

Sermon given February 20, 2022
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Today I have 3 stories to share as my sermon. The first comes from my experience last Sunday with the youth confirmation class - most of whom I've known from our time together in Trinity Play. This time I was invited to reflect with them on their question about "how to balance science and religion" A very worthy conversation, don't you think? A conversation, as a matter of fact, which has been going on since we have human records, before what we think of as science was even a thing. Back then, our ancient ancestors lived in a deep relationship with their natural environment, an environment which held not only matter but spirit. No question of how to "balance". It was a complete piece for them, a whole story — until Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Darwin began to unravel the connecting threads and science and religion became at odds.

An unraveling and separation, I contend, unnecessary and contrary to the truth of reality. Wonderfully, now current science has brought us back around to knowing that we really do live in a whole cosmic story as it were. For as much as we go through our day acting like it's all about our separate "us", we are truly an integrated part of a vast, evolving, pulsing mass of matter and energy, just as our earliest ancestors knew.

For John Haught, a professor at Georgetown University of science and theology, this unified reality is the title of latest his book: *The Cosmic Story*. And the most fascinating aspect in his book is his idea of there being an outside and an inside to this cosmic story in which we live. In fact, he suggests using this understanding of outside/inside story as a way to "balance science and religion".

It is Haught's way of maintaining the tension between science and religion. According to him, we need science for the outside of the cosmic story. Science is a quest for truth about the world around us - the stuff of rocks, water, stars and chickadees. Using quantum theory, entanglement, waves and particles, the various fields of science measure, analyze, describe what's already happened and discover predictable "laws" of nature. That's the outside story. Science's job is not to look for the inside story nor to say there is no inside story.

For, again as Haught thinks about the cosmic story, religion holds the inside story, the sense of mystery,. With words, rituals, stories and images, an inside story is revealed and evolves with answers to who we are, where we are going, what's meaningful and why there is life at all. Religion helps us live our unique personal stories, giving expression to inner experiences such as guilt, wonder, joy, love, hate, compassion, death. Moreover, as Haught cautions: "science alone will never bring you over to the inside... No accumulation of scientific information about cells, brain, and nervous tissue, or about the physical and biological processes that gave rise to them, can ever tell you what it is like to be a meaning-seeker and truth-oriented being."

And Haught push's the story metaphor even further: What if, "...after all, the point of the outside story is to carry an inside story." Could it possibly be that all that can be measured, tabulated and counted, the outside story, is created as a vessel to carry an inner, hidden part of life?

Could it be that all the doing of our lives - hockey games, gardening, hiking, cooking - are ultimately about carrying our inside story - the feelings of accomplishment, the pleasure of being with friends, the satisfaction of trying out a new recipe, the delight of creating a drawing or knitting a hat. For isn't the inside story often the best parts of our story? It's the inside story we share with those we love, the parts we keep telling and remembering. The inside story holds the richest and most important part of the outside - which brings me to my second story.

It's the story in our first reading this morning - one of many familiar scenes in the long saga of Joseph. You know, the guy with the coat of many colors! His brothers' jealousy led them to sell him to slave merchants. He ends up in Egypt. Years pass and his inside story of dreams land him in the Pharaoh's court. His dreams then turn into actual silos of grain stored against a possible future famine. When such a famine arrives in the land of Canaan, those same brothers are forced to search for food. They arrive at the feet of an Egyptian ruler, begging for grain to feed their family back home and discover it's Joseph, the brother whom they betrayed.

Intriguingly, they don't recognize them. And more intriguingly, they don't recognize the deeper and more cosmic place of their story. It is Joseph who realizes the whole story. "But it was not you who sent me here, but God..." And as he later says: "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..." Joseph points to the mystery and unknown truth in all our stories. There is an inner story unfolding in the midst of even physical hunger and past acts of hurt and evil.

It is Joseph's insight of holy blessing intertwined with hurt that brings me to my third story . It happened in the summer of 1962. My sister, Lynn, and I had the gift of being in a college-aged group touring Europe. You know the kind of tour - a different hotel every night and sometimes in a different country! A couple of nights into the tour, Lynn told the tour guide that she would be bunking with another young woman in the group. Since we were booked as rooming together, this change meant the tour guide needed to juggle the female room assignments every night. The result was I stood each evening in the hotel lobby as the guide tried to find a room for me. Needless to say, this experience created a memory of being left out and not having a place in the community.

As in Joseph's and his brothers' story, amends and forgiveness have happened between my sister and me. So, I was surprised when that 1962 summer memory popped into my mind during a recent meditation session. Yet, a nano second after the surprise of the memory came a much more important surprise. Holding the painful memory this time, I saw it for the first time as an outside story holding an inside story. I realized how that summer experience began my particular awareness of and compassion for those who are looking for a place in community, who are on the edge.

Of course, in that moment, Joseph's words, " but God meant it for good..." didn't come into my mind. Nor did Haught's wondering if "the point of the outside story is to carry an inside story." But, for me now, they both certainly apply. There was more going on than I knew at the time.

Yet, this recent reframing of the summer of 1962 is not a complete mystery to me as a follower of Jesus the Christ. I believe he dwells among us as the Cosmic Story of matter and spirit, perfectly and mysteriously wed together. Jesus lived his story in complete wholeness. He knew he existed in God's cosmic story and he invites everyone to believe and live in the same truth. Jesus' outside actions and words carried and revealed God's inside story of forgiveness and compassion. In our gospel today, Jesus shows us how outward actions - turning the other cheek, giving away your coat, loving your enemies - are more than just outward actions. There is more going on here. Acts of mercy, generosity and forgiveness, and, yes, even hurtful actions, can open and hollow out an inner space where the outside story can be transformed and able to carry God's grace. Or as Jesus says this morning: "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Amen.