

Epiphany 5, February 7, 2021 ~ Your 6 Word Story

The novelist Ernest Hemingway Legend was known for his clean and clear writing style. Some of my favourite books written by him include The Old Man and the Sea, A Moveable Feast, For Whom the Bell Tolls, and A Farewell to Arms.

There is a legend about Hemingway that he once won a bet with his writer friends that that he could tell a story in just six words. It was supposed to have happened at a restaurant while he was having lunch. Hemingway wrote down 6 words on a napkin and passed it around.

Here are the 6 words:

For Sale; baby shoes, never worn.

What a story. In just 6 words, we feel the heartache of parents who lost their child and the child never got to wear the baby shoes. We feel heartache and loss and pain from parents who prepared for the birth and development of the child.

Mark the evangelist who wrote the Gospel of Mark had a similar clean and concise writing style. This gospel was the first one to be written and it has a relentless pace towards the cross. Mark uses actions words such as immediately, and links the ministry together with this phrase: **then they went.**

In the shortest of the gospels with only 16 chapters Mark writes about the life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. Mark tells nothing about the birth of Jesus or anything about his childhood years. Mark begins with John the Baptist, then the Baptism of Jesus, his temptation, the calling of the first disciples, and teaching and healing. All in Chapter 1!

Mark focuses on the humanity of Jesus as well as his divinity. This is a Jesus who needs quiet time to go and pray, a Jesus who gets hungry, a Jesus who loves children, a Jesus who gets rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. This is also the Christ who walks on water, the Christ who stills storms, restores a little girl to life, and is transfigured on a mountaintop.

In our passage appointed for the 5th Sunday after Epiphany, Jesus and his disciples have just left the synagogue in Capernaum. They return to their home base ~ the home of 2 brothers who are also disciples, 2 fishermen named Simon Peter and Andrew. Peter's mother-in-law was sick and in bed with a fever. In the story-telling technique of Hemingway, we learn a lot from this short phrase.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. **Mark 1:30**

What do we learn? We learn that Simon Peter is married, that he cares for his mother-in-law because he mentions that she is sick and in bed. He even knows her symptoms. She has a fever. We do not however know her name. We do know that she is loved as the first thing that the disciples tell Jesus when he enters their home is that she is sick. They ask and Jesus immediately responds with action.

What happens next? Jesus goes into the bedroom of the mother-in-law, "took her by the hand and lifted her up." (Mark 1:31). The woman is immediately healed ("the fever left her" Mk 1:31) and "she began to **serve** them." Now this doesn't mean that the only reason Simon Peter asked Jesus to heal his mother-in-law was so she could get up and cook supper!

The Greek word that Mark, the author of the gospel uses for the word SERVE is **DIAKONIA**. From this word we get DEACON. When a deacon is ordained in the church, he or she is called to SERVE. That is their primary responsibility and when they serve those in need, it is as if they are serving Christ himself. The new deacon imitates Christ and takes on the ministry of a servant. Jesus came to serve and not to be served.

Peter's mother-in-law takes on the ministry of a deacon.

Mark uses the same word, DIAKONIA, for the temptation of Jesus. Again, in Mark's brief style, here is what Mark writes about the temptation;

Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts and the angels **waited on** him.

The angels waited on Jesus ~ that is, they served him. Peter's mother-in-law served them ~ that is, she waited on them. She was doing ministry, the

ministry of a deacon, the earliest deacon in the church right at the beginning of Jesus' 3-year ministry.

This is why God wishes to heal us and why we can in full confidence ask for healing prayers. When we are healed, we then serve. When we are healed, we become deacons for God. All of us. Each of us. Just like the angels.

Never stop asking. Never stop praying for a healing. Healing is not always a physical cure but a transformative grace that cleanses us and blesses us and fills us with God's power.

Some of the most powerful people I know who serve others have physical ailments and challenging physical conditions. These thorns in the flesh do not stop them from taking on the mantle of humility and serving others, waiting on us. Heart conditions, cancer, dizziness, lung conditions... nothing stops them from serving others. They would tell you that they live to serve, and that in the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“those who wait for the lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31

Mark's message is very clear. We do not have all the time in the world to make a difference, to be disciples, to spread the good news.

Would your 6-word story be?

Here is mine:

I called. Jesus healed. I serve.