

Telling Our Stories - Craig D.B. Patton

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Part I: Children's Time

You want to know something a little weird? A lot of the adults here in church probably have no idea what we're doing in Sunday school these days. None. So, let's help them out. Who can tell me a little about the story we're studying right now?

Ok, good. That's right. Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem when he's about 12 years old. And when they leave, he stays behind in the temple. Mary and Joseph have to go back to get him. What's Jesus been doing? What's he still doing when they find him?

Talking with the rabbis, that's right. Talking and talking and talking with them. Do you know anyone who, when they get excited about something, they just can't stop talking?

Jesus was one excited kid. He wanted to know all of the stories about God. He spent his whole life telling those stories and lots of new ones too. And everyone he met was changed by them. People gathered, like we do here, and they were changed because they learned about God together.

It's true. I know. Let me tell you a story:

Once upon a time, I came to First Church. And in this place I met dozens and dozens of children. You asked me questions about the Bible that made me think. You inspired me to write Christmas plays about workshop elves and talking foxes and a nervous Jewish family and then you gave them life. I saw God in each of you.

Now it's time to go learn more about the story of Jesus in the temple, but as you go, I invite you to join everyone else in offering each other a sign of God's love. Let us pass the peace.

Part II – Telling Our Stories

Now, what I said to the kids a minute ago wasn't some sort of sales pitch to get one of you to sign up to replace me in the Sunday School. Although, Cindy will have an opening. No, it was something more important. Like all good stories, at its heart, it was true. I have been changed by my time here at First Church.

Another of the truths in my story is that First Church and I were not an instant match. I did not walk in the door with Alison in 2007 and find myself at home. It took some time. It took some careful listening for God's voice. And, in the end, it took a few leaps.

The first leap came at Rev. Kevin's invitation. He asked me to co-lead a young adult trip to Back Bay Mission in January of 2008. I didn't really know Kevin. I had never been on a mission trip, much less co-led one. I had never worked with young adults. But I thought I could hear that tiny voice of God.

I said yes. And I wound up having an extraordinary, powerful week. I learned a lot and helped where I could. And there was no hesitation when I co-led trips the next year to D.C. or the year after that to Boston. Along the way, I formed some friendships that have continued despite age differences and the fact we rarely actually see each other. Together, we learned more about what God wants us to do and then we went out and worked to do it.

Shortly after that first trip to Back Bay, Cindy Cole approached me about co-teaching in the Mouse Pad - the computer room for the Sunday School. I didn't really know Cindy. I had never taught in a classroom. I had never worked with a range of young children. But I again heard that tiny voice.

I said yes. You've already heard a bit about that part of my story. In addition to getting to know the wondrous children of this church, teaching in the Mouse Pad gave me the chance to spend more time with a wide range of Bible stories. I've had to think about what the truth is at the heart of each story and how it relates to the life of a 6-12 year old child in 2012. And doing that has made each one a sharper, clearer lesson for me in my own life.

And then there are the Christmas plays I've written and directed. I'd never done those things before either.

Saying yes to those invitations, taking those leaps to try something new, made all the difference for me. I found my role in the epic story of First Church. A place where I have been able to grow and express my faith in new ways. A place where I've learned from so many others by working alongside them, practicing our faith together.

And now, if you'll excuse me, there's a roomful of children waiting to teach me more about Jesus in the temple. Peace be with you.