

Sunday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019      “Blessed are the Peacemakers”  
Stephanie Siemens and Dayna Goertzen

Steph

I think my favourite part about sermons has always been when the speaker tells a story. Now I'm not talking about Bible stories here. Not that Bible stories aren't good or anything, but it's always been the real life stories that drew me in. My ear would always perk up when, as a kid, Pastor Henry Block would start to tell about a time when he was a kid, or when he and Gladys lived in Jamaica.

Now I'm able to engage with sermons on a more intellectual level, and I enjoy the theological aspects of what is being talked about, but, it's when Patty starts a sentence with “This reminds me of one time when...” or “One summer, when Patrick at I...”. These are the cues that a story is about to be told. Automatically I refocus and find myself, metaphorically, on the edge of my seat, waiting for what is to come.

Stories are really important. Stories are personal, they allow for our empathy and understanding of one another to flourish. As true as facts may be, there are some things that stories do better. Certainly in the world of peacebuilding, stories are vital. We all have stories. I think one of the best things we did to celebrate OMC's 90th anniversary was to spend time every Sunday sharing our OMC stories. Stories are powerful.

For Dayna and I, storytelling was a steady theme throughout Planting Peace. Planting Peace is an MCC Alberta program where for one week, we got together at the beautiful Camp Valaqua with other young adults to learn and talk about peacebuilding. I think it's accurate to say that Dayna and I both really enjoyed the experience. The last time we stood up here together was to emcee the OMC 90 Coffeehouse/talent show. That is a good story to reminisce on. I don't think we'll be offering you any cheesy jokes to laugh at this morning, but hopefully we can give you some food for thought as we share about what we've taken away from our experiences at Planting Peace.

Dayna

Meeting new people and other peacebuilders

We learned about the sharing circle; telling, hearing, listening, incorporating, back to telling. We practiced this by hearing other people's stories, listening closely to what they felt they wanted to share with us personally, incorporated it, and then we actually shared what we heard with the group as if we were that person. It was interesting to see what the other person picked out from our story and highlighted, and the way they highlighted it was a different perspective from what we know. It was interesting. This was challenging also because we didn't know these people well at all yet we had to share a personal story of theirs to the group.

Had to be conscious not sharing what's not ours to share. Really challenged us.

Meeting new people:

- Challenged me to do something about my passions

- Helped me to see others living out Jesus' teachings about peacebuilding and caring for everyone, and gave me hope that peacebuilding is possible
- New people that can hold me accountable in a way to work for peace and peaceful relationships
- Encouraged me to try and build communities where we can brainstorm and work together
  - Myriam and Steph group

Feeling hope in a group that shares passions similar to mine and feels called to do something about it too

Steph

Storytelling is how we ended each day. I really liked this. Every evening two or three people shared their story. The prompt questions were:

- Who are you? Where do you come from?
- What inspires you?
- What have been turning points in your life?
- What are you working towards?

These are big questions. But important questions. They are difficult to answer because sometimes, we don't know the answer, sometimes we don't like the answer, or sometimes we aren't ready to share the answer out loud with others.

To answer them is to say something about ourselves.

What would you say in response to these questions? Who are you? What have been the turning points in your life? Would you be willing to share them with an almost random group of people? I wonder if we'd be more willing to share honest answers with strangers than with the people in the pews next to us? Are we a community that is safe for people to share their stories with? Do we make space for story sharing?

Do I as an individual listen well when people share their stories? Active listening is a critical part of honouring someone else's story, which is also critical to peacebuilding. How we listen is important. Am I listening to understand or listening to respond? Active listening is the key to building stronger foundations of understanding. I think this is why I dislike debates, especially political debates. It seems like no one listens to each other, everyone is talking over one another, or planning how they are going to break apart their opponents statements as said opponents are still speaking. This hardly seems like a practice that will lead to a peaceful outcome.

- I would say, I am a really good active listener, so long as what your saying doesn't contradict my strongly held beliefs.
- Active listening, is easy when we agree with what is being said, but really hard when the topic at hand is something we feel strongly about.

- Amber Bennett - speaker about AB Narratives Project.
  - Our time in AB came on the heels of a significant election. And, at least in the media, it seemed that positions on climate change and industry was a polarizing issue.
  - The project was centred around creating safe spaces for all groups of people to talk about climate change. And not about the facts, but about their stories and their experiences of it. These safe space were created by forming groups that had something in common. Teachers talked to teachers, farmers talked to farmers, Industry workers talked to industry workers etc etc. in this way people were able to let down there defences easier, they already knew they were among friends.
  - The project resulted in 2 final reports which “are intended to provide practical guidance for climate and energy communicators about what language works well and – crucially – what language might pose an obstacle for communicating with any specific group.”
- How do we talk about topics/issues that people have strong, differing opinions on?
  - Focus on STORIES to find common ground, understanding and a shared language to talk about climate change! Not facts
  - Book: “I’m Right and You’re an Idiot” by James Hoggan - our biases

