

Why Your Faith Should Go Beyond 'Safe'

I once had a Christian publisher who wouldn't allow me to mention baptism or a cross necklace or even heaven in my book. I don't publish with them anymore, but they are not entirely to blame. The problem is their Christian readers don't all agree on baptism or cross necklaces or heaven, and they don't want to read about something that makes them uncomfortable. They want to read safe stories.

I have a problem with safe. I have a problem with writing stories that simply confirm beliefs people already have and don't challenge them to grow. Choosing to only listen to what we want to hear makes us no different from the world.

A great example of this is the story of the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings. I read it aloud to my husband the other day, and as he sees life through the eyes of a cartoonist and does great impersonations, he acted out his mobster movie version for me. (Read the following with an Italian accent.)

King Ahab: Hey, Jehoshaphat. Let's go to war with Aram.

King Jehoshaphat: I'm with you. But let's ask God what He thinks first.

Prophets (in unison): Victory is yours, man.

Jehoshaphat: Is there a prophet of God around here?

Ahab: There is, but I hate him. He never says anything I want to hear.

Jehoshaphat: Bring him in anyway.

Servant (fetching Micaiah): All the other prophets told the kings victory is theirs. You'll be better off if you tell the

king what he wants to hear.

Micaiah (dripping in sarcasm): Yeah, yeah. Victory is yours.

Ahab: Tell me the truth, kid.

Micaiah: If you go to war, you will die, and your people will be scattered.

Ahab: See? I told you he never says anything good.

Other prophets: Idiot.

Ahab (scratching his chin like The Godfather): Lock him up until I return safely.

Ahab never returned, and the honest prophet probably died in prison. I tried to find a happy ending for him in the Bible, but that's it. End of story.

Now, I'm not comparing myself to a prophet, but as a writer, I'm also called to tell the truth. And truth should challenge us. Change us. Protect us from getting hurt by doing our own thing the way King Ahab did.

I think the hardest part of being challenged is having the humility to admit we don't always get it right. None of us. Even Beth Moore posted on Twitter that someone said he doesn't agree with everything she says, and she responded with something like, "Neither do I! I've grown and realized I've been wrong in the past. What kind of person would I be if I didn't?"

We can't use our Christian culture as a way to insulate ourselves from discomfort. We can't just keep reaffirming each other that we are right while everyone else is wrong. That's propaganda.

I'm also reminded of a class I took from writer/director Brian Bird (*Touched by an Angel* and *The Case for Christ*). He called

us to be great storytellers, and he referenced a Christian movie that only Christians loved. He said a friend took his non-Christian neighbor to that movie, and when they left, the neighbor said, "Now I know why you wanted me to see this movie."

It didn't touch him. It didn't change him. And it didn't change us either. It only made us feel better about ourselves. It was a movie that preached to the choir.

I have a beautiful friend who has experienced this mentality of saving saints firsthand. See, her husband was locked in prison in Iran for being a pastor. The church rallied behind her for his release. But then when she finally realized that he was abusive and the news leaked to the public, some people in the church turned on her. She has apologized for not being more open about what she was dealing with from the beginning (even though she hadn't fully understood it), but in her mind, she was trying to be like Jesus.

Would the church have fought so hard for his release if they'd known the truth? While the rest of us were thought we were saving a saint, my friend knew she was saving a sinner. She knew him better and loved him more than any of us.

Do we want to save sinners anymore, or do we only want to rejoice with each other in our own salvation? Do we just want to wear our Christian slogans on T-shirts and hide out in churches? Have we become Pharisees?

My dad told me yesterday about the book *Radical* by David Platt that is challenging him more than any book he's ever read. And he's been a pastor since before I was born. That's the kind of book I want to write. In fact, this article is even challenging me because sometimes I, too, have the faith of a Pharisee.

If you're a Christian, you don't need to keep guzzling the gospel message the way a baby does a bottle. According to

Hebrews 5:13, you're called to mature in your faith and find nourishment in the meat of Scripture. And sometimes, that meat is tough.

Just ask Micaiah.