
The Power of Stories

An article from the *Cathedral Times*.

I was on a special retreat this past weekend. The Chapter of the Cathedral of St. Philip (the lay governing body of the Cathedral, rather like a Board of Trustees or Board of Stewards) gathered in north Georgia for our annual time together. Deliberately, we do not act in any official or formal way during that time. Rather, we tell and hear stories – about our lives and about the history and ministry of the Cathedral.

What a holy and powerful time we had! The retreat was designed so that Saturday morning was devoted to “spiritual autobiographies.” Each of us took a few minutes to tell our story, our life story, but with a particular emphasis on the spiritual elements of our lives. That might mean the various churches we have been a part of, but it might also mean various crises or turning points in our lives, or times we have experienced something holy, or ways we have tried to serve God.

What happened was marvelous. Our stories took time. They took so much time that we did not finish hearing the last story until 9:30 in the evening! Yes, contrary to our carefully planned agenda, our spiritual autobiographies ended up taking all day! And they were worth it. I heard some powerful things, some tender things, some moving things. Whether the stories were solid, or funny, or sorrowful, I heard holy stories.

Each of us, each of us who is a child of God, has a story. And each of us has a “spiritual autobiography,” no matter what our official role is in the church. And no matter whether or not we think God has been especially active in our lives, we have a spiritual story. It is amazing what emerges from our mouths once we set out to tell our spiritual story.

When God created the world, and separated the light from the dark, and the day from the night, God declared the whole event “good.” In the same way, God gives us stories. There may be some parts of our stories that are quite dark, that might embarrass us, that we might figure are completely dull to others. But we are mistaken if we think they are not good. No matter what our story is, there will be something in it that relates to another person of God; it is good, therefore, for us to tell our stories. And God shines a special goodness even upon the darkest parts of our lives.

Consider telling your story some time this year. Find a loved one, or a special group of friends, or some intentional gathering, and resolve to tell someone your spiritual story. It could be a five minute story, or a two hour story. Resolve to make it a “spiritual autobiography,” a description of your life with an eye towards how you have experienced God. It will be wonderful what comes out of your mouth!

