

## Stewarding Our Stories

November 3, 2024

### Matthew 25:14-30

*<sup>14</sup> “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once <sup>16</sup> the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup> But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

Please pray with me:

God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

August 22, 2024, the headline of the Metro and Iowa section of the Des Moines Register read: “Bychinski recalled as selfless.” I was visiting my mom and just happened to browse through the printed newspaper that arrives at her door each morning. Keith Bychinski was just 31 years old, and the article told the sad story of his drowning. He waded into a local pond to help two young boys trying to retrieve their

fishing rod. Diagnosed with autism as a child, it was his nature to be kind and generous. He was working for a landscape company when the two boys asked for his assistance. His mom said, “he would help anyone when given the chance.”

It's what I read next that transported me back to May 1976. The article said that she hoped the families of the boys didn't feel any guilt for her son's death. She said, “If Keith hadn't helped those boys and they would've jumped in and something would've happened to them, he would have never been able to forgive himself. I don't want them feeling like it's their fault because it's not.”<sup>1</sup>

My mom nodded when I asked her if she read the article. She knew exactly what I was thinking, and together we recalled the day a grieving mother called me. I was just 15 years old, and it was the day of her son's funeral. She called to tell me she knew it wasn't my fault. She didn't want me to live with that guilt. My mother called her back right away and spoke with her, thanking her for her kindness at such a difficult time.

It's hard to say what altered my life more, the accident that left a young motorcyclist dying in the street, or the phone call from his mom. He ran the stop sign. He hit the side of my car and went under the car – the car I was driving. No helmet. What astounded me about her phone call was that she was thinking about my well-being – she was caring for me – as she was about to bury her son.

Without a doubt it was a formational event in my life. Years later I wrote a letter to Mrs. Butts, that was her name. I had nowhere to send it, but it was a good exercise for me to reflect upon how that event and her call shaped my life. I wanted her to know that I had not forgotten him, and her pain. I wanted her to know how it informed my ministry.

It is often the most painful stories of our lives that shape us, for better or worse. One of Richard Rohr's well-known quotes is: “If you don't transform your pain, you will almost certainly transmit it.” I have thought of it often as I tend the wounds from my own past.

“What do you do with your pain?” was one of the questions we explored in a small group this summer. Fourteen of us went through the book, “Telling Stories in the Dark,” by Jeffry Munroe; Lynn's brother. Chapter after chapter told the painful but familiar stories of people navigating suffering and pain. Reading those stories as a small group created space for us to tell our stories. It was heavy, hard, and powerful.

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<sup>1</sup> Jose Mendiola, The Des Moines Register, “Bychinski recalled as selfless,” August 22, 2024

The book's introduction introduced us to author and theologian, Frederick Buechner and his concept of the stewardship of pain. He stumbled into this language while speaking at a retreat. He felt safe enough to tell a particularly painful childhood experience with his alcoholic father, who later died by suicide. Someone came up to him after his talk and said, "you have had a good deal of pain in your life." The man continued, "You've been a good steward of it." Buechner was thrown off by his comment at first. He certainly didn't hear it as a compliment. He never set out to be a great steward of pain.

He began to reflect on this concept, the stewardship of pain, and all the ways we deal with our pain, and this led him to our parable for today. It's one of those parables often used for stewardship sermons – with the usual message of "do something with what you have been given." Never have I ever connected this parable to our pain and wounds...Buechner had the audacity to say that our wounds and the pain we carry are a treasure to be traded, not buried.

So how do we steward our pain? How do we transform it, so we don't transmit it? How can we find something redemptive in our suffering?

If it were encouraged in our culture and in our religious communities, a beginning would be lament. If you are not familiar with that word it is a passionate expression of grief or [sorrow](#). It is wailing. It is physical. It is communal. It is a purging of the raw emotions. It is letting it rip with your anger at God at the situation at others. There are Psalms of lament in our scripture. But too often, we don't want to go there. It feels too much like falling apart, yet the wisdom of scripture includes it. Acknowledging that we are not very good with the open wounds of lament we can move on to a good next step – storytelling.

We tell the story, and we name the hurt. That is the wisdom of Desmond Tutu and his daughter Mpho Tutu from their book, "The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path of Healing Ourselves and Our World." In this book they write about the transformative power of telling our stories and naming our hurts with others encircling us.

Telling our stories connects us. It draws us together in the shared experience of pain and fosters a desire to help one another steward their pain. "Healing comes as we widen the lens and take in the reality that loss is something many others have experienced. My pain is my pain, but it is also something that links me to others in a deep irreducible way."<sup>2</sup> In sharing our stories we can participate in each other's healing.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Munroe, Telling Stories in the Dark, 2024, p. 49-50.

Our book from this summer reminded our small group that we live in a culture that “disowns” grief. We say things like: “put it behind you,” “get over it,” and “get on with your life.” That is the language of disowning. “The goal of grieving is not to move on from it, or to somehow overcome it, the goal is to own it and take it into your being. As time passes, the goal shifts from not only owning one’s grief, but owning it redemptively, to use it to help others.”<sup>3</sup>

Henrey Nouwen, well known for his book, “The Wounded Healer” said it well. He wrote: “Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. The main question is not “How can we hide our wounds?” so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but “How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?” When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.”

So where is God in all of this? God is in our lamenting and grieving. God is in the telling of our stories. God is in the mending of the broken fragments of our lives. God is in the connecting of our stories. Sometimes we’re the one in need, sometimes we’re the ones who come along side the one in pain. When we trade our sorrows with one another, rather than burying them, we discover wisdom, empathy, and compassion; we experience the holy.

The Sufi Poet Rumi said, “The wound is the place where light enters you...”

Many years have passed since the accident of my youth. There have been other sorrows...but it is that memory that returns time and time again...in the sound of a mother’s voice and the painful intersection of our lives. My hope and my prayer are that I have stewarded well her sorrow entangled with mine.

What are the formational stories of your lives? What have you done with your pain?

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Munroe, Stories, p. 151

