

The Seventh Story

Us, Them,
& the End of *Violence*

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The Seventh Story: Lenten Daily Reflections 2022

ISBN: 978-1-7329437-0-4

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DAY 1 Wednesday March 2

In *Cory & the Seventh Story*, a mysterious visitor named Swifthorse comes to the Old Village and recites this poem at a special dinner. These lines from her poem offer a great start to our Lenten journey.

“There is no big or small, no short or tall,
No best or worst, no blessed or cursed,
No dirty or clean, no cause to be mean,
No rich or poor, no reason for war,
We have more than enough in the story of love.

Each is for all of us, and all are for each of us.

This is the wisdom this new story teaches us.” - Cory and the Seventh Story

Today: In our culture at large, and in our individual lives, our current level of wisdom is responsible for the results we’re now getting. As we begin these 40 days together, let’s open our hearts, making space for a better story that yields deeper and more life-giving wisdom.

Day 2 Thursday March 3

Social theorist and former Catholic priest Ivan Illich knew the power of stories:

Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society.

Rather you must tell a **new powerful tale**, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story ...

one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole,

one that even shines some light into the future so that we can take the next step.... **If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story.** - Ivan Illich

Today: Lent is a season for remembering a powerful story and entering into its meaning. Today, look for ways that unhealthy stories are holding people captive, and imagine the power of a new, better, bigger story to liberate.

Day 3 Friday March 4

In the Seventh Story, a poet names six common but self-destructive stories, and invites people to live into a new seventh story that flips the scripts of the first six stories:

the poet invited people to join her in forming a new community,

where status would depend on service,

where domination would be replaced by equitable community,

where the revolution of the heart would lead us to share power-with, not power-over, transforming the process by which we lead and learn,

where deadening isolation would be replaced by rejuvenating silences,

where we would learn from and celebrate folk on the margins,

where we would share not possess, and heal each other's wounds in a new story,

not of victimhood or power-over, but of forgiving each other, co-conspiring only beauty.

Today: Lent has traditionally been associated with the word “**repentance**,” which many people misunderstand to mean feeling guilty or ashamed. The word actually means “rethinking everything,” or “flipping the script” of our inherited stories. Today, pray for humility and willingness to have your inherited scripts flipped in the ways described by the poet.

Day 4: Saturday March 5

Us versus Them - this dualistic story of conflict frames so much of our individual and societal behavior. But the seventh story invites us to redefine “winning over.” Instead of winning advantage or power over others, our goal is for both us and them to be won over, won over to God’s side, the side of love.

the six earlier stories all claimed that the path to peace, security and happiness was about “winning”.

us over them

or us overthrowing them

or us staying apart from them

or us cleansing ourselves of them

or us having things that they don’t

or us being more important than them because of our competitive suffering...

but in the Seventh Story, the story of reconciliation, we still get to win, just not at anybody else’s expense.

in the Seventh Story, human beings are not the protagonist of the world...

Love is.

Today: Wherever you go, look for Love at work, behind the scenes, winning people over from hate, fear, greed, and resentment.

SUNDAY March 6th: First Sunday in Lent: Gospel Reading: Luke 4: 1-13

Who are the children of the future? I should like to answer: the people who renounce domination and the dreams of rule, people who are not victorious and to not dream of victories, but who open themselves and their institutions in creative receptivity towards what is divine, towards what is human, and towards what is natural. These people are the heirs of the future.

-Juergen Moltmann

Day 6 Monday March 7

Conflict may be inevitable, but violence is optional. The Seventh Story invites us to choose peacemaking rather than violence.

We are so used to hearing about violence, and for some of us, experiencing it, that we may never stop long enough to think that it doesn't have to be this way. Yes, conflict may be an inevitable outcome of bringing seven billion (or even just two) souls into proximity, with all our competing desires and perceptions. Yes, conflict may be a fact of life. But escalating violence does not have to be.

We can better imagine a more peaceful future if we come to terms with how violence became so much a part of our past.

Today: Whenever you come into conflict or see others in conflict, imagine the parties in conflict committing to peace.

And imagine the phrase "your kingdom come" from the Lord's Prayer in the Christian tradition to mean "may your peace come." Make "may your peace come" be your constant prayer or meditation today.

Day 7 Tuesday March 8

When something goes wrong, we instinctively look for an explanation. We want to make sense of it, perhaps to find someone (else) to blame. But this natural desire to make sense of wrongs - like human violence - could we unintentionally be justifying those wrongs, and in that way could we be making it possible for them to continue? As we wrote in **The Seventh Story**:

... consider this: if our stories successfully account for human violence, do they unintentionally justify it, normalize it, and reinforce it? Do our stories train us to think of escalating violence as inevitable, an eternal absolute of human experience? Do they train us to expect things to get worse and worse, creating the conditions for a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Today: As part of your Lenten journey, try to see violence and hatred as optional rather than inevitable.

