wander through the countryside and from town to town offering his stories to anyone who would listen. He would go where the people gathered - in the pubs, at the picnic tables, around campfires, and he would always begin his stories with 'Once upon a time.....,' because that's the way all good stories begin.

The Storyteller always told his stories with love, compassion and authority. But there were those who didn't like the stories he told. Perhaps they thought that they were nice, but only fairy stories, good for children, but not to grown ups like them who knew better.

But some went away angry. They didn't like what they heard, because all really good stories tell us something about ourselves, things that we sometimes just don't want to hear. And some didn't like his authority, because it reminded them of some bad experience in the past, like a teacher who picked on them at school, or an older kids in the schoolyard who bullied them, or bad parents.

However, there were people who saw that his stories were for them, and invited him into their homes to stay. And around the dinner table, the stories continued, but then a wonderful thing would happen. The Storyteller would encourage them to tell *their* stories. Sometimes these had never been told before, perhaps because they were too shameful, or too painful, and the telling of them would have meant the shedding of tears. But the Storyteller would listen intently with love, and wipe away their tears with compassion, and, if necessary, use his authority to banish fear and shame. As a result, little miracles would happen, in that some sort of healing always took place.

These people and their homes were blessed, and they didn't want him to leave. But he told them that he needed to go and tell his stories in other places, and that he would never really leave them,

because they had allowed him into the most intimate places of their lives.

If ever the Storyteller could find no place to rest at night, he would go to the places where the homeless were, on the fringes of town. He would doss down with them under the motorways and bridges, or in cold doorways, and listen to their stories, and weave the magic of his healing into their lives as well. In fact, sometimes he felt more welcome in those places than anywhere else in the town.

There came a time in one town, however, when the angry people who didn't like what they heard got together to rid themselves of him altogether. They invented some charge, accusing him of something he could not possibly have done, took it to the authorities, and had him arrested, beaten, and eventually put to death.

For those who knew him and been touched by his healing, this was devastating. They gathered together for comfort, and grieved for days, wondering what they could do next. Then suddenly he reappeared. He reminded them of the gifts he had given them, especially (and this was something they hadn't thought of) the gift of storytelling. He stayed with them for a while, mainly using his authority to prepare them for the task ahead, and then he left, promising to send them someone to help them.

And the Storyteller kept his promise. His friends began to do what he did, go out and tell his stories in his name with love and compassion and authority. They too brought about healing as they encouraged others to tell their unique stories. And sometimes they were received, and sometimes they were turned away or suffered like the their friend and master. But the storytelling went on.

And that is why I'm telling you this story today.

Once upon a time.....

Mark 16:15



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