

Last week I introduced the notion of a FRAMING STORY, the overarching narrative that provides a people or culture with a FRAMEWORK through which they understand their place in the world.

I spoke of AMERICA's framing story—the story we tell ourselves about ourselves—and how it's being challenged these days as long ignored realities reexert themselves.

And I suggested that when Jesus began his ministry, the EMPIRE OF ROME OWNED THE FRAMING STORY for the western world and ENFORCED THAT FRAME through its military reach and its ruthless invention for dealing with dissent: the CROSS.

In the first chapter of Mark, when Jesus emerges from obscurity to proclaim the nearness of God's reign he is, I said, proclaiming an alternative to EMPIRE.

DON'T ALLOW YOUR LIVES TO BE FRAMED BY THE NARRATIVES OF ROME, says Jesus. SITUATE YOURSELVES IN A DIFFERENT STORY, THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOD, NOT CAESAR, IS LORD, AND THAT WE CAN LIVE IN RELATION TO GOD AND GOD'S LOVE RATHER THAN CAESAR AND CAESAR'S POWER.¹

When Jesus calls disciples—calls us—to follow him ON THE WAY, he's inviting us to live under the influence of a FRAMING STORY different than Rome's story or America's story or any other FRAMING STORY the world has come up with.

Today's reading builds on that theme.

Today we learn that Jesus, for the second time, is teaching his disciples that
“the SON OF MAN will be betrayed, killed, and after three days, will rise again.”

And Mark comments: BUT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WAS SAYING AND WERE AFRAID TO ASK HIM.

Well, I get the part about being afraid! The first time the topic of Jesus' death came up Peter got a royal dressing down—remember?

GOD FORBID THAT WOULD EVER BE YOUR FATE, LORD! Peter had said.
To which Jesus responds: GET BEHIND ME, SATAN! YOU HAVE NO CLUE WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

Like the student in class who, confident he knows the answer, blurts it out, only to discover he is embarrassingly off the mark, neither Peter nor the others are willing to broach the topic again with a 10-foot pole.

¹ Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Thomas Nelson, 2007. Page 90.

The truth is, it was a long time after the soul-numbing experience of his crucifixion and the mind-boggling news of his resurrection before the discipleship community could grasp the true meaning of the new WAY that Jesus had been trying to show them.

They simply weren't able to comprehend it while he was still with them.

Only when they experienced the unqualified forgiveness and undeserved grace of the very one whom they had deserted and betrayed, ONLY THEN were they finally able to move beyond paralysis and into mission.

But at this point, with Jerusalem a long way away and their hopes for glory still intact, the disciples of Jesus aren't ready for that conversation.

They'd rather focus their talk on something that makes more sense—what living under Empire has taught them: PECKING ORDER—who's on top and who's on the bottom; who're the winners and who're the losers. Who is the greatest.

This isn't lost on Jesus. So when they arrive at their destination, Capernaum, he asks them: WHAT WERE YOU ARGUING ABOUT ON THE WAY? And not one of them wants to 'fess up.

Jesus had invited the Twelve to learn a new way of being in the world, to live by a DIFFERENT FRAMING STORY than the one that has largely dominated human cultures from the beginning: that MIGHT MAKES RIGHT, that BEING FIRST IS NOT ONLY EVERYTHING—IT'S THE ONLY THING!

Talk about God's anointed one being rejected and killed doesn't fit this old template, and no matter how many times Jesus tries to teach them, this new information doesn't penetrate.

But Jesus is not about to give up on them. So he sits down with them and sketches the outlines of the NEW FRAMING STORY once more:

WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST, MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL.

Then driving the point home, he brings a young child into the circle, sits her on his knee, and says: WHOEVER WELCOMES SUCH A CHILD, WELCOMES ME AND WHOEVER WELCOMES ME, WELCOMES THE ONE WHO SENT ME...

... And a child becomes the emblem of God's FRAMING STORY.

In the film, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, Atticus Finch, an attorney in a small southern town, serves as defense counsel for a black man accused of raping a white woman.²

The night after the man's arrest Atticus suspects there will be trouble, and so he comes to sit on the jailhouse porch where the defendant is being held.

While he's there a mob of angry white men come with torches, shotguns, and a rope. They don't want a trial; they want to lynch the defendant right then and there.

The situation is tense. Atticus stands his ground, but knows he won't be able to hold the mob off forever.

It's then, with the pressure mounting, that Atticus' young daughter, Scout, who's been secretly watching the situation, comes running through the crowd and takes her place by her father's side.

Atticus tells her to go home, but she won't budge.

While she stands there with her father, she looks at the crowd and starts to recognize the faces of some of the men—they are the fathers of some of her friends and schoolmates. She calls out their names—greeting them as only a child in that tense situation could—and asks them to pass her greeting on to their children.

In her presence the resolve of the angry men begins to crumble and shame takes its place. Scout's innocence becomes a mirror for them and they don't like what they see.

An awkward silence envelops the mob until one of the leaders turns to go. Others soon follow, and Scout becomes the unlikely hero whose presence shifts the tide of hatred and violence without lifting a finger. REFRAMING THE STORY.

Each of us has received the call in our baptism, to conform our lives to God's FRAMING STORY. To walk the Jesus Way bit by bit, step by step, day by day.

Of course we struggle at it—and fail more times that we can count! But we keep at it and don't give up, because our Lord REFUSES TO GIVE UP ON US!

To be servants of the Servant—there is no greater calling?

Amen.

² A Horton Foote screenplay, based on the novel by Harper Lee. Robert Mulligan, director, 1962.