Day 8: Wednesday March 9

When Jesus traveled through the land, his stump speech included this powerful, provocative sentence: “The kingdom of God is at hand.” If “kingdom” means a society or civilization without violence and hate, what would “at hand” mean? Here’s our take from *The Seventh Story*: If we take the long view and study the statistics, it turns out that the average human is in much less danger of actually dying from violence than we were a few centuries ago. But it often doesn’t feel that way. Our brains are wired for danger, so violence gets our attention like nothing else.

News media exploit our in-born violence-vigilance to win higher ratings and advertising income; politicians play on our fear of violence to win votes; entertainers find that violence attracts viewers and sells tickets and advertising.

To put it bluntly, like sex, violence sells, and a lot of us are making a handsome living on hurting and killing, which makes our relationship to violence all the more dysfunctional.

Most of us would rather not live in a kill-or-be-killed world, an enslave-or-be-enslaved world, a dominate-or-be-dominated world, an impoverish-or-be-impoverished world.

If we had a realistic chance to build a live-and-let-live world, a world of generosity and justice and neighborliness where we do to others as we'd have them do to us ... we would gladly choose that option.

And that's what the Seventh Story is about. A less violent future is available. It's within reach. It lies before us like a road less traveled.

Today: Hold the phrase "within reach" in your mind and heart today.

Day 9 Thursday March 10

Why is the season of Lent important? If it only gave us an annual time to "repent," to rethink the stories that frame our lives, that would be good enough. But it goes beyond that. If you and I rethink the stories that frame our lives, we will begin to live differently, and we will set a positive example for others to imitate.

Growing numbers of us see great value in René Girard's theory that humans scapegoat each other because of mimetic rivalry [desiring and competing for what our neighbors desire, as they do the same], but we don't share his despair.

We see how negative imitation has trapped people in cycles of violence, and we are eager to model nonviolent living and leadership for positive imitation.

We believe that many of our neighbors haven't yet chosen a nonviolent story because their imaginations are still held captive by stories of domination and fear, stories that have dominated human societies for uncountable generations.

Today: Be aware of the negative or positive pull of others' example upon you, and hold in your heart (in prayer or meditation) the desire to be a positive example for others, so that a "loving contagion" can spread through our community and world.

Day 10 Friday March 11

The first prayer that many of us learned was the "Our Father" or "Lord's Prayer."

But in today's context, many of us are seeing more clearly than ever before the legacy of a toxic patriarchy and toxic masculinity that makes it difficult to use masculine metaphors or even pronouns for God. In *The Seventh Story*, we wrote,

Now Jesus' core message of the kingdom of God, along with his use of the word Abba or "Father" for God, may at first seem like a reinforcement of patriarchal domination. But a closer examination of Jesus' life and teaching show that Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them.

Instead of patriarchal stories of domination, [Jesus] taught and embodied service, reconciliation, and self-giving.

Today: Look for domination stories at work around (and within) you. Refuse to give them your consent, and pray instead, "May I be empowered to lead by love rather than domination."

Day 11 Saturday March 12

In the Christian tradition, Lent prepares the way for the climax of the season of the Christian year that begins with Advent, anticipating Jesus, proceeds through Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus, continues through Epiphany, exploring the life and deeds of Jesus, and culminates in the rejection, torture, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus during Holy Week. Tragically, many of us focus only on Jesus as a ticket to heaven and not as a revolutionary teacher and example for life on earth:

Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them. Instead of stories of violent revolution or revenge on the one hand or compliant submission on the other, he taught and modeled transformative nonviolent resistance.

Today: Look for revolution or revenge stories at work around (and within) you. Refuse to give them your consent, and pray instead, “May I be empowered to work for justice by love rather than revenge or retaliation.”

Sunday: March 13 2nd Sunday in Lent: Gospel Luke 9: 28-36

Day 13 Monday March 14

The language of religion can be liberating, but it can also be deadly, especially when it is commandeered by unscrupulous politicians. By emphasizing purity, religious and political groups can easily paint “us” pure and “them” as impure or unclean. And when we render “them” unclean, we simultaneously render “them” vulnerable to “ethnic cleansing” ... and “us” vulnerable to become the “cleansers.” The irony of all this is tragic, but common.

Jesus' life and teaching show that Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them.

Instead of the **purification** stories of scapegoating or ethnic cleansing, he encountered and engaged the other with respect, welcome, neighborliness, and mutuality.

Today: Look for purification stories at work around (and within) you. Who is being called dirty, unclean, other, outsider, intruder? Refuse to give these stories of purification your consent, and pray instead, "May I be empowered to live by love rather than purification, superiority, or exclusion."

Day 14 Tuesday March 15

The word "Jesus" has been so cheapened over the centuries that at times, saying his name feels like saying "Exxon" or "BP." Even worse, on the lips of many, Jesus' name has become a weapon, and a phrase like "Jesus saves" feels more like a threat to outsiders than good news. That's why, during Lent, it's important for us to try to recapture who Jesus was and what he can mean if we grasp the liberating essence of his message and example:

Jesus' life and teaching show that Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them.

Instead of inhabiting a competitive story of accumulation, he advocated stewardship, generosity, sharing and a vision of abundance for all.

