

prayer toolkit

bible story telling

AIMS

To explore how bible storytelling can be a starting point for meditation and prayer.

INTRODUCTION

In the toolkit item Praying with the Bible some ideas about using the Bible for prayer are given. In this document you will find an example of Bible based story telling that could also be a starting point for meditation and prayer.

You may use this on your own or in a small group. Make sure you are in a comfortable and quiet place to begin. Give the story your full attention. Either read it out aloud or silently as you prefer. Take your time to take the whole story in carefully.

STORY: The Funeral

Many years ago I was in the 'undertaking' business. They don't like this terminology now. It has to be Funeral Directors. Looking back, I realise now what a good "steady" job it was. There is no fear of recession hitting you too hard in that profession. The dead have to be buried, or cremated, no matter what the economic climate is. However, I must admit that I did not like the road accidents and young children's funerals.

I won't tell you the name of the company I worked for, but say they are based here in our town fairly close to our church. In those days they were considered the elite of the local funeral trade. If you wanted a good "classy" funeral, and the majority of people do, they were the ones to go to. We had a lovely fleet of hearses and cars then. Specially built Daimler Majestic Majors that made the occasion appear really regal, if you know what I mean. There were none of those "stretched" Volvos then! Yes, those Daimlers certainly gave a majestic air to a funeral, especially the hearses. Wonderful machines and a 'real joy' to slide the coffin in and out of those.

There was a lovely "Chapel of Rest" on the premises in those days. If you wanted a little peace and quiet at lunchtime it was an ideal place to go and eat your sandwiches. I have to admit to finding some of the other chaps lunchtime conversations being a "trifle lacking" in variety and interest at times. The main topic being football, and I will leave you to guess the other!! So the Chapel provided a nice quiet haven for a little contemplation.

I had been in this profession for a few years, and as you know, people get to learn what job you are doing. On several occasions I had been approached "to set the wheels in motion" for organising a funeral. People are understandably lost they are when confronted with bereavement. I suppose it is a case of shock and bewilderment.

Well that is how I became involved in Colin's funeral. Colin Barnes that is.

Living locally then, I had known him and his mother, Mrs Judy Barnes, for quite a few years. This was indirectly through my parents, because we lived reasonably local to them, and also through attendance at Christ Church.

Judy Barnes' husband, George, had died some years earlier when Colin was still a boy. Apparently he had been at work one day at his job of machine man at one of the local paper mills, when he collapsed, was rushed to hospital, but was found to be dead on arrival. The shift working in those days could be a real "killer". His grave is in the local cemetery.

prayer toolkit

bible story telling

Well you can imagine what the shock of this did to Judy Barnes. I remember that she was in a terrible state for months after this tragedy. The long term consequence of this though was, that although things were probably rather a struggle for her, she tended to really "molly-coddle" young Colin. I suppose it was only natural in the circumstances. Well Colin seemed to "go along" with his mother doting on him, and this continued through his school days, even when he started to go out to work.

As far as I can recollect, Colin had been working for almost three years when he decided to go on one of those winter holidays in the sun, accompanied by a mate of his. This was quite an innovation in those days, going off from the dreary winter here to some exotic sunny clime. I won't tell you where it was, just in case you are contemplating going abroad. All I will disclose is, it was outside of Europe. Also in those days, with this sort of trip being such a novelty, very few people bothered about all these doctor's "jabs" which are so prevalent now.

So Colin went off on this holiday and I can recollect seeing him just a few days after his return, feeling rather envious of the sun tan he had acquired. Apparently it had been a wonderful break for him and he was really enthusiastic about it.

Well you can imagine my surprise to learn only three days later that Colin had been taken ill. After two days ill at home he was rushed to hospital. He had only been in hospital three days when we were shocked to learn that he had died. It would appear that during his sojourn abroad he had contracted some rare "bug", and returning to this quite chilly climate had exacerbated the condition.

As you can imagine, poor Judy Barnes was in a real state of shock and in no state to make all the arrangements necessary for the funeral. That is how I became partly involved, primarily to see my boss and for him to start preparations for the funeral.

The day of the funeral arrived. It was a Thursday at approximately 2.30 p.m. if I remember correctly, in Christ Church. I must say that a real special effort had been made with the preparation of the hearse and cars that day. It was also a very good quality coffin, not like some of the things you get these days. In the church it was quite crowded, not your average funeral. The minister did particularly well that day, conducting what was a very emotional and disturbing service.

