



Stories connect us. James K.A. Smith in his book on the 5th century St Augustine of Hippo, “On the Road with St Augustine” describes how Alcoholics Anonymous uses the practice of shared stories to bring people out of addiction. The thing about these stories is that they are all familiar: the path of addiction runs down similar tracks. These aren’t stories that seek novelty; they are not shared because of their originality. The stories are shared because, in Smith’s words, “they weave a web of solidarity”.

Across the nation, and even the world, we are hearing familiar stories. They are accounts of isolation. They are stories of fear and trepidation. They tell of the pressures of new constraints on our daily lives. But we are also hearing stories of goodwill and generosity. Neighbours reaching out to one another. The self-sacrifice of health workers, shopworkers, caregivers and other essential workers who are keeping us protected and fed.

These are not new or markedly different stories one from another. But telling them brings us together, in the midst of our physical separation, into a lived, shared experience.

An experience that we all share can become a comfort and a strength. It gives a perspective and a reassurance that something we hold alone cannot always allow. That is why one of the best things we can do for our mental health is to share how we are feeling with someone we trust. A shared experience gives us hope: others will have experienced the same thing you have, and have come through the other side.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is the great, defining, shared story for Christians. The witness to what God has done for us through Jesus’ death and resurrection resonates into all our individual lives in different ways, but the themes are consistent. The story is both startlingly old, and remarkably familiar. Other people too, at different times and in different places, will have experienced the isolation at the Garden of Gethsemane, the pain of rejection and humiliation, the fear of death on that first Maundy Thursday.

Yet the Christian story allows us to experience all these things with the knowledge of the hope of the resurrection to come. This grand narrative, the big story of Jesus, is a very human story transformed by God. And that is exactly what we are invited to participate in as Christians. We each have our stories, but it is in the hands of God that they are woven into glory.

When we share our feelings, even our deepest fears and disappointments with others, we often have a sense of being held. When we take that path of turning around our human story towards God, in Jesus, we become a part of a new human family that can also hold us. But we are also held by God, our rock and our hope. We may be apart, but we will never be alone.

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