Today: Take this short teaching from Jesus on accumulation, and ponder it throughout the day. You may even decide to commit it to memory:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... No one can serve two masters: for either you will hate the one, and love the other; or else you will hold to the one, and despise the other, You cannot serve God and mammon (wealth). (Matthew 6)

the seed of a Seventh Story that will heal the world

Day 15 Wednesday March 16

The word “retreat” is a precious word to many of us. It means getting away for rest, refreshment, recentering, and reconnection. But there’s another kind of retreat that is driven by fear and even hatred ... the desire to withdraw into an enclave where we seek self-preservation and say, “to hell with everyone else.”

Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them.

Instead of advocating escapist stories of isolation, he sent his followers into the world to be agents of positive change, like salt, light, and yeast.

Today: Carry these words from Jesus in your heart:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)

Day 16 Thursday March 17

In Jesus' day, Galilee was a place of victimization. Roman outsiders oppressed them with military occupation and heavy taxes. And then their countrymen to the south joined in the exploitation. Wealthy Judeans would buy up the lands of small farmers when the farmers were unable to pay their taxes. They might allow them to stay on as tenant farmers or sharecroppers, sending stewards to collect a share of their produce every season. Or they might banish them to become landless day laborers, working for unlivable wages.

Interestingly, Jesus spent most of his time with these victims of political and economic oppression. But his message wasn't one of resentment or revenge.

He continually told them that their faith could save or liberate them. He challenged them to see themselves, not as victims of heartless oppressors, but as beloved children of a loving God.

Jesus came to subvert all stories of violence and harm, not repeat them.

And instead of leaving the oppressed in stories of victimization, he empowered them with a vision of faith, hope, and love that could change the world.

Today: Look for times when you disempower yourself by letting yourself be defined by how you have been mistreated. Can you imagine living by a better story about yourself?

Day 17 Friday March 18

When Jesus' disciples considered calling down "fire from heaven" on some of their rivals, Jesus said, "You do not know what spirit you are of." Today, someone might say, "You do not know what mindset you're trapped in," or "You don't know the paradigm you're working in," or "You don't know what psychological needs are driving you," or "You do not know the ideology you're caught up in." In *The Seventh Story*, we wrote:

The patriarchal spirit, we might say, is an unholy spirit of conquest, control, and intimidation, exclusion, privilege, and entitlement, theft, violence, and destruction.

But the holy Spirit of God as embodied by Jesus bears the nonviolent fruit of love, joy, and peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness, faithfulness, generosity, and self control.

When religious people retreat into old stories of patriarchal authoritarianism, they are saying, in effect, "We have no king but Caesar." The only leadership they will recognize and follow is the broad, old, well-worn highway of authoritarian patriarchy.

But we advocate a new path, a new story, a new way of life, in which love, not violence, is the protagonist.

Today: Using language that feels honest and makes sense to you, yield yourself to be filled with the Spirit of love, joy, peace, and other characteristics of well-being in the seventh story.

Day 18 Saturday March 19

During this Lenten season, we are engaged in a two-part project, described in these paragraphs from *The Seventh Story*:

From the Buddha and Isaiah to Jesus and Mohammed, our seminal religious leaders have challenged us to imagine a less violent world. In more modern times, theologians like Walter Wink and Desmond Tutu, anthropologists and social scientists like Girard and Erica Chenoweth, and social/spiritual activists like Dorothy Day, Gandhi, and Dr. King have challenged our shades-of-gray narratives of violence and helped us envision a full-color world where differences can inspire connection, affection, and mutuality rather than fear, division, and death.

Through the influence of these social and spiritual visionaries, the hearts of more and more children, young people, adults, and senior citizens are yearning for a new story, a story of love rather than hate, of creativity rather than destruction, of win-win cooperation rather than win-lose competition, of peace-craft rather than warcraft.

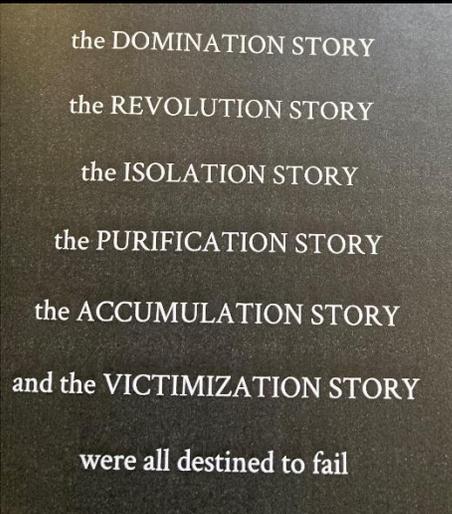
They are waiting for a new story to explore, inhabit, and tell.

They are ready to embark on a project with two interrelated elements:

1. To unmask the deceptive power of violence, to remove its magic sheen, and to show it for what it really is: a vicious, addictive cycle that creates a temporary euphoria, temporary order, and temporary unity, but in the long run, leads in a downward spiral ending in civilizational suicide.
2. To explore the regenerative power of a seventh story, a story of liberation, reconciliation, creativity, and peace. We want to stop telling stories that make heroes of violent people and instead celebrate nonviolent examples whose lives inspire us all to imitate their compassion, kindness, understanding, wisdom, and willingness to suffer for the truth rather than make others suffer. These positive examples will help us leave old stories behind and choose a better human story for a better human future.

