

The Truth Shall Set You Free

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, May 10, 2018

Genesis 3: 8-13 and Mark 7: 31-37

I've always wanted to write a memoir, to share the story of my personal journey, but I've feared how people might react if they were to learn some deeply personal details about me.

When we carry the burden of shame, a belief that we are somehow deficient or unworthy of unconditional love and acceptance because of who we are or what we've experienced, we also carry the agony, as writer Maya Angelou put it, of "bearing an untold story inside" of us. We either choose to leave out certain details or never tell the story. Period.

Adam and Eve do the former. When God asks Adam how he knew of his own nakedness, Adam says Eve gave him the fruit and so he ate it. While that's true, Adam leaves out a key detail: he chose to eat the fruit. Likewise, Eve blames the serpent, leaving out her choice to eat. Blame feels better than shame, after all.

Yet God wants us to get past our fear and shame. God wants us to live openly, honestly, into the fullness of who and what we are and have been created to be. Look at how Jesus takes the deaf man aside and, in privacy, opens his ears and tongue. Jesus sighs, empathizing with and releasing the deaf man's suffering, saying "be opened." It's a deeply intimate moment. And it's liberating.

Some of us attended a retreat in Lenox, Massachusetts, last week that asked "What's Our Story?" It was a safe and supportive space that invited us to open our ears and mouths, and it was wonderful to see how the Spirit was speaking and working through us.

I was asked, along with some others, to share a story with the whole group about an experience in which I learned something about myself. The story I first thought of telling involved a very deep healing experience, but certain details connected to that story were so intimate that I chose to share a different story altogether. Fear and shame censored me. What would people think if they learned *that* about me?

A story someone else told at one point during the retreat resonated with the one I had really wanted to share, so much so that the act of listening, of learning I wasn't alone in my experience, was cathartic. Then I felt the agony of having left my story untold. Who knows what further healing might have come—for me or for others—had I opened up and entered a more vulnerable space as this person did?

Author and professor Brené Brown has stated, "Owning our story and loving ourselves through the process is the bravest thing that we'll ever do." For some, this can be a slow process, like a chick pecking at its shell. But it *can* happen—with an open heart guiding the mouth and ears, a heart filled with Jesus' own compassion and vulnerability. Agony can become joy. For it is in those moments of raw and naked and unabashed honesty that God really does speak and move through us. The truth really can set us free. Will we speak it and will we hear it?