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Hearing the voices of the good news

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HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS

by

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THESIS

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HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS

The intent of this thesis is to demonstrate that the art of biblical storytelling is a means to effect a fresh hearing of the gospel.

The thesis will be established in four ways:

1. By reporting the personal history of the author with biblical storytelling in a contemporary parish.

2. By examining the need for a fresh hearing in the way biblical storytelling relates to contemporary hermeneutics and homiletics.

3. By creating a homiletical process including biblical storytelling, congregational discussion, sermon, and sermon feedback.

4. By reporting and analyzing the results of the storytelling/homiletical process over a six week period in a parish.

This thesis will conclude with a critique of the biblical storytelling/homiletical process outlined above, and suggest further opportunities for oral presentation of the gospel stories to effect a fresh hearing.

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As a parish pastor, charged with the responsibility of speaking the good news of God in Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, the author has maintained two primary curiosities about the people he serves. Week after week, month after month, year after year, the congregation gathers for worship to sing, pray, eat, speak and listen. The primary speaker is the pastor while the primary listeners are the congregants. This pastor has usually asked two questions. Why are these people here? What are they hearing?

Both of these questions have complex answers which are beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth. Reasons for worship participation vary with the number of people in attendance - from habit, tradition, and parental rules to curiosity, hearing a word from God, being assured of forgiveness, or finding weekly motivation for discipleship. What is heard is as dependent on the psychological mood, the philosophical presuppositions, the educational level and the social acceptance of the individuals as it is on the combination of words spoken. The author has always been humbled and surprised that the congregation keeps coming back for more. The preaching task of taking the biblical word, understanding and interpreting it, and sharing its meaning with a contemporary congregation is awesome indeed. The Holy Spirit of God works its power when connections are made from the scriptural word through the sermon to the listening congregation with the result that the people are enlightened, inspired or motivated to respond in Christian discipleship. Working from text to sermon to heard word and community response is a mixed media process calling for reading/writing

disciplines as well as hearing/speaking skills. Robert Kysar bears witness to the difficulty of this homiletical process.

> There is another sense in which the process of reinterpreting the tradition is different for the preacher than it was for the biblical authors. The biblical writers were translating oral tradition to the written word, or revising written tradition. Homiletics, on the other hand, demands the retranslation of the written word back into oral form. If the biblical traditions had their origins in nearly every case in oral word, the preacher returns the tradition to its oral mode. The tradition began in the power of orality - the power of personal presence in the speaker, the immediacy of the message embodied in flesh and blood. The written word, on the other hand, sets something between the proclaimer and the audience, namely the written page![1]

This thesis developed through personal experience of learning the oral mode of communicating gospel texts. Biblical storytelling seems to be an important link in the homiletical process. It begins while working with the written texts of the canon to discover meanings in the oral form of their presentation. The author will report his experience in learning the art of biblical storytelling in chapter one. The joys, discoveries, disappointments and learnings of sharing biblical storytelling with groups in a parish will be uncovered.

Biblical storytelling has emerged in recent years as a force for biblical proclamation. This is the result of fresh studies in the fields of biblical hermeneutics, theology and homiletics. Chapter two will explore the developments which have prompted biblical storytelling to be a fresh means for hearing the good news.

Biblical communication requires an audience. The messages of biblical stories are transmitted to people in both written and oral form. This thesis utilizes the oral communication medium to effect a fresh hearing in the group context of a local

congregation. It takes seriously shared community discussion in the homiletical process. Chapter three will report the development of a process of biblical storytelling, discussion, sermon formation, and sermon feedback as it took place in the homiletical life of a local congregation. Chapter four will report and analyze the results of the communication process developed in chapter three.

It is the author's contention that biblical storytelling is an important ingredient in achieving a fresh hearing of the gospel. This fresh hearing involves the development of oral learning and presenting skills by the preacher, the expectation of listening feedback by the congregation, and common searching for the way of God in our contemporary culture. The author intends to demonstrate that biblical storytelling will evoke a fresh hearing of the good news of God in Jesus Christ, and enable people to respond to what God is doing in their lives.