Today: When someone asks “How are you?” today, see if it’s appropriate to say something like this: “I’m doing really well. I’ve been spending a few minutes each day reflecting on idea called the Seventh Story, and it’s stimulating me to feel or think ...” Finish the sentence in a way that feels natural and honest for you, and then see where the conversation might go.

Sunday March 20th: 3rd Sunday in Lent Gospel: Luke 13: 1-9



the DOMINATION STORY
the REVOLUTION STORY
the ISOLATION STORY
the PURIFICATION STORY
the ACCUMULATION STORY
and the VICTIMIZATION STORY
were all destined to fail

Day 20 Monday March 21

Empathy is one of the most important capacities for people living in the seventh story. Consider this brief selection from The Seventh Story, and see where your empathy takes you:

Salman Rushdie said it well: “Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives - the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change - truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts.”

Today: Look and listen for people who seem trapped in a rigid, disempowering, limiting story. Instead of judging them, pray that you might feel empathy for them.

Day 21 Tuesday March 22

You've probably heard the saying, "Hurt people hurt people." Whether you've been hurt or done the hurting lately, today is a good day to ponder this question from The Seventh Story:

Why do we hurt each other?

If René Girard is right, it's because we have been taught to believe that peace and security will come through having what we believe others want; and that when our boundaries are challenged, we must harm or even kill those who would get between us and our stuff. We have defined belonging not by what we cherish and love and share, but by whom we exclude and how we can hold onto what we have taken.

Today: As much as you are able, be sensitive today to the hurt that is taking place within and around you, and see if these thoughts on hurt help you understand what's happening and why. Again, let compassion rather than judgment fill you for all those involved - the hurters and the hurt.

Day 22 Wednesday March 23

Today's reading focuses on the most basic of human needs:

We know that to survive, humans need four things: **food, water, air and protection from the elements.**

But beyond four walls and a roof, we seek a deeper shelter. Along with meeting our physical needs, every ordinary life, like yours and mine, seeks to find, and make, meaning.

The search for meaning is nothing more than the pursuit of happiness and security; and the pursuit of happiness and security is really the search for meaning, because when we find true meaning in life, including the way meaning manifests as belonging to a community and a place, happiness, and security take care of themselves. From the earliest moments of our lives, we adopt and adapt lenses through which we see the world, handed down by family, community, and cultural traditions. We are told that these will both show us what we want, and how to get it. In other words, they will shelter us. The path toward or away from shelter shows up in the systems of our everyday lives:

Family and cultural practices.

Education.

Artistic and cultural expression.

Political and legislative boundaries.

Economic or gift exchange.

Community organizing and social movements.

Religious and spiritual transformation.

These are also the lenses through which we experience life generally, and they do not exist in isolation from each other. Indeed, they are all gathered in one larger circle, each with a part to play, but none bigger than the circle itself.

The circle is not religion, nor philosophy, nor ethics, nor politics, nor economics, nor science, nor aesthetics, although it's hard to imagine the circle without any of these.

The circle is **storytelling**, and there is nothing more powerful.

Today: Think about - and perhaps invite others into conversation about - the stories that have been most meaningful in your life. The Wizard of Oz? Romeo and Juliet? The Color Purple? The Velveteen Rabbit? The Accidental Tourist? The parable of the prodigal son? Ponder the meaning that you derive from your most treasured stories.

Day 23 Thursday March 24

Lent traditionally ends on the Thursday of Holy Week, right before Good Friday. (We'll extend our journey through Easter Sunday.) In a sense, the forty days of Lent prepare us to read and respond to a story of horrific violence. This selection from The Seventh Story is about "the myth of redemptive violence."

The myth of redemptive violence is a foundational story of our times. The evidence is simple, and clear: we act like we believe it, continually seeking to bring order out of chaos through force. The evidence for why this belief is wrong is simple, and clear: observable reality disproves it. Killing does not cleanse. Violence does not bring peace. We don't ultimately feel better, or find shelter by destroying someone else's life, or even merely assassinating their character. Wars beget wars until one party is overwhelmed, or decides to stop. Nobody wins. We need a new story. Of course, it is not really "new" - we use "new story" in similar way to Charles Eisenstein, who means it as "new for modern civilization as a guiding narrative"; old ideas can be better than the more recent ones; and some old ideas have not so much failed but never been properly attempted. Perhaps even more exciting: some old ideas are ready to finally come to life. Now, if industrial societies began to live according to the principles of reconciliation and connection with self, others, the earth, and love itself - well, that would be a new story indeed. So what we need is another story, one so ancient and usually misunderstood that it may seem entirely new.

Today: Whether you use the term “new” or “another,” today, hold in your heart a desire for a better story to live by; an alternative to the myth of redemptive violence.

Day 24 Friday March 25

Read today’s selection, a quote from Werner Herzog included in *The Seventh Story*,” a few times, slowly.

“We comprehend... that nuclear power is a real danger for mankind, that overcrowding of the planet is the greatest danger of all.

