

I've long been drawn to a passage in 2 Corinthians 5 that talks about being given a ministry of reconciliation
While it fits into the larger theme of Christ reconciling the world to himself
I am drawn to the piece that is our work: that we are given this ministry of reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

It could be said that this is only about evangelism or encouraging personal trust in God
Yet to me, reconciliation also has a lateral piece to it
Reconciliation to God isn't complete without consideration of human reconciliation

I think we are most easily instructed through stories

So I want us to take some time to tell stories of reconciliation
Biblical stories, Quaker stories, older stories, modern day stories, etc.
And I invite you to join me in this by sharing your stories of reconciliation
Both personal stories from your lives as well as stories you know

I'm convinced that these stories will be transformative in our own story
Today, I'm going to tell 2 stories—one from the Bible and one from Quaker history

The first story is of Jacob and Esau, found in Genesis 25, 27, 32-33

This is a story of betrayal and hatred between 2 brothers
Isaac had 2 children—twins with Esau being the first born and Jacob second
Isaac favored Esau, while his wife, Rebekah loved Jacob
Israelite tradition said that the birthright belongs to the first born son
As young men, they had a spat and Esau traded his birthright for stew when famished
In due time, Isaac prepared to bless his firstborn and give him his inheritance
Isaac asks Esau to hunt wild game and prepare a meal in preparation for his blessing
While gone, Rebekah and Jacob scheme to trick Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob
Esau returns with a meal of wild game and discovers the blessing was given to Jacob
Esau hates Jacob and threatens to kill him
Jacob flees to the country of his mother, where he marries and becomes wealthy
Jacob falls out of favor with his father-in-law, leaving for the country where Esau lives
Jacob sends word on ahead to Esau and messengers report Esau is coming with 400 men
Jacob tries to save himself and his family by appeasing Esau with gifts
Jacob is still the planner and schemer—finding way to succeed
In the night, Jacob wrestles with an angel and was left with a limp due to a hip injury
The angel gave him the name Israel,
“for you have wrestled with God and with humans and have prevailed”
In the morning, Esau came towards Jacob with his 400 men
Jacob is still expecting revenge from Esau and calculates how to survive
But Esau was running to meet him, embraced and kissed Jacob, while weeping
All of Jacob's plans and schemes pale in comparison to Esau's joy at seeing his brother
The 400 men with Esau, accompany Jacob on the final portion of his journey

I find it interesting in this story, that it is the one who was wronged that extended grace
We don't know the same detail of Esau's journey towards forgiveness
With Jacob, we see both scheming and struggle
Seemingly it is the combination of God's persistence and Esau's grace that change Jacob

The second story is of James Nayler (1618-1660) and George Fox (1624-1691)—early Quaker leaders

- After experiencing what he described as the voice of God calling him, he sought spiritual direction
- Nayler found it in Quakerism after meeting George Fox in 1652
- Nayler became a leading traveling Quaker evangelist, known as the Valiant 60
- He was charismatic and an excellent preacher—many saw him as an equal to George Fox
- Nayler drew a following—in particular a number of women who traveled with him
- George Fox became concerned with the appropriate good order within the Society of Friends
- Fox and Nayler had significant conflict between them
- They spoke, but their differences remained unresolved and they hardly interacted
- In October 1656, James Nayler re-enacted Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem
- He rode on horseback into Bristol
- He was surrounded by other Friends who were waving branches, singing "holy, holy, holy"
- Nayler denied that he was impersonating Jesus and said only that "Christ was in him"
- But many were convinced that Nayler had messianic pretensions
- The English Commonwealth was alarmed by the growth and subversive nature of Quakers
- As a result, Nayler was tried by Parliament for blasphemy and sentenced to 2 years in prison
- He was publicly tortured and given hard labor
- The case was used to maximize propaganda against the Quakers
- George Fox and Quakers avoided the legal proceedings and were horrified at his actions
- Their focus became on mitigating damage to the Society
- As they tried to balance the new teachings and ideas of Quakers with respectability
- The movement de-emphasized charismatic leadership in favor of greater organization
- A necessary move to provide stability and longevity to this new movement
- Nayler lost favor and his place of leadership among Quakers
- Yet, while in prison Nayler wrote a pamphlet, "The Lamb's War" and other writings
- He wrote clearly and calmly of Friends' understanding of the conflict of good and evil
- Even while suffering terribly in the dungeon
- In spite of significant injury, he found the courage and strength to write well
- He had a renewed spiritual devotion and personal humility
- In September 1659, he was released from prison and died 1 year later after a mugging
- Before his death, Nayler reconciled with George Fox
- Nayler paid a visit to George Fox and knelt before him
- Nayler asked for forgiveness, repenting of his earlier actions
- He was forgiven by Fox

Today, there is a realization that Nayler and his writing should not be discarded as unseemly

I caution us that we should not discount the ministry of others, even if it doesn't suit our style

- When the disciples complained that another was healing in Jesus' name, he said,
- "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us."* Mark 9:39-40 NRSV

The stories today are stories of local reconciliation—of reconciliation between peers

- Reconciliation begins here—locally—between those of us in the community
- The absence of reconciliation robs the church of unity

Hours before his death, Nayler wrote...

There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end... In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life.