

Book Review

Between the Listening and the Telling: How Stories Can Save Us

By Mark Yaconelli

Reviewed by Terri Robertson, CENetwork of the ELCA

Mark Yaconelli is a writer, retreat leader, community builder, spiritual director, storycatcher, husband, and father. He is the founder and executive director of [The Hearth](#), a non-profit organization that trusts in the power of personal stories to heal, connect, enrich, and mobilize communities for good. He is the author of six books and if you're like me, his book *Contemplative Youth Ministry* is still part of my youth ministry library. My connection with him was more from the youth ministry lens than that of a storyteller or spiritual director. But this book changed that for me.

Released in August 2022, *Between the Listening and the Telling: How Stories Can Save Us* touched me in ways I didn't anticipate. I found myself glued to words on the pages, eagerly awaiting the next chapter and more stories. In the book's foreword, Anne Lamont writes, "It is through this communion – between the listening and the telling, letting ourselves be seen and heard and acknowledged – that we come to the great, longed-for understanding of why we are here, who we are, what really matters, and that we, in fact, matter. This is the ultimate liberation."

Each chapter of the book centers on a certain aspect of how stories reside in us, touch our lives, expand our connections, heal us, allow us to move forward, and at times, hold us back. In Chapter 3 – The Catacombs, Yaconelli shares how those stories buried in the catacombs of our soul are "sacred paintings, captured memories that hold the emotional truths at the root of our being." And untold, those stories never go away.

In Chapter 4, entitled "Coming-Out Parade", we're reminded of the fundamental hope that we all share, that we might be seen and welcomed. It isn't just in the telling of historical facts in the stories that are shared with us as children that makes us competent and resilient, but the relationships and interactions in which these stories were communicated.

It could be because I enjoy wine that I particularly loved the story in Chapter 6 – The Hearth – that took place in Tuscany. This story was a reminder to me that those things in my life that often are most meaningful and memorable are because of the relationships – the places, people, occasion, and state of my own heart – rather than the specific products, items, or details of what takes place.

Other chapters focus on stories that call us to be vulnerable and empathize with each other, about the importance of listening to and sharing stories during and following traumatic events to increase our capacity to heal. Having served twice with Lutheran Disaster Response following Hurricane Katrina, I saw firsthand the power that being able to share their experience with those who took the time to really listen had on the residents of New Orleans. He acknowledges the impact of the pandemic on our lives and how this upheaval of our present time provides us with an opportunity to tell a new story.

Interspersed throughout the book are "Interludes". These short stories drew me in, capturing my full attention and connecting the pieces and expanding my understanding through experiences. I found myself thinking of ways in my own life where I can increase the opportunities to connect with those I know and those I don't know through the listening and telling of stories.

The final chapter ends with these sentences, which continue to resound in my mind, "We need stories to help us recall the things we've all forgotten: That we are all intimately interrelated. That our home is in one another. That peace is found within one another." May we keep these words in our hearts as we are intentional about storytelling and story catching in our own lives.