

“Home: Sharing Our Stories”
Acts 22:1-21

In his book, *How to Know a Person*, David Brooks shares this: “Nicholas Epley was commuting by train to his office at the University of Chicago. As a behavioral psychologist, he was well aware that social connection is the number one source of happiness, success, good health, and much of the sweetness of life. Human beings are social animals who love to communicate with each other. Yet on this commuter train that day, he looked around and it hit him: Nobody was talking to anyone. It was just headphones and screens. And he wondered: Why are these people doing the thing that makes them the happiest? He later conducted some experiments in which he induced people to talk with other commuters during their rides downtown. When the ride was over and they arrived at their destination, researchers were there to ask them how much they enjoyed the trip. The comments were overwhelmingly positive. People, introverts as well as extroverts, reported that a commute spent talking with someone was much more fun than a commute spent locked into your screen.

So why don't people talk more? Epley continued his research and came up with an answer to the mystery: We don't start conversations because we're bad at predicting how much we'll enjoy them.”

Part of the work of providing shelter for each other is to share and receive each other's stories. Our stories make sense of life for us and they also help us to see our lives in more wholesome ways. When we tell our stories, we begin to see the invisible thread of God's love in our lives.

Our culture encourages sharing our opinions and ideas, but sharing our stories is a little harder because it feels more vulnerable to do that. When we tell our stories, we invite others into our inner landscape and into our journey of life. It is much easier to stay at a safe distance when we are sharing opinions and knowledge.

In our Bible story for today, the Apostle Paul found himself in a tough spot. Because of his faith and commitment to continuing the mission of Christ, Paul spent a great deal of his ministry traveling from one city to the next establishing churches and encouraging communities to keep going on the path of discipleship. One pattern that was very clear in Paul's mission was his determination to continue despite the dangers and persecutions he had to endure. Over and over again in the book of Acts we hear about Paul's encounters that led him to public arguments, mob threats, court appearances, and going to prison.

Now I invite you to enter into the setting of the story: It's late May, early June in Jerusalem, which means the weather would have been hot. The place is filled with people who had travelled to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. Paul had faced a violent mob who beat him up because they believed that he was desecrating the temple and violating their rules. His only salvation came from the Roman soldiers who carried him away, but now he was facing trial and had to defend himself.

Paul then asks to defend himself. One would think that Paul would give a sophisticated theological argument, like he does in so many of his letters. Paul was trained in philosophy and in theology. He could have had a very eloquent defense about his mission to the Gentiles. But instead, he chose to tell his personal story. Let's listen to it from Acts 22:1-21:

'Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you.'

²When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said:

³'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

⁶'While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁸I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do." ¹¹Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

¹²'A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, ¹³came to me; and standing beside me, he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. ¹⁴Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; ¹⁵for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name."

¹⁷'After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw Jesus saying to me, "Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me." ¹⁹And I said, "Lord, they themselves know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him." ²¹Then he said to me, "Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Paul provided his experiences of the power of God. Even though the stakes were high, Paul knew that the only chance he had of connecting with his adversaries was to tell his story. He knew that they could not argue with him about that. They may reject it, but they could not go into an argument mode.

Paul also knew that the only way he was able to convert people was through his own testimony. In all of his missionary experience, Paul knew that his story was the most effective way to reach people's hearts so that their minds may receive him.

To illustrate this, let's listen to these two different accounts:

During the years 1945 to 1989, East Germany was a separate state under Soviet occupation. It was ruled by a communist puppet government. By 1961 so many people were fleeing to the West that the authorities closed the borders and built the infamous Berlin Wall to prevent people going from East to West.

Now listen to this account:

Peter was born in the middle of the War, in the eastern part of Berlin. He remembers bombers howling overhead and his parents carrying him to air raid shelters. When he was nineteen, Peter realized he wasn't going to be allowed to stay at university unless he joined the Communist Party. On August 12, 1961, he heard rumors that something was about to happen along the borders. Peter took his chance and, with nothing more than his swimming trunks, he swam across the Teltow Canal and asked for political asylum in the West. The next day the borders to East Berlin were closed behind him, and it would be nineteen years before he saw his mother again.

Which one of these accounts connects with you? Which one are you more likely to remember?

Faith is about life and if we are to share life and faith with each other and become shelter for each other, it is important for us to share our stories. There is always a place for theological discussions and teachings, but the heart of who we are is in our stories. Paul wrote powerful and complex letters to the different churches, but when he was first trying to connect with people, he began with his story of conversion to the way of Jesus.

When we tell our stories, we make meaning out of what may seem like random events and relationships. Berne Brown has this to share about the importance of stories: show video.

I want to invite you to practice this with me today. Just take a few moments to use the pieces of paper you received as you walked in to tell a story about someone who has made a difference in your life.

[Difference Maker Story Form](#)

Your Name:

Email address:

Name of the person you're naming as a "Difference Maker":

Role this person played in your life:

Share a story of how this person has made a difference in your life:

Remember that the truth of life is delivered to us daily, fresh-baked in the ovens of our own experience. Amen.