Special thanks go to two people who helped immensely in the typing of this thesis, Shirley Cross and Marlene Falcioni. This thesis would not have been possible without the motivation and co-operation of the people of Christ Lutheran Church, Waterloo, Ontario, whose zeal for hearing and doing the good news are sources of joy and surprise. Hearing the voices of God in the good news of Jesus Christ is a wondrous grace. The author dedicates this thesis to his granddaughter, Emily May, in the hope that she will hear the good news.

1. Robert Kysar. "Preaching as Biblical Theology: A Proposal for Homiletical Method" in John Reumann (ed.) The Promise and Practice of Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 149.

CHAPTER I

PERSONAL HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The personal encounter and historical journey of the author with the art of biblical storytelling has played a significant part in both the process and content of this thesis. It was in a storytelling course that the author experienced a fresh hearing of the biblical message. In the summer of 1990 the author attended a one week course at Toronto School of Theology on Biblical Storytelling. It was led by Dr. Thomas Boomershine, a professor of New Testament at the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, who is one of the developers of the biblical storytelling movement. He joined an eclectic group of twenty-eight Christians from many denominations to wrestle with the Gospel of Matthew. One of the assignments was to learn "by heart" a chapter of Matthew to *tell* to the rest of the group. Issues of story learning, literary genres, biblical hermeneutics in an electronic culture, the origins of the scriptures in oral cultures, and the transmission of ideas and experiences in oral tradition were explored, as well as the creative dynamics of Matthew's point of view and style. On the last evening the group gathered to hear the Gospel of Matthew told in one sitting, each participant sharing in a serial manner the chapter he/she had volunteered to learn - from chapter one to twenty-eight. It was a profoundly moving experience in many ways, three of which will be mentioned here.

First, new things were heard from Matthew which had not made an impact on the participants in previous readings. Themes from earlier chapters rise again in later chapters to reinforce the receiving of the word. Perceptions popped out to this author

which had never been received from reading commentaries or doing the exegetical homework necessary for preaching in a tradition which uses the lectionary in an episodic fashion.

Second, this learner surprised himself by being able to internalize and verbally tell a chapter of Matthew's gospel in just a few days. So much was happening in the course to distract concentration. As one who has abhored and opposed memorization as a useful learning method, the author was shocked into a new consciousness. Story learning and telling was not the same as rote memorization either in process or product. Twenty seven years ago, the author had been tempted to leave seminary over the necessity of regurgitating lecture notes on tests. Fear and lack of confidence plagued the author's efforts to master the art of storytelling. This was overcome as the participants learned how to attend to the written word in its original oral form, to pick out verbal threads which tied the action together, to visualize the scenes, to speak the words in various tones so that people could hear and receive the messages in different ways. The participants prayed and meditated over the texts to work through their impact in contemporary terms. Learners struggled with how to take the static, individually read written word and let it transform them through their own internal learning processes. In the process they were prepared to make the text into a dynamic and moving, communally shared, spoken Word. The word with which God wants people to live and breathe was heard in a new way. It was like being in the valley of dry bones and having the breath of life forced into unused lungs so that the lifeless skeletal forms vibrated with life and health.

The third profound effect of this experience was that it raised many new and disturbing questions about the preacher's communication of the gospel, and the parishioner's response in hearing, witnessing and serving. How might the Good News of God, written in a library of textual resources called the Bible, and accessible mostly to scholars or professional clergy specialists, be presented to people in refreshing and startling ways through the ears and visual imagination of oral transmission? It is not possible nor desirable to set aside the valuable work of biblical scholarship. The insights and debatable differences learned from the historical-critical method, from redactional, source, and form criticism, and from sociological and structural analysis have provided rich resources for interpretation and inspiration. However, there remain transmissional questions which are raised by the oral tradition which preceded the written texts. They relate to the historical-critical methods and have a profound effect, both in process and content, on the reception ability of people living and learning by television and other electronically experiential means. It seemed appropriate to pay attention to the oral origins of the scriptures, so that the word might be transmitted in new ways to contemporary audiences who learn by hearing and experience. Many people in an electronic culture have forgotten how to read, or do not spend much time attending to written words.

Two subsequent happenings occurred in the parish the author serves as a result of the Biblical Storytelling workshop.