We have understood that the destruction of the environment is another enormous danger.

But I truly believe that the lack of adequate imagery is a danger of the same magnitude. It is as serious a defect as being without memory.

What have we done to our images?

What have we done to our embarrassed landscapes?

I have said this before and will repeat it again as long as I am able to talk: if we do not develop adequate images we will die out like dinosaurs.” - Werner Herzog

Today: Let yourself wonder about what Herzog means by “images.” Don’t look for one fast and correct answer. Look for many answers or examples that help you see the profound point he is making.

Day 25 Saturday March 26

Gareth writes: *My friend Colin, an architect, and kind of a mystic, says that the purpose of his craft is to help people live better. There's beautiful simplicity, but also enormous gravity in that statement. Just imagine if every public building, city park, urban transportation hub, and home were constructed with the flourishing of humanity - in community or solitude - in mind.*

Sometimes this is already the case, and we know it when we see it.

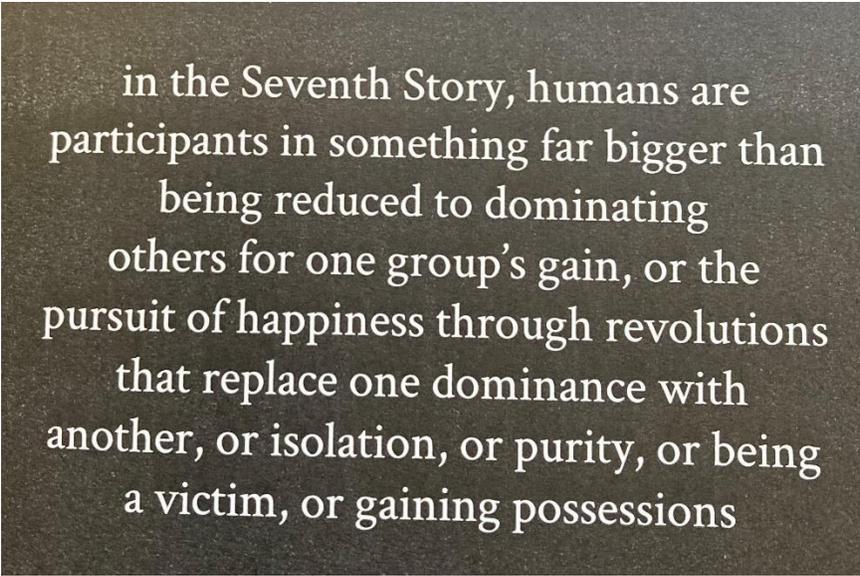
Our minds and hearts feel more free, we breathe more easily, we are inspired to create things - whether they be new thoughts of something hopeful, or friendships with strangers, or projects that will bring the energy of transformation yet still into the lives of others. If architecture, manifested at its highest purpose, helps us live better, then it is also easy to spot architecture that is divorced from this purpose. In our internal impressions of a building or other space made to function purely within the boundaries of current economic mythology - especially buildings made to house the so-called "making" of money - the color of hope only rarely reveals itself. Instead, we are touched by melancholy, weighed down by drudgery, even compelled by the urge to get away. But when we see the shaping of a space whose stewards seem to have known that human kindness is more important than the free market, that poetry and breathing matter beyond bank balances and competition (a concert hall designed for the purest reflection of sound, a playground where the toys blend in with the trees, a train station where the transition from one place and way of being to another has been honored as a spiritual act), we know that it is possible to always be coming home.

This is not just true for architecture, but for all art; all stories, actually. The purpose of storytelling is to help us live better.

Today: Look at the building in which you live, or other buildings you see regularly, perhaps on your way to work.

Ask yourself how they could be transformed to help people live better. Consider if you can take one step to help make that happen.

Sunday March 27th: 4th Sunday in Lent Gospel: Luke 15:1-3



in the Seventh Story, humans are participants in something far bigger than being reduced to dominating others for one group's gain, or the pursuit of happiness through revolutions that replace one dominance with another, or isolation, or purity, or being a victim, or gaining possessions

Day 27 Monday March 28

A great story is what results when humanizing wisdom and grace, and technical and aesthetic craft operating at their highest frequencies kiss each other.

What the distinguished peace theorist and activist John Paul Lederach calls “the moral imagination” with which artists dance can expand the possibilities of violence reduction and healing, or reinforce the terms on which violence seeks to justify itself. This is the artist’s highest calling - whether we find ourselves in a situation of escalating dehumanization, or one in which violence is already decreasing.

If our task as storytellers is to tell the truth in a way that escalates humanization, and if part of the truth is that violence isn't entertaining, and that stories and images can heal or destroy, then what, indeed, are the greatest stories ever told?

Today: See if you can think of a person or a community with whose politics you strongly disagree; ask yourself what you could do to humanize them more in your own mind.

Day 28 Tuesday March 29

Over time, humans have synthesized six primary stories as ways of organizing our lives so that we get to hold onto "our" stuff.

The first story that evolved to handle the task was the *domination* story: "we" would rule over "them".

This oppression provoked the emergence of a *revolution* story, often expressing itself as revenge, one form of domination replaced with another.

