

Storytelling

My Granddaddy Reeves used to tell a story that went like this: “A man needed to jump across a creek and so he got a running start. While he was airborne, about halfway over the creek, he noticed that there was a water moccasin laying in the exact spot where he was about to land.” Granddaddy would just stop there and wait for someone (like me) to ask the inevitable question: “What happened then?” The answer came with a smile, “He turned around and went back!” Everyone would laugh.

But we knew that there was a truth in that story - that you can't ever really go back. (Note: the “Edit: Undo” button on the computer is a handy feature; I wish that in real life there was a way to “un-do” ...or even “un-say” something.)

About telling our story: When I was a child, the word “lying” was not in our vocabulary. For some reason I still do not understand, my mother would not let us use the word “lie”. If I made up something to hide behind or defend myself, Mom would use this euphemism... “You told a story.” And I would be in big trouble. “Telling a story” was bad. So when my brother would want to tattle on me, it was often “Mo-o-o-m, Sam's tellin' a story!” Well, we grew up anyway.

But over the years, I have learned that spinning a story can be a good thing. A story does not have to be true in every detail for it to *point to* a truth. Fairy tales are a good example. Do you remember the emperor who was cajoled and convinced by his subjects that he had on a beautiful new suit of clothes when, actually, he had on nothing? He believed them. We all need critics and advisors that we can trust! But sometimes we want to be told only good news when the real truth is different. I don't know if there really was such a silly emperor, but the sad and uninformed truth of his example remains: He believed the wrong people.

When people hear a story, the truth that is in it resonates. Sometimes the truth brings joy and satisfaction; sometimes it brings frustration, stress, or even anger. Sometimes the truth is a new insight that challenges us to change or grow.

We need to hear and know our own stories. One of the jobs of the leaders in the church is to interpret the life of the people--*for* the people. In so doing, we have the awesome responsibility to shape that life. Those who are parents do the same thing with their children. As we watch them and get to know them, we form them along the way. We help them look at themselves and see where they need to laugh, or change, or grow, or just feel more confident. Stories help.

Like the man who jumped only halfway across the creek, we can't change course in mid air. Or just “turn around and go back”. The tracks we have laid cannot be changed. But we can learn from truths in our own stories, and others, and improve our future!

I have been gathering great “Trinity UMC” stories over the past year and I invite you to share your favorites with me however you can. I'll use them somehow. Come on, make my day!



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