

Story 1 Transcript

“LGBTQIA+. So many initials. But behind each initial is a person. A person like you and me. A person with feelings. And these people are more than an initial can explain, more than an initial can encompass or comprehend. We are all unique and exceptional. We are all special.”

I feel that as Christians, we should be more in the habit of asking the people we come across in our lives: “Tell me your story.” We seem to be afraid of owning our narrative, yet Christians from the beginning of the Church have been known for sharing their stories, it is one of our traditions. I must admit it is with trepidation that I share my story, a story that leads not to freedom from shame, but freedom then shame then freedom from guilt and shame.

I was brought up in a Christian home (Salvation Army) and saw at first hand to the joy that faith in Jesus can bring, one of the songs we used to sing was “Joy, Joy Joy, there is joy in the Salvation Army.” That was my experience of the church; the love of God was shown in practical ways and expressed through service, our Sundays were full of worship services, open-air meetings, and feeding the poor and homeless. We were not rich and not poor; my dad was a postman who loved Jesus and loved me; my mother was a lovely woman who again loved Jesus and also always had time for others. I knew from an early age that I was different; I knew that girls did not do it for me, though I did have a girlfriend.

I remember when I was 16 talking to God about my sexuality; I was with a friend driving to Cornwall and at 4 am we stopped for a rest, as I lay on the grass looking at the stars I felt God say to me “You see those stars? If one of them blows up I can create another one, but, if you blow up I can never create another you, you are unique.” It blew my mind; God loved me despite what I thought were my hidden sins. Society was saying being “Queer” was wrong and illegal for a 16yo, the church was beginning to be a bit more loud about it, but God was saying he loved me.

I truly believed that being gay was not in accordance with my understanding of scripture, and it was like a civil war going on inside me, I remember walking past high rise flats. I had to force myself to walk past and not to go and jump off. I met my future wife at Church, where at the time, I was leading the youth work. I did not marry her to make me straight; I loved and admired her; I still do. My wife and I separated about 21 years ago after 13 years of marriage, not due to my homosexuality, but due to lack of communication (on my part) and my guilt and shame.

I did not realise at the time the effect it had on my children (9 to 16 at the time). The only thing that kept me going was my children. My children took all this very badly, my eldest refused to attend church and ultimately lost his faith in Jesus (though I still say to him it was in the church, not Jesus). My middle son (15), who was suffering from depression, got worse. After four months he was finally given an appointment to see a psychiatrist on July 4th 2000. I came home on Sunday evening (two days before his meeting) and found him dead in his room (he hung himself). I had been to London Pride the night before, even now, 19 years later, I still feel guilty about attending Pride, I know that he would have loved to have come with me.

My thinking over the past 22 years about homosexuality has begun to change; I was never “cured”, and all the ministry achieved was to fill me with more guilt, shame, self-hate and condemnation. Many a time I wanted to end it all, but I could not because of my sons. If crying and praying could have cured me of my sexuality, I am sure 25 years of it would have helped.

It took me another three years to get back to God, in that time I ultimately came to terms with my sexuality and that God accepted me being gay and that as a gay man I can stand proud with Him my Father. I now have a sense of freedom, no longer need the acceptance of the church or other people; I am me and am happy with me. However, due to the ministry I received at the hands of the church, I still feel fear, hurt, still think that I can't trust the church, sometimes the church is the last place I go for help. It is such a shame that our LGBTQI+ siblings feel safer in a gay bar than in a church, that is the outcome from a faith-based rejection.

To my LGBTQI+ siblings, I say: the shame is not yours to own. It is for those that clothed you in that shame to take ownership. Those institutions that nurtured the shame it is their responsibility to take ownership and the consequences. Those parents, family members and friends that shamed you for being not who they wanted you to be. The shame is theirs.

However long you have worn and lived with that shame, it is never too late to disrobe.

We are called to serve not to judge; we are called to love not to condemn. Jesus came that we may have life, life in all its' fullness. So lets' live that life...NOW.