

The Rest of the Story

Years ago, I used to listen to a short radio show called The Rest of the Story. This program contained short vignettes in which the author, Paul Harvey, would talk about little known history that had given rise to much used commonplace things today. Harvey, for example, might talk about the inventor of the coffee machine or the founder of a restaurant chain. His goal was to help us understand where things we use every day came from. Most often, the history included unknown, ordinary people who had great ideas. The Rest of the Story was intended to help us all understand that sometimes ordinary people from ordinary places can do extraordinary things.

If Paul Harvey were writing about the beginnings of the New Testament church, he might well begin by talking about a man from a remote fishing village on the shores of a smallish lake in the Mideast, in an unknown province named Galilee. He would have noted that this man's parents were not academic scholars or political leaders but, rather, were also of fisherman stock, plying their trade as their parents did before them. He would have gone on to say how this ordinary man, after becoming convinced that a local Rabbi had a life-changing message for the world, became a strong advocate for this Rabbi and went on to become a leader in a movement that has changed the world. If we had known Peter, we would not have suspected that he would become one of the early leaders of a religion that is now over 2 billion people strong. Telling the rest of the story simply by stating the observable facts would be inspirational for we see an ordinary person doing extraordinary things.

Of course, we know that there was much more happening than what can be learned from the story of Peter. Peter's Rabbi, for example, was no ordinary man; he was and remains the eternal Son of God. Peter didn't become the leader of the church through his own power and charisma or his unique set of gifts; he was empowered by the eternal third Person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit. While The Rest of the Story normally celebrated the accomplishments of ordinary people, the story of Peter and the rest of the apostles much celebrate the accomplishments of God working through ordinary people.

I suspect that few of us or few of the people we know will ever become the subject matter for The Rest of the Story. Most of us will not invent some life-changing device or develop a novel and helpful idea that shapes the course of human history. Most of us don't have the ingenuity to develop something that can change the world. We are not going to make the pages of The Rest of the Story.

But Peter wouldn't have either if it had not been for the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit working in him. Peter would have continued on as an unremarkable fisherman in Galilee, and we would never have known of him as we have never heard of almost all of the other fisherman of his time. Peter's fame is solely a result of God working through him, and, as I already stated, it was because of this that Peter accomplished what he did. We could argue, further, that Peter was not always willing to be used by God to lead the church. He was plagued by reluctance and disillusionment, at least at first, although that was replaced with a deep commitment that led to his being willing to die for Jesus, which he did.

This all goes to say that while few or even none of us may ever make it to the pages of The Rest of the Story, that does not mean that we won't be able to engage in life-changing work. It is possible that God may work in us to change the world. We may feel unqualified and incapable, but that hasn't stopped God before.

We may not be like Peter in that we do something as significant as being one of the first leaders of the Christian church, but we can be used by God to change someone else's life. It doesn't take someone special or particularly qualified. All it takes is our response to willingly follow Jesus. Peter, as we recall, had to grow a little in that, especially as he denied Jesus at his trial. Jesus had to straighten him out a little after he rose again, and after that, Peter showed himself to be ready and willing. Peter's life didn't proceed as he planned it, we can be sure, but because he was willing, God used him.

The rest of our stories has yet to be written. We don't know what lies ahead of how we can be used of God. Yet, we can be confident of this: if we are willing, and if we are committed to following Jesus, God can work in us to change lives and perhaps even change the world. As Peter, we won't be able to say that it was our ingenuity or charisma, for all that we do must be attributed to God the Spirit as he works through us. But when we are willing and ready to follow Jesus, we can be quite sure that he will use us in ways we might not have thought possible.

We should note, of course, that we will not always know how God uses us or the impact we might have made. A GEMS or Cadet counsellor may not know that a small conversation changed the life of one of their students, and a visit to another member of the church might change someone's life forever, and we may never hear of it. Perhaps, a generation or so from now, someone might include one of us in their "The Rest of the Story." It does not take ingenuity or special giftedness to make a lasting impact on someone's life. All it takes is a deepening commitment to Jesus Christ and a willingness to be used by the Holy Spirit. May it be said, however, that in the end, we become part of The Rest of the Story as they recount how we were used by God to bring change to another's life and, perhaps for some of us, to many lives.

Pastor Gary