Another typical manifestation was the *purification* story, in which all the troubles of a powerful group were blamed on a minority, who would be excluded or even exterminated.

The pain was so great that some people began to define themselves by what they had suffered, a *victimization* story, which some aggressively maintained.

Others simply withdrew, believing in the righteousness of their own group, called to an *isolation* story in a wilderness or a promised land, where the domination cycle would begin over again.

And the people who perhaps thought themselves to be the smartest of all just retreated into trying to possess as much as they could: living by an *accumulation* story which pretended that happiness comes from having stuff; and doing our best to keep it.

Back to Square One. And repeat.

Today: Ask yourself which of the six stories was most present in your formative years, and which is most difficult for you to let go.

Day 29 Wednesday March 30

Empires, Roman, British, Intergalactic, or those based on extracting resources from the land without thought of sustainability, or in institutions like schools and businesses where people were ruled rather than collaborated with.

Revolutions that sought to replace one oppressive order with another variation of power-over rather than power-with, and which exacted the ultimate punishment on the old leaders, denying the humanity of those who had done it to “us”, thereby becoming just like “them”.

Purifications by nationalism and the shadow side of religion, projecting enemies onto anyone whose differences did not accord with a more dominant view.

People living as nothing more than victims, unable to find repair for their experience of suffering (or perhaps never offered it), instead treasuring it, defending it, threatening, or hurting those who proposed an alternative perspective, or invited healing. Entire nations have been built on the victimization story told by settlers, so powerful a story that it blinded them to the enslavement and genocide they enacted to secure what they believed was freedom.

And of course, there have been communities who have withdrawn into isolation, a holy remnant, the elite, the chosen fleeing the corrupt. Even today, some folk prepare for such a future. Meanwhile some people have come to the conclusion that consuming more things will keep us safe and happy; the lie that humans can actually own stuff merely another useless thing we’ve bought.

Today: Choose two news stories - one that stimulates sadness, and another that stimulates joy. Which of the six stories is embodied by the first, and how does the second seek to transcend the six stories?

Day 30 Thursday March 31

We call these six the “default-oppositional” stories, and they have touched us all. Many of us were taught some variation of them as if it were the natural order of things to dominate, revolt, purify, isolate, define ourselves as victims, or accumulate for its own sake. We may even have consciously structured our lives around one or more of these stories. Each is rooted in a desire that is completely natural, and good: the pursuit of happiness, security, peace: *meaning*.

Yet each fails to achieve any of those things, because each depends on a false premise: that on earth, among humans, there is "us" and there is "them". The six stories all depend on scapegoating others, and defining happiness on the basis of what “we” can get for “ourselves”.

Today: Consider how you were taught - by family, community, politics, or religion - to divide into “us” and “them”.

Day 31 Friday April 1

The domination story invites us to rule over them.

The violent revolution story demands that we overthrow oppressors even if it kills them, and dominate them in return.

The purification story names, blames, shames, excludes, and sometimes eradicates minorities.

The victimization story alienates us and invites us to self-harm by defining "our" suffering as greater than "theirs", perpetuating violence by demanding vengeance.

The isolation story causes us to forfeit the gifts of the rainbow by withdrawing from community.

The accumulation story deadens our souls by defining our happiness on the basis of the "things" we "own", and causes others to suffer by withholding the bread we have from those who need it.

Today: Which of these stories seems most like your life?

Day 32 Saturday April 2

Such stories are everywhere. Each of us has been wooed, or coerced, or willingly gone along with them. And upon such stories we have built a world of "us" and "them".

Us over them.

Us versus them.

Us versus some of us.

Us in spite of them.

Us away from them.

Us competing with them to get more "stuff".

Can you see how a world built on such stories can only be one in which we fight each other? Can you see how, in such a world, peace is impossible?

Can you see how, now that humans have the power to wipe ourselves out, we need another story?

Today: How would your life need to change, if you were to move beyond "us" versus "them"?

Day 34 Monday April 4

There is a Seventh Story.

It is evoked in many wisdom traditions, but in the one that the two of us know best, it emerged about 2,000 years ago, when a poet-craftsman started teaching a bunch of Middle Eastern peasants the meaning of love. The poet radically interrupted the six stories, saying that instead of getting stuff and keeping others from getting stuff, you can't actually possess stuff for yourself alone in the first place. Instead of building walls, you are invited to show the same kindness toward your neighbor as you would want them to show to you, to celebrate his joys, to grieve her losses. Even more provocative: instead of defeating enemies, you are asked to love them. We call this the reconciliation-liberation story.

Today: What do reconciliation and liberation mean to you, in your personal life, in your community, and in the world?

Day 35 Tuesday April 5

The most revolutionary, if you will, part of the Seventh Story; the part that makes it of an entirely different character than the six, is this: In each of the six stories, humans are masters of "our" domain, the world is divided into "us" and "them", and the purpose of life is to be a selfish economic unit, producing bounty to keep for yourself and your group. The six stories are all based on reacting to other people's desire; they invite separation at best, and violence at worst; they seek to avoid suffering. They ultimately portray human beings as depraved, untrustable, unlovable. Pawns in a war story, run by uncontrollable demons. And in a world where we have the power to destroy ourselves, they are evolutionarily inappropriate.

