

## WEAVING A STORY AND SPINNING A YARN

As you may now know, Deacons in the Methodist Church are called to congregate as an Order, in an annual Convocation in May. Due to the restrictions, this has been in a virtual format from home, but the sadness of missing it, has been eased with the way in which we were mightily blessed by the input of others in the diaconate, around the Connexion and beyond.

One of the sessions was taken by Rev'd Dr Barbara Glasson, the current President of Conference – her theme was "Story," and she began with this beautiful prayer from the Corymeela Community.

*God of the story,  
You are in and out of the stories we read,  
calling us into them and calling us out of them.  
Give us courage to listen to our own curiosities as we read old stories;  
dare us to ask the questions hidden in the heart of the text.  
Lead us to mine, with heart and mind and desire and desperation,  
the many meanings in the one story,  
because this is where we find You, and where You find us. Amen*



### SESSION 1

We had been promised a session on spinning yarn, so Barbara shared a video of herself preparing the wool and spinning it. It seems they have pink sheep where she lives! This first section was about looking at **personal narratives**.

I knew vaguely, that before the spinning there is the carding process where all the detritus is removed from the wool, and she drew the analogy of sorting the story out before or whilst we tell it.

The process of carding takes time, as the thick wool is combed between two brushes to prepare it for spinning. My response to that was to consider how often we carefully "card" the prickly, messy bits out of our stories, in order to make them palatable for others to receive, and I wondered if that compromises the authenticity of our stories. Barbara reminded us that God made the world out of chaos, not order, and so I felt that it was important for me, to retain the difficult aspects of my own narrative. It also prompted me to remember that as we listen to the stories of others, we are called to hear them with an attitude of patience.

Barbara then led us to consider the narrative in Matthew 6 v 25 – 34 (the lilies of the field) and invited us to view it with an "Ignatian eye" asking ourselves what the back story might have been to this text, and she suggested that Jesus must have known about spinning; perhaps his own mother spun at home. The point she was making was that we as Christians,

must always listen well in 3 dimensions, and be aware of the “back story” when a narrative is shared, and to be ever attentive to the nuances within them. She also stressed that we should be alert to that which may have been discarded, and be mindful of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who share their stories with us.

*You might wish to consider which aspects should remain in, and which could/ would be discarded in your own narratives.*

The wool goes through many twists and turns onto the wheel, and is made up of many threads just as our own narratives are. As it was fed onto the wheel, a beginning and an end were formed from the tangled mass, just as our own life narratives are formed, and as it was spun round and round on the wheel, I was prompted to recollect those who have NEEDED to tell their stories over and over again, not because they are held captive in their narrative, but rather as an act of “re-membering” (putting back together) some very traumatic times in their lives, which they are seeking to come to terms with. The retelling of a story can often be the beginning of a process of straightening out traumatic or difficult narratives, and to listen, can often offer an opportunity to set tangled strands straight- in short an important process of renewal.

There was a consensus of opinion that:

- we hear these stories with the greatest respect, and that **they are not our stories to share**, for we often live with hidden bias that could distort and damage the narrative of the one who has shared it
- we must resist the temptation to make someone’s story fit in with our particular understandings of our own, or to neatly fit in with a wider narrative
- we should create time and a safe space for people to be heard
- we respect that there may be discrepancies in the way in which people tell their stories one from another

## SESSION 2

Barbara then asked us to look at the **narrative of the church** and she took us to Mark 2 v 1-12 (the paralysed man lowered through the roof)

She invited us to think about the paralysed man as an analogy for the church in these current times, and posed a series of questions which we all may wish to ponder upon, pertinent as they are to our times:

- *What is blocking the church from getting near to Jesus?*
- *Do we need to think outside of the box about taking the church by another route?*
- *Are we the paralysed “hand-wringers” or are we the ones seeking a new way for the church to get to Jesus?*

- *Who will be part of the team “digging the hole” into the future and where are we in this story?*
- *What might a transformational church look like?*
- *Does the church even want to be in the presence of Jesus?*

The feedback asked more questions and made the following observations:

- What in our church life, blocks others from entering in?
- Are we prepared to live with a mess whilst we discover transformation or a new normal?
- The concept of “Holy desperation” was mooted. We often tell Jesus what **we** want, but the men in the story remained silent, and Jesus remarks on their depth of faith – *“When Jesus saw their faith.....”* Perhaps we need to listen more deeply to what God is calling us to
- One participant picked up on the story of Bartimaeus, and posed the question Jesus asked *“Do you want to get well?”*
- Whilst we may be yearning to enfold ourselves in the story that we knew, and all that we are comfortable with, we are subjected to change by events; so maybe we need this liminal space in order to be resurrected, after all there had to be a “hole” (tomb) before the resurrection!

Barbara reminded us that whatever the church’s narrative is in the future, it is our responsibility to seek a “healthy means” and to not underestimate the TEAM challenge that is set before us all, and she spoke of how the rule of life which Methodist Deacons live by , can be the seeds of how the church can and should be different.

She concluded by showing us a piece of fabric that had been woven with her pink and grey wool, and there I reflected, that some people perceive their own stories of faith as not “bright” and exciting, and that there can be a tendency to hugely down play our narratives, so much that they are bleached of all colour. However, ALL strands in the team are vital to the rich weaving of God’s story of love for us!

Finally it was recognized that currently, many feel as though the fabric of life has unravelled, and that they are hanging on to their individual threads, but God invites us all to lay our “threads” down and to trust that He will weave us and the church of Christ, into a new “narrative”, so that many more will hear the gospel of hope in this hurting world.



*Den. Selina Nisbett*