#### Dayna

- Feeling lost before and just internalizing what I learn and am passionate about, now having a direction to start directing my passions, Anna gave us tools to use, it’s less daunting now
- We learned about change with Anna first. Without change we cannot work towards being activists for peace. Peacebuilding will take a change in how we see peace and how we interact with others, how we create relationships, etc. How do we handle change and work towards bettering something?
- We brainstormed, What is change? It is transformation, growth, a process, it requires commitment, it’s ambiguous, sometimes it “just happens” and sometimes it requires a lot of intentionality, it can be good or bad (which is debatable also), sometimes it’s unwanted, it can be internal or external, it’s inevitable, it can be scary or intimidating or also exciting, it requires action, it involves story telling, it is multidirectional and can happen in cycles, it involves collectives and individuals, it affects different groups differently, and it can give a sense of possibility.
- Anna taught us about the web systems of thinking. For example, you can teach someone to fish and they’ll eat for a lifetime. BUT, what about pollution in fishing waters, government regulations on fishing, or illegal overfishing? Among many other barriers.
  - This gave us perspective on how everything is interconnected in complex systems.

- The change should come from the people needing it, because they really know what is needed.
- **Tree example**
- So, advocacy. What is it? "...a set of organized actions aimed at influencing and/or changing the behaviours, policies, and resource allocation of individuals or institutions that hold power for the betterment of people affected by an issue"
- Advocacy: we in Canada and as white individuals have power and privilege, and a responsibility to take action.
  - There are systemic challenges that many people are caught in and we have a duty to respond. A big thing for me as I have learned more about my Mennonite pacifist faith is that we shouldn't be *passive* but work towards peace, and actually do something.
  - Advocacy can help people and their rights feel respected
  - It's based on our shared values - it's one way we can address suffering and the root causes
- We have to look at the posture of advocacy - why are we doing it? What are we doing or trying to get out of it? Are we going to help because they need "saving" or do we feel liberated and passionate and in need of advocating for the cause
- It's not charity but solidarity. Where do we start?
  - Listen to the people
  - Do your research - even talk to people with views different than yours to broaden your knowledge and understanding
  - Learn the system
  - Work with others in collective action - it will gain more momentum with more people
  - Pray/meditate
  - Plan carefully
  - Reflect
- This session stood out to me because I have all these passions about social justice that previously I didn't know what to do with, I had no clue where to even start. I learned more about our calling to action towards peacebuilding, and bringing what we've learned into our communities. If we keep it to ourselves nothing will happen. OMC is one of our communities, so it is a next step into doing something about what I learned. I hope that by sharing stories we can collectively be a community for change and advocacy.

## Steph

- Also really liked the tree exercise
- Anna also shared about her experiences as an MCC worker in Columbia.
- Worked with a community of people who had been displaced from the village by a militia group. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE. I can only imagine the trauma

that they experienced! How does an individual, let alone a whole community, heal from this trauma. Quilting. Women quilting.

- “For the Colombian coastal community of Mampuján, displaced from their land by a paramilitary group in 2000, quilting has become a way of recovering their past in order to weave a better future. First started as a trauma healing project, it quickly grew to encompass the entire community as women gathered together to talk about the pain they had suffered during their displacement.

The women of Mampuján decided to sew the history of their Afro-Colombian community, from life in Africa, to slavery, to agriculture, to displacement and recovery, in a series of tapestries.” (<https://themennonite.org/daily-news/quilting-project-heals-trauma-and-tells-stories/>)

- “The quilt in the museum is called *Travesía* (Travesty). In it, the women tell the story of their ancestors’ journey from Africa to Colombia, in the hold of a slave ship. It is a piece that describes their Colombian origins and also represents their contribution, even as slaves, to the country’s development from the very beginning.” (<https://www.mcclaca.org/stitched-history/>)

Art provides a space to tell stories and heal.

Healing for the women and their community in Columbia started when they began sharing their stories while quilting. While the results of the quilting together weren’t really planned, the quilting itself was. Time was intentionally set aside for regular get togethers during which there was no agenda, no motions to be voted on, or budgets to be decided etc. but simply a task at hand that allowed for free flowing conversation and storytelling.

- Do we have hurts to heal from? Elaine Enns would say that settler Mennonites here in Saskatchewan definitely have trauma we need healing from. Trauma that has become intergenerational trauma, Enns suggests has some significant effects on our ability to join in solidarity with other marginalized peoples. I won’t dive into details on what her research found, but I would encourage you to look it up if your interested.
- My question is: How do we as a faith community “quilt together”? Maybe we don’t actually quilt, but I wonder if we have an artistic outlet for sharing our stories. Art is a powerful tool to delve into our history for both individuals and communities.

Dayna

Art tells a story

Shows a part of an experience, story, or person that words can’t describe

Shows feelings, emotions, colors associated with each part

Everyone is an artist in their own way (might not be concrete art you can see)

Felt very alive getting to intentionally do art each evening to express what I learned in the day, connect with others, and tell a story of our own experiences and others we heard about