

# The message of the Holy Spirit

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So we watched another movie. Every now and again we have a movie night here at St. Mark's. And on Friday night we watched the movie Sully, which if you were here you would know, or if you've seen it before, it's the true story of Captain Sullenberger, the pilot who landed his airliner with 155 people on board in the Hudson River in New York.

Amazing true story, and he saved, because of his heroic actions and his skill, he saved all aboard. But if you were there, or if you've seen that movie before, I want to ask you this morning, what was the difference between watching that movie and just reading about the facts of what happened in a Wikipedia article?

What was the difference? Or let's take the movie Titanic, the second highest grossing movie of all time. What's the difference between watching that movie, like millions of people have done, and just reading about the sinking of the Titanic in an encyclopedia article?

Well, just reading about the facts of an event doesn't necessarily move you, does it? It doesn't necessarily engage your emotions in any way, but watching and hearing the story of how these facts played out, and the actual human beings involved in those events, well, that's what moves us, doesn't it?

That's what we relate to, that's what draws us, and that is why the Hollywood film industry is so successful, because their stock in trade is human stories, and there's nothing that human beings love quite like a good story is there.

[ 1 : 3 8 ] We've been storytellers and story listeners for as far back as history goes. In fact, even the word history means our story, the story of mankind, and throughout our history, humans have gathered around the fire to listen to stories.

It's through stories that cultures have grown and values have passed on from one generation to the next, and also, no matter how much we advance in technology or how much our lifestyles have changed since back then, one thing hasn't changed, and that is our love for stories.

We still gather around the fireplace, the modern fireplace, the TV set, to engage in stories, to watch stories, to escape from the daily grind and to lose ourselves in other people's stories.

You know, I've got fond memories growing up of gathering around the TV with my family and watching the A-Team and MacGyver and then going to bed to the music of Dallas playing in the background.

But it's not by chance that we're so drawn to watching and listening to stories. It's because that's the way God has made us. That's the way God has actually wired us, and that's also why a majority of the Bible, the way that God has chosen to communicate to human beings, is made up of stories.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] I wonder if you've ever noticed that about the Bible. The majority of it is stories. All the other sacred, so-called sacred texts of other religions, if you read them, which I've kind of dipped into before I got really bored, they're made up of kind of sayings and rules and principles.

But the Bible stands alone in its amount of stories, and they're real stories, messy stories that we can relate with, human stories.

But it's through those stories that we learn the spiritual truths that God wants to communicate to us. And, of course, each of those stories, like I said earlier, plays a part in the much bigger story that's been playing out since the beginning of creation and is still playing out today that we saw in that video earlier.

Now, I've got to admit, the Bible being presented that way, full of these messy stories, it might actually be a bit frustrating to us when we read it because we like things in categories, don't we? We like to be able to look stuff up in an index. I think lots of us would probably prefer the Bible to be organized by topic, right, that we can just look up marriage or raising children or the afterlife and

find all the information we need.

[ 4 : 20 ] But that's not the way God has chosen to present the Bible to us. Those are truths that we discover as we get caught up and carried along in its stories.

And that's also why you'll notice when you read about Jesus and how he answered questions. When people came to him with religious questions and they wanted him to give religious answers, how did he answer?

More often than not, he answered by telling them a story, a parable. Jesus communicated in that way and God inspired the Bible to be written in that way because real truth needs a bigger container than just the facts.

Real truth needs a bigger container than just the facts. Now let me explain what I mean by that. Think of a soup. Who likes soup? Okay?

Now good soup often has solid ingredients in it like bits of chicken or mushrooms or whatever. Now imagine you wanted to serve the soup to someone else and so you decided to pour it into a basket and then serve it to them.

[ 5 : 30 ] Now that would not be a very wise thing to do because most of the liquid would just fall out of the basket. Right? Now the solid ingredients would remain and they would be able to eat those solid ingredients.

But it's not going to leave the same impression on you to eat a soup like that as if you had the whole soup the way it was designed to be had. Right? Now why am I talking about soup?