But in the Seventh Story, human beings are not the protagonists.

Love is.

Today: Consider the idea that humans are not the protagonist of the world, and that love is instead. How could this make your life easier?

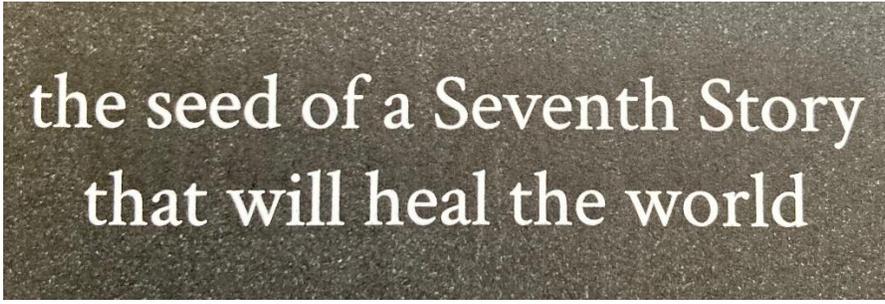
Day 36 Wednesday April 6

We are not masters of “our” domain, but partners in the evolution of goodness. As Girard wrote, “What Jesus Invites us to imitate is his own desire, the spirit that directs him toward the goal on which his intention is fixed: to resemble [love] as much as possible.”

Instead of reacting to other people’s desire, we would be immersed in hopeful practice toward the common good. Invited to connection, not separation. Invited to choose to participate in the inevitable suffering that life will bring, rather than avoiding it by displacing it onto others. To see ourselves as beautiful, worthy of trust, lovable. Participants in a great play about the evolution of the story of love. To be friends, not enemies, no matter what anybody else is doing. Not us versus them.

Instead: some of us for all of us.

Today: Look at your plans for the next 24 hours. Choose one appointment - make it an opportunity for you to resemble love as much as possible.



the seed of a Seventh Story
that will heal the world

Day 37 Thursday April 7

The key here is to tell the story truthfully - that the trend is toward reduced violence and increased peace, but this has occurred only because human beings have challenged codes and practices that were considered unchangeable. The mass barbarism of execution for public entertainment, the elitist madness of resolving wounded honor by duels, the horrific subjugation and even killing of people with physical differences because they were believed to be worthless all once seemed normal. The most ordinary of people responded to their circumstances by deciding to act, and stop what once had seemed immovable, but now could no longer be tolerated.

We will do the same, not by waiting on social forces to do the work for us, for they are not the puppeteers of history, but invitations to action.

Today: Don't read or watch the news. Pray for wisdom to understand the world as it is, and to act with courage to make it better. See what happens.

Day 38 Friday April 8

As Rabbi Michael Lerner says, Martin Luther King is not known for a speech entitled I have a complaint. Of course he spoke against the injustices of his time (chief among them what he called the evil triplets of racism, militarism, and materialism); but he also outlined a vision to overcome them. No longer willing to tolerate dehumanization, he and the people he led rose up, challenging the old order, but instead of merely replacing one form of domination with another, they offered a bridge to restoration.

Today: Consider the issue that concerns you most; and imagine three things you can do to change it.

Day 39 Saturday April 9

Every generation has the opportunity to become sensitized to the injustice whose time has come. For ours it might be capital punishment, or human trafficking, or the dehumanization of people on account of who they love, or white supremacy in civic institutions, or the encroachment of the national security state.

For you, it may be the more transcendent evils of earth abuse, the systematic exclusion of people on grounds of the money they don't have, or the trading practices that deliver cheap products to Westerners while keeping the hands that make them tied to a wheel of exhaustion and endless dissatisfaction (or worse) whose time has come. For me, it is our culture's addiction to the story that violence resolves conflict. Our real religion is the god of violence, the demonic notion that killing can create things. Yet violence is never constructive, even in the extremely limited circumstances where it may be arguably necessary.

Today: Pray for peace on the inside and out, in your own heart and in the words you speak and actions you carry out. Ask for the imagination to always find a fourth way beyond fight, flight, or freeze.

Palm Sunday April 10: Luke 19: 28-40 (**DAY FORTY**)

in the Seventh Story, humans are participants in the biggest thing that has ever happened: of the evolution of the good, of the expansion of consciousness to include the restoration and healing of all things

April 11: MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

The current global crisis is a crisis of storytelling. We have become possessed by the myth of redemptive violence, manifesting through six old stories that keep us apart, cause more suffering by attempting to avoid it, and simply do not work. Telling the story in those ways exaggerates fear, and violence will increase. The redemption of the myth of redemptive violence is not to destroy it by beating the 'bad guys' at their own game.

No.

The way to redeem the myth of redemptive violence is to de-story it: to refuse to play the game at all. To invent a new game. To tell the story in a new way that decreases fear, and violence will reduce.

Today: Plan to watch the movie *Babette's Feast*; after watching it, ask yourself how you can be Babette in your own community.

April 12: Tuesday in Holy Week

Violence doesn't create anything.