After the service Fred Mealing, our foreman, led us out with the coffin to the hearse, which we duly loaded and waited while the mourners got into the following cars. We then proceeded to the cemetery, where Judy Barnes had decided she wanted Colin to be buried as close to her late husband's grave as possible.

Arriving at the cemetery, we drove very slowly up to the north section and stopped the hearse. Do you know the cemetery? Well, the grave was to be in that area at the top, about the farthest corner from the main entrance.

It was one of those raw, cold, overcast, murky, December afternoons and I recollect thinking that, although I was feeling rather chilled, by the time we had trudged up hill with the coffin I would be feeling warmer. So up we slowly walked to the grave with the retinue of mourners following. When you are carrying a coffin it is difficult to assess how the mourners are coping behind you.

Well we had got about half way to the open grave, just at the point when I started to feel the strain, when glancing up the hill to the boundary fence my attention was caught by a reasonably large collection of people. They were entering the cemetery through the top

prayer toolkit

bible story telling

gate from the footpath, which runs parallel to the boundary line. My thoughts were, what a cheek some people have got. You would expect them to keep a respectful distance in these circumstances. A scruffy, rather dishevelled group in my opinion. They appeared to be following some bloke, at least he seemed to be leading with the rest following. Surely out of respect for the mourners they could have continued down the footpath, and not taken a detour through the cemetery grounds.

As we continued trudging up to the grave this group of people were heading for us, and I could sense that the minister was getting in a very agitated state by their presence. Well we met almost at the grave, and at a 'nod' from Fred Mealing we came to a halt, then gently set the coffin down on the ground. It was very disturbing. What with the chill northerly wind and the eyes of the chap leading the group almost seeming to look straight through us. I started to shiver quite profusely even though we had exerted ourselves coming from the hearse.

Nothing was said or happened for what seemed ages, yet was probably only a few seconds. Then this group stopping our progress to the grave seemed to shrink back slightly, leaving this chap who apparently was their leader to walk slowly forward to Fred Mealing. Looking straight into Fred's eyes, he told him to open the coffin. Probably ordered him to would be a better description. Well I quite expected to hear Fred tell him just what to do. But no, he produced the little tool kit from his overcoat inside pocket. Fred always carried this apparently after a last minute panic some years before to put in the embalmed leg that had been amputated from the gentleman they were just about to inter. Dumbstruck we all just stood there while Fred proceeded to open the coffin and slowly lift up the lid. If I had any thoughts at all while this was happening, it was probably, Well, this is instant dismissal for you Fred when we get back to the office. The apparent leader of this crowd who had brought us to a halt, walked slowly over to Judy Barnes. Laying his hand on her shoulder he said something to her very quietly. Then he proceeded over to the open coffin, looked in very carefully, and said in a very loud voice, "Young man, Get up". A movement came from the coffin, and slowly we saw Colin sit up, then start to talk. Keeping complete control of the situation, he then helped Colin up, leading him over to where his mother stood. Both then began to walk away down the hill, while we just stood there, shivering violently in the cold December wind. Well, that was the end of my employment in the funeral profession. I still have the occasional night when it haunts me.

To think about

Take some time to consider the following questions:

How would you have reacted if you had been present at that funeral?

How does the story relate to the one at Luke 7:11-16. You might like to read this Bible passage through twice as you think about it.

What do you have to share after listening to this story and this Bible reading?

You may want to doodle, draw or make a few notes of your thoughts, perhaps using your prayer journal (see booklet). Or you may want to discuss the story and your reactions with a prayer partner or at a prayer group.

prayer toolkit

bible story telling



Prayer

God of surprises,

You come to us in words and silence.

Open us to your amazing presence

and help us to be ready to respond to you.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

Perhaps you can think of other stories you could use in this way. If so don't forget to send them in to janet@bobjanet.demon.co.uk

The lectionary for prayer year is based around the Gospel of Luke. You will find more Bible and prayer related materials on the website, some of which use Luke and Acts in the Bible studies for prayer document in the toolkit.

Acknowledgements

This story was contributed by John Hillson of High Wycombe URC.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 1 – Transformed by the Bible: bible@vision4life.org.uk

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk