

Finding faith in the maelstrom: Storytelling as a source of hope

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slideshare.net/maryhess1 (*this is a link that will take you to my slides from today*)

(1) Finding faith in the maelstrom

Context collapse

Storying faith

Authority, authenticity, agency

(2) A curriculum of martyria

Holy Saturday and trauma

Testimony, witness, contemplative practice

(3) Practical exercises for hope

Create, share, believe

Digital storytelling as theological reflection

Digital storytelling as personal narrative

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An exercise in theological imagination

1. Watch a commercial. (There is a list of useful examples at StoryingFaith.org: <http://www.storyingfaith.org/archives/780>)
2. Begin by attending to your physical and emotional responses to this piece. What adjectives come to mind to describe how you are feeling right now? Don't judge them, simply write them down as rapidly as they occur to you. Regardless of what the producer of the commercial might have intended, how did you experience it? Is there a word or a symbol or a theme that emerges from your listening to your feelings in relation to this commercial?
3. Sit with that image or symbol for a while and explore it. Listen for how God may be present and calling. What is existence like within this image? What is life-giving and joy-filled about it? What is broken or sorrowing about it? What possibilities for healing and newness exist within it? Write down your thoughts as they occur to you, in brainstorming mode.
4. Take that image/symbol/word to scripture. Brainstorm a list of places/stories/passages in scripture where this image/symbol emerges for you or resonates with you. Avoid asking why a passage or passages emerged for you. Simply trust that a possible connection exists.
5. Pick one of the passages that occurred to you and find it in the Bible. Read it a couple of times, look at its context. Think about the same questions you asked initially of your image, now in relation to this passage: what is existence like here? what is full of joy? what is broken or sorrowing about this passage? are there possibilities for newness and healing within it?
6. Now try to organize the results of your engagement with this digital piece and scripture, and the resonances and explorations that accompanied it. Have any insights emerged for you from this conversation between a piece of pop culture and the deep structures of your faith? Have any pressing questions emerged for you? Are you being called in any way to direct or concrete action?
7. Finally, how will you take whatever you might have learned from this process into your daily living? Write down at least one intentional step you will take. When will you begin? Who will support you?

(This exercise is drawn from *The Art of Theological Reflection*, by Patricia O'Connell Killen and John deBeer, Crossroad Press, 1996, and adapted for this use by Mary E. Hess, October 2019)

Story Exercises

A Story Circle

In a story circle small groups gather to do four rounds of storytelling. In each round one person tells a story, and the other three listen in a specific way. You can invite people to tell a story that focuses on a specific event or incident, such as:

- A moment in which you glimpsed transcendence
- A moment in which you were suffused with hope
- A moment in which you experienced vulnerability as holy

The other three group members are assigned different kinds of listening roles. Three common ones we use are:

- Factual Listener – this person listens for the facts or actions of the story
- Feelings Listener - this person listens for the feelings expressed or embodied in the story
- Values Listener – this person listens for the values embedded in the story

As the storyteller describes a specific moment, the other three group members are listening with their particular perspective. When the story is done they then share with the storyteller what they heard in the story from their listening vantage point.

Once a full round has concluded, the roles rotate one person to the right, and the process is repeated. If you offer people three minutes to tell a story, and then roughly ten minutes for the other three people to share what they heard, you can complete all four rounds in approximately an hour.

A Titling Exercise

Another exercise I use focuses on a group generating a title together for a particular story. This process does not require a specific number of people per group, although 3-5 people is probably optimum.

In the titling exercise one person tells a brief story (here any of the prompts from the previous exercise would work, or you could choose a different one), while the other members of the group listen carefully. Once the story teller is finished, he or she faces away from the other participants and listen as they offer potential titles for the story. After all possible titles are suggested the storyteller turns back around and chooses one of them, explaining why it appeals to them. If none of the titles “work” for the story teller, he or she can offer a different title.

Asking the storyteller to turn away from the other group members helps him or her to concentrate on what they are hearing, rather than focusing on the person who is sharing the title. It embodies a form of distancing oneself and then turning back into the group. It helps if stories are limited to no more than three minutes, and to make sure that there is a time limit on the discussion of titles. If you run this activity with lots of small groups, you can then collect the set of titles from each group and present them as a “table of contents” to the whole workshop that can ignite curiosity about the stories.