

I get a lot of devotionals in my e-mail. This one caught my attention, and then took off in my brain (sometimes a dangerous place to be). I read this article by Tricia Williford again and again, and a sermon was in the making before I even knew it. Her article was "Our Story in Six Words" when I counted only five words. I want it to say "Our Christian Story in Six Words".

Why six words? There is a legend about Ernest Hemingway. Folklore says he was in a restaurant when someone challenged him to write a story in only six words. Now if I were a betting person, I would have sided with the men at the restaurant, believing it was impossible to have plot, character and conflict in only six words. But Hemingway won the bet with this short story which paints a very sad picture in our hearts and soul.

For sale: baby shoes, never worn.
That is the whole story.

It's an interesting exercise to think about your life as a six-word memoir.

I can chart the time line of my life through a series of six-word tales.

As an only child of divorced parents:

Lonely, looking to parents for love.

In college:

Study or boys, what to choose.

Alone at 21 when both of my parents died:

How on earth did this happen?

I wasn't ready to say goodbye.

As a brand-new bride, perhaps my six-word story would have been:

Chicken noodle Crockpot disaster thrown out.

When my children were born, perhaps my six-word memoirs may have been:

Josh, what did you do now?

What defines you? *Is there a six-word story you are holding on to as your identity?* We each have our stories.

I wish someone could call me.

I really thought he loved me.

God, what do I do now?

I still make coffee for two.

Living the dream I didn't want.

Where do I go from here?

Love to cook. Love to eat.

This diagnosis will swallow me whole

Oh but I kept on going in my search of six word stories! I then found a wonderful sermon from by Father Sean Mullen on Easter Day 2011 at Saint Mark's Church, Philadelphia. He recounted the whole Bible story in six words, and you can follow along, as long as you know a little Biblical background. So close your eyes and listen to this:

*God said, Let there be light.
 Who said "Don't eat the apple?"
 It rained forty days and nights.
 And I will be your God.
 God promised Abraham and Sarah laughed.
 Moses said, "Let my people go!"
 David picked up five smooth stones.
 By waters of Babylon we wept.
 God asked, "Can these bones live?"
 John wore camel's hair; ate locusts.
 Blessed are the pure in heart.
 Care for him; I'll repay you.
 Disciples knew Jesus in breaking bread.
 Hosanna to the Son of David!
 Why, what evil has he done?
 This day you'll be in paradise.
 God, why have you forsaken me?
 Who will roll away the stone?
 Died on Friday; rose on Sunday.
 He's not here; he is risen.*

You can open your eyes. I gave you twenty examples. With just 6 words at a time, we can cover a lot of the Bible!

What would your six-word memoir be as a Christian?

The best affirmation may be an Easter affirmation, and I know we just celebrated Easter. But we are an Easter people, and should celebrate Easter every day. The Passion translation I chose of Mark 16 snagged by heart: "He isn't here—he has risen victoriously!"

These are the six words that the breathless women carried from the empty tomb back to the other disciples. These are the words that have been passed from person to person, from community to community, every day (not just Easter) since then -- in secret, in triumph, in darkness, in celebration.

Christ is risen from the dead!
 But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

It is these six words that found countless individuals whose lives seemed dead — broken by pain, suffering, sin and darkness — and given them new life. But it says, in the space of six words, that the whole world has been changed by God's grace and power.

Christ is risen from the dead!
 But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

These are the six words that are whispered at bedsides and shouted from rooftops and shared at dinner tables and churches and in neighborhoods. These are the words that

have been forbidden by governments both ancient and modern, and yet somehow they have still been spoken, still been shared.

Christ is risen from the dead!
But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

These are the six words that Martin Luther King Jr. held fast to, as he opposed the violent racism of our culture, the words that inspired Desmond Tutu's work in South Africa; these are the words that Mother Teresa believed in for the work that she did with the poor.

Christ is risen from the dead!
But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

Are these words true? If they are not, Paul says to the people of Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 15:19 "If we have a hope in Christ only in this life, then we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else." My translation of that verse - What would be the point of a version of Christianity in which Christ was never raised from the dead?

Of course, we hear all the time that Jesus – resurrection cannot be proven, because nobody saw it; that it cannot be true, because people still suffer, they still die; that we cannot believe it, because it seems so utterly unbelievable. To which we say:

Christ is risen from the dead!
But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

How many lives have been transformed, starting with Mary Magdalene and her companions, falling to the ground in shock, upon hearing these six words? How could we possibly count the ways that billions of hearts have been strangely warmed, in the words of John Wesley, upon the understanding of these six words?

Christ is risen from the dead!
But not just risen from the dead,
Christ is risen victoriously from death!

What could we possibly use to measure the impact that these six words have had upon the world -- the ways in which forgiveness, joy, reconciliation, self-giving love and charity have wrought miracles and abundance on the face of this earth in the time since we have first heard those wonderful words?

No matter how you feel from day-to-day and moment-to-moment, God reminds us in Isaiah 43:1 that He knows your name. He sees your every move, and there's no place you can go where He won't join you. He thinks about you, and He smiles over the idea of you. He will fight for you, and He has a plan for you. He is good, all the time. He is freedom. And He has a place for you: Next to Him. All because of the fact:

Christ is risen from the dead!
But not just risen from the dead,

Christ is risen victoriously from death!

It says not to be afraid when fear seems close at hand. It says you are not alone when you suspect everyone has abandoned you. It says that yes, death is part of life, but not the end of it. It says that evil will not triumph over good. It says that when you are weak you have strength yet to be discovered. It says that when you are lost you will be found. It says all this and much, much more, in its scant six words.

Christ is risen from the dead!

But not just risen from the dead,

Christ is risen victoriously from death!

Knowing this Christian affirmation and sharing this affirmation is spreading the Good News.

We know the transformation from non-believers to believers is the goal.

A radically transformed life that is full of light and life and good news, well that can change a lot of things. There are 2 billion people on this planet that believe that Jesus is the son of God. These people believe that Jesus is the savior of the world. That is an incredible potential for light in the dark.

We can light the torch of belief and set the world on fire, by just these six words.

The fire that we are talking about here is love. Jesus is love.

Jesus loved us enough to die for us.

Jesus loved us enough to rise victoriously from death.

Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ is risen victoriously from death!

This is how Jesus says we will be known as his disciples,

This is how we can proclaim the love of Christ, by telling the good news, that Christ is risen from the dead. So spread the word,

Christ is risen from the dead

And not only that,

Christ is risen victoriously from death!

These are six words you need to know, and I pray you will leave here with them not only in your minds, but engraved on your hearts, and ready on your lips. And I believe you can proclaim these six words of faith without me even telling you what they are.

So to be safe: let's put on your masks.

Are you ready? Can you feel the six words coming into mind? Forming on your lips? Do you know what they are? I'll give you a clue, and I promise you will know the six-word Gospel.

Let's practice as we do in the call to worship; this time in a whisper.

[Me:] Christ is risen victoriously from death!

[You:] **Christ is risen victoriously from death!**

I knew you could do it!

I knew you would know it!

Amen to that my friends!

That is Our Christen Story in Six Words!