



So What's the Problem?

*T*he story, the only story that Christians have, is the story of God's love and grace made manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This story is our personal story, that God loved each one of us so much that God sent Christ into the world to break through our alienation, despair, and death to make of us what the apostle Paul calls a "new creation." This singular, transformative event is the core of our story, the only story that we have to share with the world. This task is such an important one—so why is it so difficult? Why do we Christians have such a hard time with what should be a freeing and joyful proclamation?

The first problem is an external one. The world around us simply finds this proclamation difficult to believe. We live in a culture of perpetual suspicion and mistrust, one that finds it hard to believe that anything offered so freely is not encumbered by hidden strings and catches that will, in the end, cost us even more than we could ever imagine. And on a purely human level, this is a cynical yet reasonable assumption. Humans learn from an early age that there has to be a catch to everything, that there is no such thing as a free lunch, and that all offers come with fine print that negates all advantages. So often, when we open ourselves up to the possibilities of free goodness, when we reach out in trust, we find ourselves eventually bitterly disappointed, and the cycle of suspicion begins again, spiraling ever deeper.

So this is the background to how our temporal world hears the Christian proclamation of God's free and gracious love. It seems too good to be true, and that somehow, somewhere, there has to be a catch. And it is true—God wants something out of you (*Aha*, they say, *here is the catch!*). Loving each and every person so much, God wants us to have better lives, to be freed from the behaviors that harm us, our neighbors, and this world we live in. To some this sounds like a burden, a catch—but it is not. It is the beginning of the transformation that God intends. It is not a catch, but a gift, a promise that life will be infinitely better. God's will and God's love are goodness that transform. For Christians, the only task is to figure out how to proclaim this to a world mired in ever deepening spirals of suspicion.

But there is a second problem, and it is a problem inside of us. The problem is that we Christians live in the same cynical and untrusting world to which we are to witness, and the corrosive attitudes of our world undermine our own trust and confidence in God and God's promises. The question must be faced: Do we trust and believe in the message we are to proclaim? All too often, it seems, we do not. We are personally not sure enough of the message we are to share, which, of course, makes that proclamation all the more difficult. If we cannot believe fully in the good news, how can we expect to be good proclaimers of that good news?

So perhaps sharing the story of God's love and grace starts with hearing that story again ourselves. The old hymn puts it this way:

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best,
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.¹

We need to hear this story, over and over again, proclaimed in the power of God's love made present in Christ Jesus. We need to tell it to each other, to write it on our forearms and our foreheads, to hear the Christ story in many and various ways. To believe—to fully believe and trust in this story—is key. Then, telling the story is really much easier. When this power is inside of us, the cynicism and mistrust of the world hardly seems like an obstacle. Paul puts it this way:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." (Rom 1:16–17)

Sharing the story is our work and our joy, but the power of the story is from God. We are only the messengers.

Mark Granquist

¹ "I Love to Tell the Story," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 661 st. 3.