

# **SandStory: Epic Stories in a New Light**

## **Celebration of Ministry Service**

Joe Castillo

I love stories. I love good stories; the kind of stories that engage you and draw you in. The kind of stories that fascinate you. And stories are important, because stories are the way we get to know each other. And I share a little bit of my story with you, and you share a little bit of your story with me. Our stories then become intertwined; they become part of each other. And my story can influence you, and your story influences me.

Of course stories are the way that we share the greatest story of all with those that need to hear about the world's greatest storyteller. That was Jesus. And the way the disciples of Jesus reached out to a world was by going and telling their stories: *"I saw him. I saw him crucified. I saw him buried. I saw him dead. And then I saw him alive. I put my finger in the wound in his hands, and my hand in his side. He changed my life."* And those stories, as we share those stories with others, they're drawn to the Savior.

Now I am also an artist. And those of you that might be particularly astute already figured that out because I'm wearing this cool little French beret. But as an artist, when I am introduced as an artist, I tell people it's true but it's not my fault. My mother was an artist. My father was an artist. My Aunt Carolyn was an artist. I even had an uncle named Arty, so go figure. My mom swears my first solid food was Crayola Crayons.

And so one of the first things that I did when I began to pastor was not only to tell stories, but I wanted to include the visuals; I wanted to include the art. And so I began to illustrate and find ways of doing illustrations of the stories that Jesus told.

One of my favorite stories, and I'm sure one of yours, is the story perhaps I bond with because I identify with the story of the Prodigal Son. And I devised a new way of telling stories; one that doesn't require any words. I call it SandStory.

## **SANDSTORY DEMONSTRATION HERE**

Now, I want to admonish you a little bit. I want to encourage you, because, you see, five hundred years ago the church owned the arts. And almost everything that was paintings and frescoes and tapestry and stained glass and architecture and music, was under the umbrella of the church. And we got our theology straightened out and somehow we lost the arts. And most of the arts that is grown in the past five hundred years has grown in secular soil. And so the French Renaissance and the Impressionist and then the Romanticist and then the modern artist and the pop artists and then all of the digital artwork that began to be produced, all of radio, all of television, all of movies, wound up being co-opted by the secular world. And the church, unfortunately, kind of allowed that to happen. And particularly when Hollywood came along, and we all said with television and with Hollywood, well, you know what, that's of the Devil. We don't want to mess with that; we've got to preach the word. And we lost out on capturing what is some of the most powerful ways of telling our story that there is.

I've had the great privilege of moving to Atlanta, and I am five minutes from Pinewood Studios, where God is doing an amazing work. Pinewood Studios started in the UK by a Methodist pastor. A movie studio that was intended to start producing movies that were wholesome and family-oriented and shared the story of Jesus. Now they've deviated a little bit of that, but there is still a real core of godly people that are trying to do good things with the arts. And so I would encourage you to incorporate the arts, the visuals, in your churches.

One of the greatest impressions I had as a young child was a Sunday school teacher that would walk in every Sunday with a paper bag. And we always wondered, what's in the bag? And these were object lessons, and they were just simple things. He would bring out a shoe and talk about beautiful feet or a hammer or a piece of fruit. And you know, we get all of that from the Master Artist. We ought to be the ones using the visuals. You see, this is a visual generation; this generation has been brought up on television and the Internet. If we're going to reach them, we need to capture the eye-gate as well as the ear. And so I encourage you to do that. And it can be something simple like a message that I'll never forget. The pastor walked into the pulpit, and he had a seven-foot stick that was sharpened on one end. And he said this is an ox goad. How simple, but I never forgot it. So you don't have to be an artist to use visuals.

Somebody asked me once, if art is so important, why didn't Jesus ever paint a one-man or have a one-man show or paint a painting? And I said, Oh, you're so wrong. You see, every time he pointed to a sunset or the lilies of the field or the birds of the air or picked up a handful of seed, that was his artwork. That was his object lesson. He was surrounded by his own studio; his own creation.

Let me close with the very first SandStory I ever created. I've had the privilege of sharing this in places where I couldn't speak the language, but they understood the story. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.