

## Let the guest be welcome

When the nomads of the Negev desert invite a person into their tent, the greeting they offer is »Let the guest be welcome!« In this world of the desert, a world in which it is never easy to maintain and fashion life, there are few words that are warmer than these.

All the truth of the world is contained in stories. The storytellers of the world have one all-consuming interest, namely, our human experiences. In order to be able to say something about our human life, they make use of the vehicle of the story. For when words first need to find the mind of a person in order to touch the heart, then the storyteller knows all too well, that the mind is a pitifully small target.

»When someone tells you a piece of their story (life), they're giving you a gift, not granting you your due« (Stories of Faith, p.9). Stories do not have to be new in order to bring us pleasure and joy. Some stories are like well-known friends. Some are as reliable as bread.

These times of storytelling in Siebenquell under the title »Let the Guest be Welcome« invite people to discover the warmth and the wonder of the stories for their lives.

It is easy to state what moves us to offer these courses. Stories open new worlds to us. They help us not just to discover these new worlds, but also to navigate them. Simply, stories change people. And we offer people these new worlds, ways and possibilities from the bottom of our hearts.

### How Stories Change People

Whenever we discover something, we immediately wish to tell someone. There is nothing worse than being full of a story and having no ear into which to pour it. When the old woman Anna sees the child Jesus, »she spoke about the child to all who were waiting for the salvation of Jerusalem« (Lk 2, 38). Naturally, if it is a matter of secret, then the pleasure of revelation is all the greater. Jesus once said to his disciples, that he was fulfilling a prophecy that stated, »I open my mouth and speak in parables, I proclaim what has been hidden since the days of creation« (Mt 13, 35).

This remark is more than a little ironic. Parables may be revelatory, but they are seldom clear. That which has been hidden from the beginning of creation often remains hidden even after the telling of the parable. Nonetheless, the desire to tell what we have experienced and discovered remains. In this way our stories are born and told.

### The Inspired Imagination and the Answering Imagination

We all have insights into the stories of God, at least once in a while. A story of God ambushes us and tells us something containing life within it. We become aware of a story about Jesus or one he told himself. It impels us, imposes itself upon us and we discover something that serves life. This is what John Shea calls the inspired imagination of the Scriptures.

When our eyes are open and our ears no longer blocked, our tongues will loosen as well. We will speak back to that which spoke to us first. This is what John Shea calls the answering imagination.

When we enter into a biblical story we need to offer a response. Usually that response will follow something akin to the following pattern.

The fullness of a response lays in our actions. If we hear the word and act upon it, we will live. If we are not yet able to act, we can first pause and reflect.

»A third option is that we can imaginatively respond. Some people compose music, others paint, still others...dance.« (John Shea, *The Spirit Master*, p. 195). We at Siebenquell share this passion for poetry and stories. We are convinced, that we cannot approach Jesus, walk his way of know his fullest revelation without the way of the story.

### **The Wager of the Storyteller**

Storytelling is a risky business. There is no telling if they will work what we hope for, if they will work and on what level they will work. There is no controlling the power of story. Sometimes people will walk away, apparently unperturbed by the tale they just heard. At other times, they will be touched and moved, maybe driven to action and occasionally transformed. Unlike the clarity of explanations, in storytelling there are no guarantees. To tell a story is to let go of a great deal of control, for people will always hear more than we intend to tell. This is the wager every storyteller enters into.

In the great storytelling tradition of Christianity, we have always taken that bet. We wager that the stories will work, that they will have an effect, that they will work their transforming power. This is no irrational act, devoid of thoughtful observation. It is no mere leap into the void. Our own experience has deepened this trust, this primordial conviction. We have experienced what happens when people tell a tale about how they came to faith. Then we have watched them struggle to tell the tales of how they explored and deepened that faith experience. We went on to listen and receive the stories of how they made that faith work. And at the end of this series of stories, we have stood and wondered at how it starts all over again. Stories beget stories. The wager is reasonable.