

someone else's shoes

That's the power of story... we can step into someone else's shoes and come out understanding ourselves better. Pastor and storyteller Christine Redwood explores why stories matter.



When I was a teenager, I remember leaving the cinema, my face stained with tears and thinking stories are powerful. I had that same feeling recently when I watched a performance called *Black Ties*. It's a play that explores the tensions and joys of bringing two families together from different cultural backgrounds as a Maori woman and an Aboriginal man plan to marry. In the second act, the hall is transformed into a wedding reception. We were invited to sit at one of the tables as if we were a guest at this make-believe wedding. Some of the actors joined us at the tables and together we celebrated. The lines blurred between what was real and what was imagined. Yet in the end, this immersive way of telling the story created a space for us to experience the joy and power of reconciliation with a depth we couldn't have had from just hearing the facts.

I was once again reminded of how compelling stories are, and why they matter. They speak to us in a language beyond facts or abstract concepts, for instance about reconciliation, and invite us to enter someone else's world. I think we know this instinctively. How often do we share stories in conversation with friends or reminisce about our shared stories from the past? It is often through story that we can make sense of our lives. Seeing ourselves on screen or in books helps us to understand, navigate or validate our experience.

Stories can grow empathy and compassion in us for others. After my cinema experience as a teenager, I was inspired to be able to tell stories that made people think and feel and maybe even change the way they acted. So, every chance I got I told stories. I acted, I tried to write novels and plays, I made short films with my friends, I went to University and studied communication.

At Uni I watched even more movies. Some of which have stayed with me. I remember watching films about the Holocaust and seeing injustice and suffering on the screen taught me more about sin than anything else had. In class we also learned the mechanics of storytelling. We broke down plots, learning how stories move somewhere. We saw how plots move like an arc from a situation of relative stability to tension or destabilisation which resolves into a new situation of relative stability. We created characters and, in the process, started to pay attention to the people around us. A good storyteller is an observer. We tried writing dialogue and capturing how people talked. We examined the role of the narrator and debated their reliability... why were they telling this story? We wrote essays on themes and how they are conveyed in a story. And then we had a go. Reading our stories in class and filming our scripts we saw how others responded to our stories, and through this, learned to consider our audience.

I didn't think too much about where God might be in all this. It took me many years to realise that God loves stories too. Theologians have rediscovered this over the last few decades speaking about the narrative of the Bible. Our scriptures tell us a complex and massive story about God told by multiple voices across different cultures and over a long period. It is a story that doesn't just move people but can transform them. It is a story which God entered into when He became one of us. Jesus loved to tell stories. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Spirit comes. We were called to continue in God's story until God wraps it up.

I am called to be one of God's storytellers.

Aren't we all? One of the primary ways I get to tell God's story is through preaching. But you don't have to be a preacher. We need more novelists, artists, filmmakers, poets and bloggers sharing good stories that bring life and point people to Jesus. We need more people just being willing to share their stories with their neighbours and friends of how God has been at work in their lives. We could go even one step further and not just speak, but embody God's story. Like the play I saw, we could invite people over for a meal and by doing so we would be immersing them in the story of God's love, creating a space for them to experience the joy and power of reconciliation not just with one another but also with God.



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- David L Larsen

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