The first involved confirmation classes. Early in September the pastor took seven confirmands on a weekend retreat. The Rite of Confirmation is celebrated in this parish

on the last Sunday in September (for young people who have completed a two-year programme) with students entering grade nine. The purpose of the retreat was to prepare most of the students for the confirmation liturgy, but also to continue the entering eighth graders in the catechetical process.

The pastor decided to risk teaching these confirmands how to learn and tell the entire eighteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. This chapter contained the lection for the last Sunday in September (17th Pentecost in cycle A) as well as the Gospel read the previous Sunday.

The group learned the whole chapter together, in serial fashion, taking one episode at a time. The pastor told them the story orally, without reading the text (this meant he had to learn the story by heart ahead of time), and the confirmands told the story back to the pastor. Then he asked them what they had heard from this telling, what impact the story had on them personally or socially, what were the difficulties in remembering, how would they have felt if they were one of the characters in the story. Ideas and feelings were exchanged as the group learned together.

Then individuals were assigned a part of the chapter to learn by heart so each one could tell their own segment without notes, in serial order, to the people gathered for worship on Sunday at the retreat centre. Working on this assignment was the first time the students were allowed to lay eyes on the written text. The parts were practiced a couple of times before Sunday morning, and then presented as the Gospel for the day in its expanded context.

Two weeks later, in the context of the congregation's confirmation service, the confirmation students were asked to present the Gospel again before their home congregation and visiting families. There was one rehearsal. The Gospel story was told, without notes, from memory and from their hearts, word for word from Matthew's eighteenth chapter.

People were moved to tears. The pastor had been amazed, while learning the chapter two weeks before, how quickly these young people picked up and internalized from oral transmission, not from written memorization. They were like sponges soaking up water. When the time came to squeeze the sponges the baptismal water of the Gospel Word was heard in the congregation.

For the first time in twenty-three years of leading worship, the pastor heard the congregation spontaneously applaud the hearing of the Gospel. The orally transmitted word was the highlight of the day - and it was heard. These young people did not labour pounding the traditional memory verse into their brain by rote. They got into the spirit of the "text" with their voices, their bodies, and their hearts. They could make a Gospel witness because it had entered more than their brain through their eyes on the written page. It was work, but it wasn't "book" work in the grinding, obligatory sense.

Transmitting the biblical story orally requires the learning of some new (or renewed) skills. It is enjoyable and produces some surprising results.

The second happening in the parish which included biblical storytelling involved a new group called "Mother's Morning Out", a group of women with pre-school children

who meet for an hour and a half one morning a week for Bible exploration and sistership. Nursery care is given by volunteers.

The leader asked the pastor to share some insights about biblical storytelling with this group of young mothers. In the session the pastor began by telling them the Gospel text for the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (cycle B), Mark 9:30-37, the lection for the following Sunday. He did not use a Bible, nor did he give chapter and verse before beginning. He simply said, "I want to begin by telling you a story. Once upon a time, Jesus was passing through Galilee with his disciples...." The story about the question of who was the greatest unfolded, and when Jesus took the little child in his arms and talked about welcoming himself, the pastor motioned to the infant in the car seat who was among the group. All of the mothers instantly identified with the child. In the discussion which followed the telling of the story, the women did not focus on Jesus' conversion of the meaning of who was the greatest (the one who is least and servant of all). Rather, they focused on the power, greatness, needs, initiative, and leading of the child. They did not view the child as weak, least, powerless, or helpless.

As a man who has been trained to think rationally and linearly, and as a father of older children, the pastor was interested in getting to what he thought was the point of Jesus' story. The young mothers heard the story from their point of view as primary caregivers, who were feeling the responsibilities, demands, and power of the "little ones" or least ones. The biblical story had several points from which to gain insight into a relationship with God.

After this biblical storytelling introduction the pastor shared some very useful insights from *I'll Tell You A Story, I'll Sing You a Song* by Christine Allison.[1] It was written and collected by a woman who realized after the birth of her first child that she had forgotten many of the words to fairy tales, fables, songs and rhymes of her own childhood. The pastor began by singing the first words to Brahms' Lullaby, "Lullaby and good night .... La, la, la, la, la, la, la." The participants couldn't get beyond the first four words of the first line of the lullaby, but they all knew the tune. The words have been stored in the brain somewhere, so the problem seems to be accessing them by oral means, not by written means.

