



Dear friends,

You have heard me talk about the importance of story before. They say that a preacher only really has one sermon within them, expressed in multiple ways depending on context. I don't entirely subscribe to that view, but maybe it's true that a Superintendent has only a few letters within her, themes which emerge and re-emerge. And 'Story' is one of those themes for me...

So, my first question for July is 'how have you got on with Bible Month this year?' ...

How have you found being encouraged to read and listen to the entirety of Mark's Gospel, maybe in one sitting, but certainly across four short weeks?

If you have been able to participate in Bible Month, I wonder if you have seen and heard things which you haven't noticed before? I wonder if it has liberated us from the sense that those portions of the gospel which we don't read regularly in worship together are somehow less important? I wonder if reading the gospel with, or at least alongside, others in the Circuit has changed your perspective? I wonder where the challenge has been? In the focussed reading itself, or in what has been read, and understood with fresh eyes?

Week three of the small group material for Bible Month challenged us to identify the 'big idea' in a small part of Mark's story, summarising the key message of the passage in just one sentence. After our month with Mark, could you try summarising the whole gospel in just one paragraph? In one sentence? One word? One image? If so, what might your summary tell you about what God is drawing your attention to through Mark's gospel at this time?

Staying with my theme of 'story'...I wonder what stories you have within you which you would like to tell, or would like to be heard? Stories change lives. A glimpse of someone else's story can ring bells of recognition within us, helping us to know we are not alone. Another person's story can open up a window into experiences which are very different to our own. Many news reports rely on a person's 'story' to bring facts and figures to life. Often they draw out the hard things in a person's experience – 'the news' is often about the sad, hard or frightening things of life – places where we need to see change come. But change can also be brought to birth through stories of joy and hope which change our perception of what is possible...

Do you have within you the treasure of a story of faith, hope or joy which you could share with someone else? Our stories of faith, gently shared, can invite others to encounter God. Our stories of hope, gently shared, can invite others to encounter the world around them differently. Our stories of tiny joys, gently shared, can shine a light on the beauty of life, even in the hardest of times.

To offer generously a little of our own story to someone else is to offer a gift, just as it is a gift to the storyteller when their story is received with gratitude.

*Storytelling God
Weave your words of wisdom
Through the days of this summer.
May we find courage
to give and receive the gift of story,
trusting that all our stories
find their completion in you.
In Jesus name.
Amen*

Peace, Jo