

The Spirit

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Dear Beloveds of Christ,

There are stories in this world that we will never know. Stories that beg to be told and yet they will never be heard because they have been forgotten, covered up, never told or intentionally destroyed.

A few weeks ago, I was floating down the Wenatchee River on an inner tube. It was a beautiful day – perfect weather – no sign of humanity anywhere. Rounding a bend, I suddenly saw a strange site: An old skinny white man wearing only a loin cloth flying a rainbow-colored kite. This man camping/living in an old RV on the banks of the Wenatchee, basically naked, long full beard and hair, arms outstretched towards the heavens and flying a beautiful multi-colored kite. *What story does he have to share?*

A few Sundays ago, the *New York Times* ran a photo essay about hunger in America. The author writes, “In the pandemic economy, nearly one in eight households doesn’t have enough to eat. The lockdown, with its epic lines at food banks, has revealed what was hidden in plain sight: that the struggle to make food last long enough, and to get food that’s healthful — what experts call ‘food insecurity’ — is a persistent one for millions of Americans ... Like many hardships, this burden falls disproportionately on Black and Hispanic families, who are almost twice as likely to experience food insecurity as white families.” (www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/02/magazine/food-insecurity-hunger-us.html) Through the photo gallery in this *New York Times* photo essay, we catch glimpses of the lives of Kandice, Brayden, Doris, Armani and many others. *What other stories are held in this story?*

As I write this article, large swaths of California, Oregon and Washington are on fire. Houses burned to the ground. People missing. People killed. Treasured items gone. Lives disrupted and forever changed. *What stories are lost in the raging fires?*

When you read this article, there is a very good chance that over 200,000 people in the United States will have died from COVID-19. Over 6 million will have been infected. Common sense measures to mitigate the spread of COVID have been politicized. Suicide,

depression, hunger, loneliness, domestic violence, joblessness, and other hardships have increased in these last six months. *What story is no longer possible?*

Today I am more and more aware of the stories that have disappeared, been forgotten, or pushed underground. And I am ever mindful that as people who follow Jesus, we have the responsibility, the obligation – maybe it is a calling – to listen to the stories in the gaps of other stories. And to understand that the biggest voice might not be the place where the story is happening.

In Matthew 18, Jesus says, ‘Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.’ A few verses later Jesus says, “It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

You see, we are the people of the book – we are the people who claim the Holy Story. We are the people who believe that the story of God and humanity did not end with the cross but continues in, with and under all of us today. The Holy Spirit is alive and active among us. And the Holy Spirit is calling us through the stories we remember, the stories we share, the stories we hear, and the stories we notice.

Let us listen to one another’s story. Let us be mindful of the stories that exist on the margins. Let those of us who have had big voices quiet ourselves to hear other stories. And let us be mindful that listening to stories is not the end. For those of us who are white, let us take to heart these words from Austin Channing Brown, “In too many churches and organizations, listening to the hurt and pain of people of color is the end of the road, rather than the beginning.” (from *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*)

I would love to hear your story. How are you doing? Where is God working in your life and in the life of the Church? Where do you see God? What stories need to be told? What pain needs to be shared? What stories do you want to hear?

May the One - whose story we live in - provide care, comfort, love, and justice for you and for this world.

Let us live, move, and be in God’s Holy Story.
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

From the VEEP, Kay Edgerton



King of Kings. Prince of Peace. Lord of Life. Mighty Counselor. Jesus possesses many titles. The one that has been most on my mind this past month, however, is one that may seem lowly in comparison, but most truly reflects who Jesus is: Teacher.

If I were to evaluate Jesus' teaching skills, I think He would earn a 4 (distinguished). Here are some examples of His exemplary teaching methods:

Meeting students where they are: He physically meets them where they are - at their place of work (tending their nets), at the local watering hole (the woman at the well), and even in their homes (Zacchaeus). He gauges their readiness to learn and meets them where they are mentally by:

Assessing, accessing, and activating prior knowledge: He determines what the students already know and uses parables, similes, and metaphors to compare new and difficult concepts (the kingdom of heaven) to things which the disciples already know about and understand.

Monitoring, Adjusting and Reteaching: He checks for understanding. Often the disciples don't get it the first time – they are “perplexed” at His words. The people are eager but often dense students. Jesus uses parables because “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” (Matthew 13:13) Even Peter, the “rock” upon which the Church will be built, seems to have rocks for brains sometimes. Time and again, he almost grasps what Jesus is saying but then just misses the most important point. Jesus monitors for understanding and when it is lacking, He adjusts and reteaches using a new parable or demonstration.

Recognizing a Teachable Moment: Many times, Jesus uses current circumstances to seize a teachable moment. When the crowd is hungry and they are far from

resources, He uses the resources at hand (loaves and fishes) to feed the multitude and teach about God's abundant love and generosity.

Creating Accommodations: He adjusts and shortens assignments when necessary. If ten commandments are a little hard to remember and follow, how about two? When asked, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (Matthew 22:36), the response is: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22: 37-40)

As teachers, students, families, and support staff all prepare to enter their second month of a completely new kind of teaching and learning, please pray that Jesus the teacher will inspire and bless their efforts.

O, God, grant us wisdom, grant us patience, grant us grace. Amen.

Here are a few things I or the Synod Council have been up to:

- + I met with other Synod Vice Presidents on September 5 by Zoom to discuss the ELCA Future Church strategic planning process and the role of synod leadership as it relates to the Churchwide expression of the church.
- + Executive Committee met on September 10, 2020.
- + The Mission in Washington Endowment Fund Distribution Team met September 16, 2020.
- + Synod Council met on September 19, 2020.
- + I attended a Friends and Fundraiser event for Fe y Esperanza, a new ministry in Everett.

I would be happy to visit and worship with you—online. Please don't hesitate to contact me: veep@lutheransnw.org.

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NW Washington Synod, ELCA | 5519 Phinney Ave North; Seattle, WA 98103 | 206-783-9292; Fax: 206-783-9833; www.lutheransnw.org