Today: Take five minutes in conscious silence.

April 13: Wednesday in Holy Week

The idea that only violence cleanses the nation and makes it free is comprehensively disproven in the historical fact that non-violent revolutions are both more sustained, and produce more democracy than violent attempts at political change. The sacrifice of talking to the person who killed your mother, so they can connect with the damage they caused; the sacrifice of forgoing revenge in exchange for the common good, so we can end the cycle of violence; the sacrifice of not getting everything you want so that most of us can get something: these are the sacrifices that work.

The threat of the world today is lied about every time you open your computer or switch on your phone. Terror lives in your pocket, on a device that does not differentiate between wisdom, information, propaganda, and deceit. The good news is that you can learn more than ever before, connect quicker, and heal yourself (some of the world's great healers and healing techniques are mobile apps). The challenge - and the invitation - is that you need to learn how to edit what you're seeing.

No one else will do that for you - indeed, it is in the interests of the military-industrial-entertainment-gossip-complex that you stay unconscious, and click on as many links as possible.

Today: Don't do anything online other than what is necessary for your work.

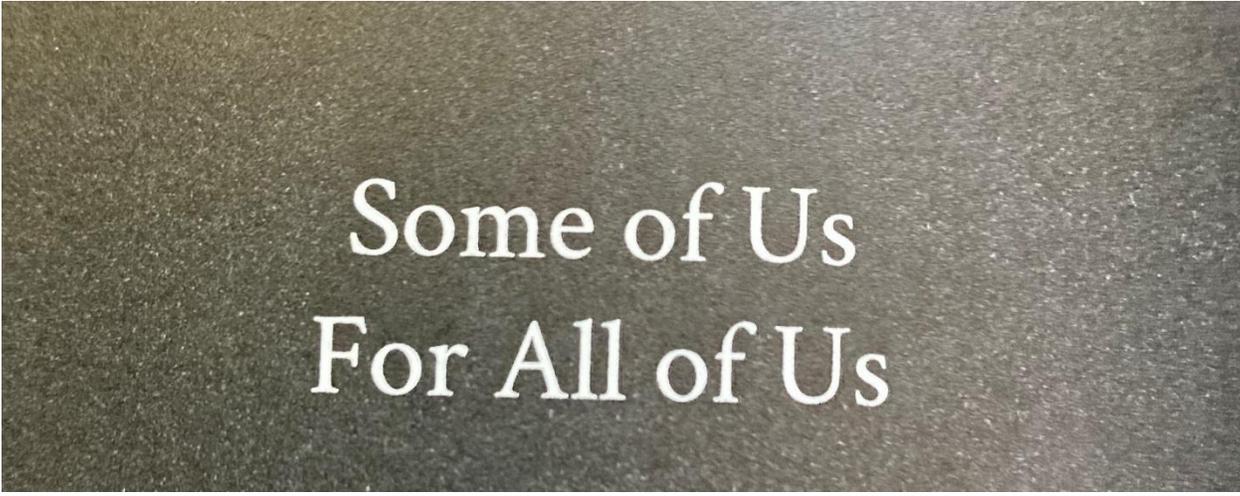
April 14: Maundy Thursday

It's not a sin to feel fear; in fact, it's quite natural, given both our evolutionary past as the chase targets of saber tooth tigers and the contemporary immersive (dis)information culture that implies such beasts are still waiting round every corner. Many of us also have stories of real suffering from our own personal narratives, and the way we have learned to remember and talk about these stories keeps us reliving the trauma, endlessly looking for a way out, but never finding it, because as self-perceived victims, we begin from the premise that there is nothing we can do about it. Our cultural conditioning is in two minds about how to survive and transcend trauma: it contains the seeds of our own healing (there is more elevating art and literature and nature and human-kindness than can be experienced in even a thousand lifetimes), but the current economic model that drives information and creative media is addicted to showcasing horror, while the self-help industry fails to recognize that fully embodying its own mission would result in its collapse.

I used to be terrified of everything, because I bought the lie that we lived in hell. Even the peacemakers struggled, sometimes suggesting that our world was a sinking ship, and that our only recourse was to bucket out as much water as we could. What we didn't realize was that the ship had already sunk. The patterns of relationship upon which our divided society was built could not serve us any longer.

We had been drowning in mutual enmity for centuries, dragged down by the madness of defining our interests as keeping people out rather than welcoming each other as the kind of gift that would liberate us too. The ship had already sunk, because it was never a seaworthy vessel in the first place. We needed another boat. Peacemakers are engaged in the task of building another boat. A boat on which a new story can be told. A story that acknowledges that while we may see 15,000 fictionalized murders by the age of 16, we'll see a lot more flowers bloom - if only we would learn to look. John O'Donohue called beauty "the divine embrace"; it's not naivety to believe that beauty will save the world. It already has.

And it will go on saving the world, as long as there are people to enfold themselves within this divine embrace; and begin to take seriously the call to hold the space between the perfection of the present moment, and the brokenness of the day. We don't know if this moment will last, but it is our moment. We not only get to choose what to do with it, but we must.



Some of Us
For All of Us