Well in the same way we tend to do that. We tend to serve soup in a basket I think when we read the Bible because what we tend to do when we read the Bible is in our fast-paced world we don't have time to read the Bible as presented so we try to pick out the solid bits.

We try to extract the facts that we need from the stories of the Bible without actually consuming the stories as they're given and letting them have the intended effect on us.

But the thing is real truth to really be convinced by truth for someone to be convinced by truth for it to arrest our hearts for it to get deep inside and change us can't just be a list of facts that engages our brains but it also must engage our hearts and our imaginations and that is why God communicates truth primarily through story which is also therefore something that we've got to learn to do if we want to communicate God's truth to other people because if you're a Christian and you've been for any length of time you've probably found yourself struggling to get God's truth through to other people haven't you?

[ 7 : 10 ] I mean I think it's a frustration that all Christians share a struggle to make it real for the people we're trying to talk to it's real for us this truth that we've discovered in the Bible and yet we talk to other people about it and it doesn't go in they kind of look at you strangely and this is your theology this is your thing that's fine but they're not really that interested in it so how do you break through that how do you make it real for them well you've got to take God's cue and you've got to learn to tell stories not just facts and so what I want to do this morning is talk about two stories in particular that every Christian should be able to tell and those are God's story and your story and to help us to see how to do this I want to look at the story we read from John 9 the story of the blind man that Jesus healed and then how he goes on to tell his story to others but first I want to see I want you to see how the story begins look there in your Bibles if you've got it open John 9 from verse 1 as he that is

Jesus went along he saw a blind man from birth his disciples asked him Rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind neither this man nor his parents sinned said Jesus but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him as long as it is day we must do the works of him who sent me night is coming when no one can work while I am in the world I am the light of the world so notice how before Jesus actually does this miracle he needs to correct his disciples understanding of sin and suffering and the connection between them and why suffering is in this world at all so the disciples from their Jewish upbringing believed that suffering was a direct consequence of particular sins that you do or your parents do and so that the more you sin the more you suffer and so if you're suffering a lot obviously it's because you're a big sinner but Jesus corrects that thinking he says no that's not how it works and then he tells his disciples two things about this man's suffering first that it's not a direct consequence of his sin or his parents sin and second that it's something

God is about to use for a much bigger purpose than his disciples can currently see which is by the way often the case with suffering that the purpose for it especially amongst God's children is for a

much bigger purpose than our eyes can see or that we can work out and in this case that greater purpose was to reveal who Jesus is that's what he tells his disciples and this miracle in him healing it was there to show us and the people then how Jesus can deal with both sin and suffering and so he wants his disciples to realize that what is about to happen is all part of God's big story that story that we saw earlier in the video and how God has always had a plan not just to deal with this man's particular sin and suffering but all of ours through Jesus dying on a cross to save those who trust in that from sin in this life and from suffering in the life to come but now just as Jesus helped his disciples to see this situation in light of a bigger picture because that's what he's doing here he's taking this particular situation that the disciples are looking at and he's helping them to step back and see the big picture of it just as he did that with his disciples that's also something we can do for the people that we know we can help them to see their situations in light of the best examples I've seen of someone doing this or read rather is actually in a story that I once read it's a little known novel you may have heard called the Lord of the Rings now yes I apologize in advance for another Lord of the Rings illustration but it'll help me clarify what I mean if you've read the book or watched the movie Lord of the Rings you'll know the character Frodo and there's a scene in the mines of Moria which is one of the places they have to go through where Frodo's reluctance to carry this powerful ring comes out in a moment of weakness and he pours out his heart to Gandalf the wise wizard and he says this I wish the ring had never come to me I wish none of this had happened now listen to Gandalf's response all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us there are other forces at work in this world Frodo besides the will of evil Bilbo was meant to find the ring in which case you were also meant to have it and that is an encouraging thought so do you see what the wise wizard is doing there he's encouraging Frodo in his time of trial and even pointing out clues of where a greater will is actually at work in his life well that's also what you if you're a

