

# Christ for the Broken

November 6, 2016

In 2003 a small group of people started a project called “StoryCorps.” Many of you may have heard it on the radio or seen parts of it on TV. What they did is, they set up a sound recording booth in Grand Central Station and simply invited people to record the stories of their lives. The idea is to create a more just and compassionate world by helping people to share their stories. Couples share their stories, parents and children come in, you hear Holocaust survivors being interviewed by their children, people who were at Stonewall telling how that inspired their activism, and perhaps most profoundly to me, you hear the stories of people’s everyday lives. StoryCorps has grown over the last 13 years to include multiple booths across the country including two at the Library of Congress, and there are mobile booths that travel the country each summer.

One of my favorite stories from StoryCorps is that of Danny and Annie Perasa. Danny and Annie are from New York. He’s an off-track betting clerk and their accents are thick. You can picture them just by hearing their voices. Danny and Annie married later in life, and in their StoryCorps short they tell the story of planning their wedding. Annie’s father had died, and she was having a hard time deciding which of her brothers to ask to walk her down the aisle. She didn’t want to offend anyone. Then Danny interrupts her to say that he has a solution: “You walk in with me; you’ll walk out with me. Simple as that.” It’s so much better if you hear it in his accent, so I really do encourage you to look it up online when you get home. “You walk in with me; you walk out with me. Simple as that.”

You could hear in that sentence that the two of them were the center of each other’s worlds. They came to the story booth as Danny was dying of cancer, and so they were once again planning a church service. Danny had told of asking Annie who was going to walk out with her behind the casket. And she said, just as firmly as he had declared about their wedding, “I’ll walk in with you and I’ll walk out with you. Simple as that.”

Ten years later I still cry when I hear this piece. It’s so beautiful. Their love is so palpable. “I’ll walk in with you, and I’ll walk out with you.”

Though Danny and Annie’s story is so powerful, I was thinking of it when Terry Bush and I were talking about our yearly memorial service in which we commemorate our church members and friends who’ve died in the last year. Terry very honestly confessed that walking up to light the candle at the memorial service was one of the loneliness experiences of his life. I asked him what might make it better, and after a long pause he said, “Not to have to do it alone.”

Of course. Of course. And that’s why this year we’re adding a new tradition to our memorial service. I’ve invited church members to walk with each of the families who are lighting candles on behalf of their loved ones. In doing so, we as a church are symbolically living the promises we make in baptism, the promises that we make to love, and support and care. This is a bookend, really. When we baptize, we promise our love, support, and care – not just when someone’s a little one in Sunday School or youth group, but throughout life and especially, especially through the dark times.

It's interesting that the lectionary suggests that we read the beatitudes found in Luke's Gospel when we celebrate Memorial Sunday. Jesus preaches that we're blessed when we're poor, and hungry, and hated – when we're a drain on the system. Why? Why would the lectionary put the beatitudes together with our memorial? “Simply because God always reserves God's most acute attention for those in need, those left behind by the powers that be, those left out of the lavish bounty of the world's produce,” writes David Lose, the president of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Jesus is telling us that when we are in need, when we are vulnerable, we have a special place in God's heart. I suggest that part of what's going on here is that when we are mourning, when we are hurting and broken and lost, it is then that God has a chance to really get in. It's then that God can shape our hearts.

And here's the real twist: We're all in need. Each and every one of us is vulnerable. We can try to hide it. We mask it. But it is part and parcel of the human condition. Lose goes on, “Unless we recognize and confess that – not as something to be ashamed of but rather as one of the defining elements of human existence – unless we confess that, we will have a hard time receiving the mercy, and forgiveness, and grace that Jesus offers.”

Friends, today as we walk with our church members and friends as they grieve and celebrate, I am reminded of Danny and Annie's StoryCorps. It was so poignant that she wanted to walk with him alone – that she walked in with him alone, and she walked out with him alone. But through our baptisms and our belief in Jesus Christ, we are told that that won't be our fate. We're told that we will never, ever have to walk alone because our God and our church will be with us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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**Luke 6:20-31**  
November 6, 2016