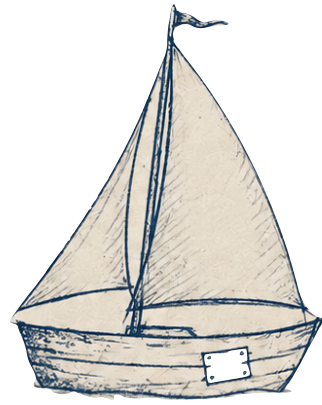


B.O.A.T.S

Based on a True Story

Have you ever heard a song that wrecked you the first time you heard it?

That's what happened to me with Michael Patrick Kelly's song "B.O.A.T.S.," (*Based On a True Story*). I was listening to the song when these words stopped me:



***Have we been lying to ourselves again
To cover up the things that have been going on?***

***Is it because we're caught up in our wishful thinking
That it seems that nothing's wrong***

***I know, I know
I know we know...***

***We like to change our history
And justify, justify.***

***We'll base it on a true story
But I know we know
I know we know***

***We'll tell the wind which way to sail these boats
We like to change our history***

***Oh come on, come on, come on
Come on, let's right some wrongs.***

"Boats" was written by Michael Patrick Kelly and Jimmy Hogarth
and performed by Michael Patrick Kelly. It appears on *B.O.A.T.S* (Columbia, 2021).

I listened again. Then again.

The line about telling the wind which way to sail the boats hit me like lightning.

I've spent years talking about following Jesus into the unknown. I believe that's what He asks of us. I've watched Him lead me into places I never would have chosen or imagined.

I also know how much I want to be the one who chooses the direction.

I want to trust Him, but I want to know what will happen if I do. I want to be available, but I have ideas about what He should ask of me. I say *I want the Spirit to lead me*, then find myself trying to decide where He is allowed to take me.

Then the rest of the song began to bother me. It asks what we do with the parts of our story that don't fit the person we want to be. That question feels especially close to home after almost 50 years of following Jesus.

I have spent the vast majority of my life putting words to convictions.

I can tell you what I believe about trusting Him. I can tell you about courage, surrender, and divine adventure.

I can tell those stories well.

Go to a pastors' conference and listen to us talk with one another. Someone asks, "*How are things going?*" and we begin describing what God has placed on our hearts. We talk about what we're seeing and what we hope is coming. I've had that conversation many times. The things I say are true... mostly.

That's what troubles me.

I can tell the truth and still leave someone with a picture that isn't quite true.

I can describe where I'm headed without mentioning how unsure I feel.

I can talk about what I believe without saying how hard it has been to live it this week.

I can tell you about the courage I aspire to and allow you to assume it's the courage I already have.

I don't have to lie. I only have to leave a few things out.

I picture two circles.

One holds the life I aspire to live.

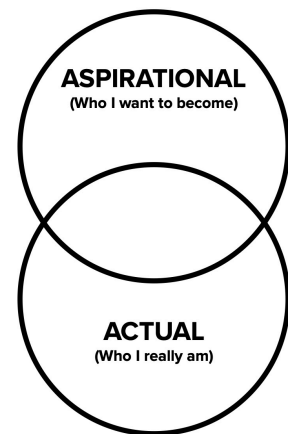
The other holds the life I'm actually living.

The overlap is where I should be, where what I say I believe is taking shape in the way I live.

But I spend far more time looking at the aspirational circle. I know its language. I can describe it with passion and conviction. When I'm talking with another pastor, that's the circle I tend to show them. Meanwhile, I can avoid looking closely at the actual one. I leave out the fear, the need for control, and the choices that reveal where I'm struggling to trust Jesus.

The more I talk about who I hope to become, the easier it is to mistake that story for who I am. Someone hears my aspirations and affirms me for them. I accept the affirmation, even though I know there are parts of my actual life I haven't told them.

I suspect I'm not alone in this. I wonder how many of us leave a pastors'



conference or even a weekend church gathering comparing our actual lives with everyone else's aspirations. We return home feeling like others are living with more faith, more clarity, more freedom. And someone may be thinking the same thing about us.

I keep returning to the song's invitation to *right some wrongs*.

Jesus sees both circles. He sees the life I long to live, and He sees the life I lived this morning. He sees where they overlap. He sees where they don't. I've spent so much energy trying to make the story sound complete, while He has been looking at the whole story all along.

The next time someone asks me how things are going, I want to tell them the part I usually leave out.