

DL: Writing Our Own Story

Last sermon from the Daring To Lead book! Some of you might be relieved. For the ten of you going deeper in the Wednesday class, you aren't done yet!

But I was intrigued by the example Brown leads with in this last segment of work. She was outlining how jumpers practice landing over and over before jumping out of the airplane. You need to know how to land, and how to handle a hard landing, before you jump out of the airplane with a parachute. I related. In my youth, in college, one of my cadre of friends was a jump instructor who was a Vietnam vet. He rigged packs and helped veterans who had lost legs in the war parachute. It had to do with weighting them and teaching them how to pull up and land. I wanted to jump. He said I didn't weigh enough to come down and if he weighted the pack to bring me down, I would land too hard. If you can't land, don't jump!

But as Brown observes, we don't do very well teaching our youth and young adults about hard landings. **We** didn't learn very well. And so after a couple bruising or breaking landings, we stop taking any risk and we just armor up. Failing isn't a Unity word so we just say after missing the mark enough times, we stop trying. These vulnerability and shame skills; the need for empathy and the courage to live our values; the permission to not do it right all the time are what we need to get back up after a hard landing. It's how we begin to write a new story. Stories run our lives so it's important we make it a good story for us.

Brown describes three parts to this new way of leading and doing life: Reckoning, Rumble and Revolution. We'll start with Reckoning, or as my grandpa would say, "Whoa Nellie". Now I assume Nellie was the name of a horse. Maybe a horse taking control and running. We have to say Whoa Nellie when we recognize we are hooked by emotion. You have maybe begun to identify those tense, breathless, churning feelings in your body that signal an emotional hook. Our lizard brain seeks to offload the feeling onto those around us or stuff it and ignore it. In this pattern, we never even get to the Reckoning. The challenging aspect of remaining afraid of our feelings is that fear continues to write our story and run our lives. Many people who are sent to anger management are convinced they aren't really angry. Or that anger has anything to do with the trouble that keeps arising in their relationships.

Brown's suggestion is that we identify the feeling and get curious about it.

We've talked many times about taking a breath. Brown uses the "box breathing" example. Breathe in for a count of 4, hold in 4, breathe out for a count of 4 and hold out 4. She says this creates a sense of calm.

She then defines calm as "creating perspective and mindfulness while managing emotional reactivity". Calm is helpful. It's interesting that both calm and anxious are contagious emotions. Ever notice how you begin to feel anxious when you are around a very anxious person? If you can remain calm, others around you can also begin to move into a calm space. It's helpful to ask, "Am I being a peaceful presence in the face of this emotion?" You might also ask, "Will freaking out be helpful?" Hardly ever! As you are curious about where this feeling is coming from, give yourself permission to feel the feeling.

The Rumble is exploring the Story we are making up. Humans are meaning making machines! And what we don't know we fill in with our made up stuff. Once you get calm, look at the story you are making up. Writing it down sometimes helps us see more clearly where we are going with it. After while we may notice we have a few "go-to" stories. You know the voice inside your head that tends to say, "What did you do now?" "How many ways can you screw this up?" "I'm a bad parent-student-partner, etc" These are the patterns we have developed to protect ourselves. These are also the foundations of our armoring up.

Identify the story and then challenge it. Brown suggests three questions: 1) What more do I need to know about the situation 2) What more do I need to know about the others 3) What more do I need to know about myself? What is under my response and what part did I play in the situation? This process of questioning calls us into connection and empathy, with ourselves and the others. It doesn't leave us spinning our own stories in the vacuum of our imagination. Frankly, it doesn't take much effort to sit and spin. Many of us have perfected the ability to continue to make up stories as we engage in numbing behavior. It is much more challenging to question the assumptions and made up stuff I am using in the story. It is difficult to seek out more information or even consider there are things I don't know in the situation. It takes courage and vulnerability to seek out information that relates to others. You might even have to talk to them. Yikes! I already have my story about them. If I talk to them, it might change my story. I'm used to my story. And, as Dr. Phil says, "How's that working for you?"

How much do we like digging into what we don't know about ourselves? First of all, we go back to fear. Most of us are afraid if we dig too deeply we'll discover yucky stuff about ourselves and who wants to know more of that? The crazy thing is, the more I know about how I react and the assumptions that are under much of my behavior, the more I can make brave choices that transform all my interactions. At the end of the book Brown quotes Joseph Campbell. "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek." How would you describe the cave you fear to enter? Maybe it is a relationship. Maybe it is an ancient story of original wounding that you continue to tell yourself. Maybe it is the world of feelings that rise up in daily life. Inside that cave is a key that frees you to begin to make brave choices; to dream bigger and live more generously.

Brown talks about the three most dangerous stories we make up and this is one spot where using this book in church allows us to go a little deeper. The first story is that we aren't lovable. Usually this story arises out of not being loved or feeling appreciated in ways we desire by people we have expectations of. What is true? We are made in the image and likeness of Divine Love. It is our best self and our true nature. Nothing we do or no judgment by others can change our true nature. The second story is that we aren't divine. Usually this story arises out of beliefs in humanity as broken and flawed and separate from divine nature. Somehow we believe we have been cast out and cannot be redeemed. What is true? NOTHING can separate us from the Oneness. Any separation is illusion and there is no benefit to living in that illusion. Lastly, we diminish our creativity in stories about comparison and failure. When we measure ourselves against someone else or things don't work out as we had expected or planned we create a story that we don't really have gifts and skills that are worthy and valuable. What is true? Comparison is a construction of humanity. You are unique in expression and exactly the same in value as every other spiritual being in human expression. Why doubt that your place in the web of life is any less creative and worthy than any other?

Delta is a math and science term that signifies the difference or change in. The difference between the story we make up about our experiences and the truth we discover in the Rumble is the rich substance of our spiritual growth. It is the grounding we need to begin to utilize our skills to write a new story. A story that is not run by unrecognized and unacknowledged feeling. A story that is not based in fear.

This is the Revolution. The last step where we get back up when we land hard. It is where we have that strong back, soft front and wild heart. We take risks and we live into our values. Brown says, "We fail the minute we let someone else define our success for us." This means taking time to identify what has joy and meaning for us. For some it might be big gatherings and for some it might be solitude. For some it might be travel and for some it might be staying home. Don't let other people define what success looks like and don't compare what gives you joy to what other people say gives them joy. Joy is not a competition! It is listening to our soul speaking through us.

Choose courage over comfort.

Choose whole hearts over armor.

Choose being brave and afraid; fierce and kind at the exact same time.

Dare to lead because we are the ones we're waiting for.