

BEYOND SUNDAY

To Save a Life: Week 3

Story 1: Margaret's Story

A young woman named Margaret spend decades battling depression and anxiety that were traced back to a horrible day in school when a teacher, frustrated with her tardiness, made her stand in front of the room and invited all the students to come up to the board and write something bad about her on the chalkboard. The kids were ruthless. They wrote things like "Margaret is ugly!" "Margaret smells," and "Margaret is stupid." All twenty-five students went up to the board and wrote these hurtful things. This event inflicted wounds that Margaret found difficult to heal. She battled depression, discouragement, and constant anger. Finally she went to a psychologist for help. She spent two years meeting weekly with the counselor, but finally they reached the end of their sessions.

The counselor said, "Margaret, I know this will be difficult, but just to make sure you're ready to move on, I am going to ask you to do something. I want to go back to your schoolroom and detail the events of that day. Take your time. Describe each of the children as they approach the blackboard, remember what they wrote and how you felt—do this for all twenty-five students.

In a way, this would be easy for Margaret. For forty years she had remembered every detail. And yet, to go through the nightmare one more time would take every bit of strength she had. After a long silence, she began the painful description. One by one, she described each of the students vividly, as though she had just seen them, stopping periodically to regain her composure, forcing herself to face each of those students one more time.

Finally she was done, and the tears would not stop, could not stop. Margaret cried a long time before she realized someone was whispering her name. "Margaret, Marga-

ret, Margaret." She looked up to see her counselor staring into her eyes, saying her name over and over again. Margaret stopped crying for a moment.

"Margaret, you left out one person."

"I certainly did not! I have lived with this story for forty years. I know every student by heart."

"No, Margaret, you did forget someone. See, he's sitting in the back of the classroom. He's standing up, walking toward your teacher, Ms. Garner. She is handing him a piece of chalk and he's taking it. Margaret, he's taking it! Now he's walking over to the blackboard and picking up and eraser. He is erasing every one of the sentences the students wrote. They are gone! Margaret, they are gone! Do you recognize him yet? Yes, his name is Jesus. Look, he's writing new sentences on the board. 'Margaret is loved. Margaret is beautiful. Margaret is gentle and kind. Margaret is strong. Margaret has great courage.'"

And Margaret began to weep. But very quickly, the weeping turned into a smile, and then into laughter, and then into tears of joy.

(Source: SermonCentral.com. From Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality*, pp. 55-56)

Story 2: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

You might be asking, "What do these stories have in common?"

A counselor came into Margaret's painful past and got to rewrite her story for her: "You think you have never been good enough, but that's not what the God of the universe thinks."

In the story from the Bible, Jesus went out of His way to pursue a man named Zacchaeus. In Jesus' culture, one group of people was hated more than any others: the tax collectors. They were Jews who basically worked for the Roman government to rip off money from their own people. Did you notice the people didn't even want to say his name? They just called him "sinner"! But Jesus stood up for this hated man and called him "a son of Abraham." That was the greatest compliment you could give to a Jew!

You get it, right? Jesus went into this man's hurt, and He retold his story. It inspired Zacchaeus so much that he went on to change his whole life. God gives us the privilege of being able to do the same thing—to help someone rewrite their story based on the truth of God's love for them.

This week think about how God has or can rewrite your story.