[12:43] Christian can do in the lives of the people around you because you know the bigger picture and so you can help them to see their circumstances in light of it and how their struggles and their lives fit into that bigger picture as Christians we've been privileged to be given the bigger picture let's not keep it to ourselves but let's help the people around us in this world see where we fit in where as we're currently living in this age where that fits into what God is doing and what he has done and what he's going to do still because that's what the Bible reveals to us we are the bearers of that truth and the world desperately needs to know that big picture and not only can we help people to see their lives and their circumstances in light of the bigger picture but we can even like we saw a few weeks ago we can even point out clues that we see of God working in their lives and so that's the first story we need to be able to communicate to other people and help them see their lives in light of it

God's big story and by the way the more that you take opportunities to read the Bible to learn about the Bible to read and be exposed to resources like those videos that help you to understand the Bible better the more you do that the clearer God's big story will become and the better you will be able to communicate it and help people to see how their lives fit into it and so use every opportunity you have to sit under God's word if church is on if the Christians are gathering and a sermon is being preached and they're opening the word together put aside other things in life to be there so you can absorb more for your benefit but for the benefit of your friends and family who need the big picture in their lives but there's another story that all Christians must be able to tell and that is their own story so look at how the story of the blind man goes on in

John 9 so Jesus heals him in quite a strange way he puts mud on his eyes and tells him to wash in a pool which he does and he's healed and by the way if you didn't pick it up yet from the Old Testament reading this miracle is probably an allusion to Naaman's healing in two kings where the prophet Elisha told him to go down into the water as part of his healing as well and any observant Jew would have picked up the link and how just as Naaman's miracle showed Elisha to be a messenger from God this miracle shows that Jesus is sent from God as well and if you're still wondering that's why the pool is called Siloam which means sent see these things all fit in to the big picture don't they and so because of the significance of this miracle the Jewish authorities call in this formerly blind man and interrogate him because of course it's a crime to be healed and so they're very cross and then they question him but I want you to listen carefully to how he testifies in this court case how he tells his story verse 15 therefore the

Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight he put mud on my eyes the man replied and I washed and now I see now they don't like his answer or the simplicity of it because they didn't want to admit who Jesus was they didn't want to admit the fact that was right in front of them and so they started a big theological debate which is typically what people do when they don't like the truth that is presented to them they'll get into deep theology and start a debate and they try to get this blind man to admit that Jesus is a sinner which he couldn't really comment on I mean he's a beggar they're experts in the law they would have out argued him on theology any day of the week and so look at how he responds verse 24 a second time they summoned the man who had been blind give glory to God by telling the truth they said we know this man is a sinner he replied whether he's a sinner or not I don't know one thing

I do know I was blind but now I see I love the simplicity of this guy and he is actually given to us as an example it's interesting in John if you read the other stories most of the stories Jesus is the main character Jesus is the one who takes up most of the time in the story that's who the focus is on what he says because he is in many ways an example to us in how we should be telling our story of being blind and then seeing to the world around us and do you see how he didn't need to engage in a theological debate with these guys he didn't get pulled in to a theological debate all he did was simply recount what had happened for it that's all that was essentially his testimony and that's all witnessing needs to be for a

[18:02] Christian too you know Alan in his prayer prayed that we would all be evangelists now some of some of you may have gone oh no that's that's impossible I can't do that I can't do what evangelists do but actually you've probably got a misunderstanding of what evangelism means all it really means is being a witness is called in a courtroom in a court case just to testify to the facts they don't have to be the lawyer they don't have to be the one who argues the case in fact the Holy Spirit is the one who does the convincing who does the arguing all we've got to be is the witness in the stand testifying to the facts and that's all witnessing needs to be you don't need to be an expert in theology to recount what God has done in your life and God can and does work through the stories of his people like we saw last week remember if you were here last week the Samaritan woman at the well and how she has this experience of

Jesus and then do you remember what she said when she got back to the town I'll read it again from John 4 then leaving her water jar the woman went back to the town and said to the people come see a man who told me everything I ever did could this be the Messiah so they came out of town and made their way towards him many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony he told me everything I ever did so when the Samaritans came to him they urged him to stay with them and he stayed two more days and because of his words many more became believers so this woman too is an example for Christians because she simply shared her experience of Jesus in her own words limited as her understanding of Jesus was she just shared what she had experienced she had no script just a simple accounting of her own experience and yet that was enough to change a whole town because it showed people the reality of who

Jesus is and that is something that all true Christians have as well their own experience of how God has revealed himself to them and changed them and that's their testimony but here's the thing when I'm talking now about your testimony as a Christian if you're a Christian I'm time God did something in your life any time in your life where God has spoken to you has revealed something about himself has changed you or your behavior in a significant way which he's still doing if you're a Christian each of those experiences is your testimony you know I've come to learn that a Christian story isn't just about when you first became a Christian that might actually be quite boring but that's not all that God has done in your life if you're truly walking with him if the

Holy Spirit is working in your life you have stories to tell often that God has done things in your life and revealed things and changed you what a real living relationship with God is for you now and how God is working on you and changing you now that is your story and the truth is if you can't find if you look hard in your life and you can't find any story like that then I'm not actually sure you're a Christian at all sorry to say but a Christian is someone whose life has been taken over by the Holy Spirit the Bible says and who is being transformed in real noticeable ways not just someone who became a Christian once upon a time at some youth camp but someone who is experiencing the reality of God in their lives now and I must ask you is that you can you say that you have stories to tell of how God is working in your life and if you don't then maybe it's time to really examine whether

you are a

Christian whether the Holy Spirit is in your life whether God is real and present for you but if it is if you do have stories to tell of how God has been working on you and transforming you and revealing himself to you then I want to tell you this morning sharing those stories of what God is doing in your life with non Christians is actually far better than running them through a list of theological ideas you know that is boring for most people but your story your story is real and it's something that they can relate to and it's a big enough container for the truth that God wants communicated in this world so that's the way God has decided to make his truth known to this world that's how that's the means by which the Holy Spirit transmits his message in this world through stories true stories stories that people out there are longing to hear actually the story of what this life is all about and what

[ 23 : 20 ] God has done in history and how they can be caught up in that it's the most exciting story we've ever heard and the story of what he has done in your life and how he can do that in theirs as well they are longing to hear those stories but we have to be the ones that tell them but before I finish there's one more story that you need to know about when talking with someone about Jesus one story that is often overlooked when we share the gospel with others and that is their story their story because everyone has a story everyone each person who passes you on the street you might not know them from a bar of soap but they have a with

God's big story the big picture and maybe even you will be able to point out clues of where God is already at work in their lives and that's what we need to be doing for the world around us who are still blinded by sin who don't know the truth we need to communicate it to them but not in a scripted way where we have to be theological experts just by knowing that each of us have a story to tell and we know the big story and we are the messengers of that and so as we finish the series remember what the Holy Spirit is doing in this world right now what we learned five weeks ago the work that he has always been doing and that is to bring light and life into the chaos and darkness of people's lives to bring them hope and a future through coming to know Jesus and you don't have to go far even here in Plumstead Southfield and this is a fairly kind of together community I suppose decent if you like according to the world's labels but you don't have to go far to find brokenness to find people whose lives are just a mess to find people who desperately need a bigger story to be part of who need their darkness dissipated by the light who need hope who need a future we have that and the way that the

Holy Spirit has chosen to bring that light into that darkness that is out there is through you and me as we share with those people the great stories of what God has done in this world and what he is still doing even now in our lives will you do that let's pray for God's help yes Lord we thank you so much we often overlook we often take for granted how much you have revealed to us that you have revealed your true story to us what you are doing in this world what life is all about that we don't have to wonder Lord thank you for the Bible thank you for the stories in there us I pray as well for anyone in this church this morning who doesn't have a story to tell who on reflection realizes that they have not had a real experience of you in their life that the Holy Spirit is not changing them Lord would you speak to them would you draw close to them and in the quietness of their own hearts in the quietness maybe later of their rooms at take down the barriers that are still preventing them from asking you into their lives and would you come in and bring them new life while you do your work of shining light into the darkness so Lord we thank you for today thank you for speaking to us we pray these things through Jesus Christ Amen