



SIEBENQUELL

I tell stories, because I believe



Over twenty years ago John Shea told this story.

»A woman came to me. She had found some marijuana in the dresser of her son while he was in school. She was furious. He comes through the door and she starts to slap him and scream at him. She goes crazy. He does not even know what is going on.

After she was done with him, she came to see me. We sat down and she told me what a horrible human being this kid was. She worked her way through his entire growing up. He is now 16 years old. She tells of his smoking and his use of pot. And when she is finally finished, this kid has just emerged from the pit of hell. This woman was caught in total negative rendition. She only told the negative stories of his life.

When she was done, I asked her, »How does he get along with his sister?« She snorted, »Terrible!«

I asked further. »Has he ever done anything good for his sister?«

She responded, somewhat quieter, »Well, he bought her that sweater she wanted for Christmas.«

I pressed on. »Tell me more. Did she like the sweater when she opened the present?«

She answered tersely, »Yes.«

I asked more. »Your son works in the family business. Is he utterly irresponsible?«

She replied tersely, »No.«

And thus I gradually moved her to tell the good stories about the life of her son.«

Why did John Shea do this? As he says, partially out of instinct, but mostly out of faith.

Our faith tells us, that the corruption that is in us, as well as the destructive tendencies into which we repeatedly fall, are never the whole story about our life. Every life contains value, dignity and meaning. They are freely created by God and deeply cherished by him. Our sinfulness and the destructiveness in us always play themselves out within this context of the value, dignity and meaning that were created by God. We do what we do, but always as beloved and wanted people.

The only way to deal with this destructiveness is if we can tell the stories of goodness. Otherwise our consciousness will be dominated by the stories of destruction. As soon as that happens, we start to hate. And the next step is, that we are then ready to kill. Of course, the mother is not going to murder her son. But she will say dumb things like, »I won't go to his wedding!« or »I will throw him out of the house. It would be better that way. I don't want to see him ever again!«

When we only tell the negative stories about people, we reduce them to their negative moments. Now they are no longer the good creature with value, dignity and meaning, who have strayed on the wrong path. No, when we only tell the negative stories, they are merely the corrupted creature. Then we are liberated and can deal with them as we please.

We can do this to ourselves as well. We can tell stories about ourselves this way, about every failure, mistake and error. Here, too, we need to learn to tell good stories of our lives and to contemplate our failures, mistakes and errors within that framework.

Today, when I am asked why I continue to grapple with stories and storytelling so much and so intensively, I must give a simple answer. I tell stories, because I believe. The faith out of which I act tells me, that the value, dignity and meaning which God created and placed within us, comes before original sin. Thus, I try to draw these stories to the surface, as the framework within which we can deal with the destructiveness.

I tell stories, because I believe the stories God told me.

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