

Last Sunday, when Ke Huy Quan won the Oscar for Best Actor in a Supporting Role, he gave a memorable acceptance speech. Ke Huy Kwan made his big screen debut, as a child actor, in the 1984 movie “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.” He also had a role in the 1985 classic “The Goonies.”

When the acting roles dried up, he went to work behind the camera as a stunt coordinator and assistant director. So, it was a big deal for him to be cast in last year’s acclaimed movie Everything Everywhere All at Once. When his name was called as an Oscar winner, you could see the delight on the faces of those in the audience.

He began his speech properly by paying tribute to his mom. Then, he shared a bit about his life. He said, “My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp and, somehow, I ended up here on Hollywood’s biggest stage.” He went on to say, “They say stories like this only happen in the movies. I cannot believe it’s happening to me. This, this is the American dream.”

The thing that made Quan’s speech so memorable was the fact that he told his personal story. I think that took courage. He didn’t just say, “Look at me. I won the biggest award in the industry. He shared his journey from refugee to Hollywood’s biggest stage. In doing so, his triumph resonated in the hearts of millions of people. It allowed those watching to share the joy and to share the meaning of that moment.

That’s what telling one’s personal story, the downside and the upside, can do. I believe God loves stories about perseverance and triumph. God led the Hebrew people from slavery to the forming of a mighty nation. Jesus died on a cross like a common criminal, but that wasn’t the end of the story. He triumphed over the grave. This morning, I hope to convince you to have the courage to tell your story.

Jesus and his followers encountered a blind man on the road. Jesus saw the encounter as an opportunity for a great story. He spat on the ground, made a little mud, and spread it on the man's eyes. Then, Jesus said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." The man did as he was instructed and came back with the ability to see.

The neighbors and those who passed by him regularly couldn't even decide if this man was even the same guy. They asked, "How were your eyes opened?" He told them the story of how Jesus made the mud, spread it on his eyes, and told him to go to Siloam and wash.

Next, the Pharisees got involved. They didn't believe Jesus had the power to restore sight. The text says, "The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight." Therefore, they called in the parents to testify.

They verified the man was their son and he was born blind, but they had no desire to affirm that Jesus miraculously restored his site. If they were to claim Jesus to be the Messiah, they could be kicked out of the synagogue. They said, "He's old enough [to answer for himself]; ask him."

So, they called the formally blind man back. After the Pharisees said, "We know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner," the man courageously retold his story. He replied, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

He was born blind. He had an encounter with Jesus. Then, he could see. That's good news! That's the gospel in a nutshell. That's a story that needs to be told. It would take courage. His story caused a commotion, but the words of that man have become an affirmation shared by people of every time and every place. If his life could be changed, our lives can change. If there was hope for him, there's hope for us. If Jesus could restore that man's sight, there's no telling what he can do for any of us.

Our stories are meant to be told for that same reason. I believe everyone has one. God gives each one of us strength to persevere. If high school was hell for you,

but you made it through anyway, you have a story. If you fought cancer, you have a story. If you've coped with the loss of a loved one, you have a story. If you grew up in a family, you have a story to tell.

My guess is that some of us haven't even considered our story. We either don't think it matters, or we're just reluctant to talk about ourselves. Many of us have been conditioned to think faith is a private matter. We learn it's better to walk the walk than talk the talk.

I want to suggest something different. I think God loves stories of transformation: the weak find strength, the blind gain sight, the lost become found, the dead are raised. That's why the Bible is full of these stories. They teach us. They inspire us. They provide a reason for hope. When we share our stories, it's a gift. It creates connection. It gets us in touch with our humanity.

It's not as hard as we might think. Just introducing ourselves is an opportunity to share our story. When I was in seminary at the Boston University School of Theology, I attended a symposium. One of the speakers was author C. Eric Lincoln. He got his PhD in Social Ethics at BU.

When he came to the microphone, the first thing he said was, "When I was a studying here at BU, I was an ordinary student, but I was an extraordinary sports fan." I immediately felt connected to him. He described spending more time than he probably should have, during his time in Boston, in the bleachers at Fenway Park. As a very ordinary student, I needed to hear that. I didn't feel so alone. He shared a piece of his story, in just one sentence, and I was all ears.

Last summer, during coffee hour, here at the church, we invited folks to tell their story, whatever they wanted to share. Thirty or forty folks would hang around after worship to hear one of you share about your life. It takes courage to do that, to reveal personal information rather than withhold it. That's why I consider sharing our personal stories an act of generosity.

When we share our story, it allows someone else know they are not alone in their struggle. It creates bonds between ourselves and others. Our stories witness to the power and presence of God in our lives. You never know if your witness is exactly what someone needs to keep going.

In my opinion, one of the greatest gifts we can give to children and grandchildren is to share the tragedies and triumphs of our lives. There's even an app for that. They will send you a weekly question you never thought to write about to prompt you to share a story. After a year or so, your collection of stories are bound together in a keepsake book you can then give to your children or grandchildren. Some stories might be difficult to share, but what a powerful gift.

You may have heard, there's a move, in some places, to prevent the teaching of African American history in schools. Think about the stories we would miss out on. There are stories of triumph and survival we don't even know yet. As a nation, we were once blind to the evils of slavery, but now we see. That's a story worth telling. That's a hopeful story. It affirms that real change is possible.

Author Elie Wiesel won a Nobel prize for telling his story about surviving the Holocaust. He prefaced one of his novels with this famous story: When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, whether it was persecution, famine, or some other threat, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, another Rabbi, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient.

Wiesel concluded, “God made humankind because God loves stories.”

What’s your story?