This may be similar to people's capacity to remember and restate biblical material. It seems reasonable that people will have greater access to the resources of faith when they are more able to internalize the Word by hearing and experiencing the other senses, not just by reading. Biblical storytelling may be a way to increase the memory storehouse and communication ability of people growing in an electronic/oral culture.

The pastor closed the morning session with the young mothers by reading to them another story. This time he stuck his nose in the book and never lifted his eyes from the page. He read every word, one after the other. He read Mark 9:30-37. It wasn't the same. They said so. They heard more the first time when he began with "once upon a time" and did not refer to the written word.

What are the implications of biblical storytelling for undertaking faithful biblical theology in the electronic nineteen-nineties? How can storytelling have an impact on work in the parish, on pastoral leadership, and on homiletical methods?

Stanley Hauerwas maintains,

> The social ethical task of the church is to be the kind of community that tells and tells rightly the story of Jesus. But it can never forget that Jesus' story is a many-sided tale. We do not just have one story of Jesus, but four. To learn to tell and live the story truthfully does not mean that we must be able to reconstruct "what really happened" from the four. Rather it means that we, like the early Christians, must learn that understanding Jesus' life is inseparable from learning how to live our own. And that there are various ways to do this is clear from the diversity of the Gospels.
>
> A truthful telling of the story cannot be guaranteed by historical investigation (though that investigation certainly can be in service to the truth), but by being the kind of people who can bear the burden of that story with joy. We, no less than the first Christians, are the continuation of the truth made possible by God's rule. We continue this truth when we see that the struggles of each to be faithful to the Gospel is [sic] essential to our own lives. I understand my own story through seeing the different ways in which others are called to be his disciples. If we so help one another perhaps, like the early Christians when challenged about the viability of their faith, we can say, "But see how we love one another".[2]

As a community of the faithful the local congregation is called to "tell the old, old story" in a many sided way. When the story is heard, and the people grapple with it as a message or messages received, then their many-faceted discipleship responses enliven both the parish and the people around the parish. The telling of the story begins the process of informed and motivated discipleship.

Eric Auerbach, in his study of biblical narratives, concluded that,

> the text presents the reader with a vision of the way things are, a representation of reality in which Scripture makes an imperialistic claim. The text depicts a world, and it is "not satisfied with claiming to be a

> historically true reality - it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy". The challenge the biblical text presents the reader is not whether the reader can appropriate the text and its claims within the reader's world; the challenge is whether the reader can and will enter the world of the text: "we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history".[3]

The teller/hearer of the biblical narrative has a much more intimately involved sense of "entering into the world of the text" than the silent, individual reader. This happens partly because the communication event occurs in a social context. The receiver of the message does so more experientially than cognitively, and the impact has a more memorable effect. People who have been raised with television expect an experiential impact which they do not ordinarily receive from a blandly read word.

Telling the biblical story holds the potential also to be an important homiletical starting point in the preparation of sermons as the preacher works from text to people. Preachers act as intermediaries when creating their art form in a communications triangle which includes the text, the person and efforts of the speaker, and the reception capabilities of the community. So much of this communication has been monological because of silent individual print, or because of institutionally derived expectations, or because of media limitations. Some of the communication becomes dialogue when preacher and community find ways to share with each other. It appears that biblical storytelling can be a way for the communication to be tri-logical (or tri-emotional or tri-ethical) as the received Word lifts off the written page into the expression of the teller and into the ears, hearts, and actions of the community as it responds to the living Word. It is the intention of this study to create an opportunity for this communication triangle.

The process and content of oral communication provide a power dynamic which differs from the written word, and affects the memory response capability of the receiver. It is fascinating, for example, that in Luke's story of Jesus' temptation, the Gospel text for the first Sunday in Lent, Cycle C (Luke 4:1-13), Jesus responds to the first two temptations with "it is written" and quotes from the Deuteronomic Law, whereupon the devil gets the drift and in the third temptation similarly says, "it is written", quoting the Psalms. But Jesus responds to this third conflict with, "it is said", after which the devil draws away for a time. Perhaps this suggests the power of oral communication to convey the impact of the Word of God, at least in the context of this biblical account.

In the parish, storytelling - not story reading - has important implications for what can be accomplished with the youngest children in Sunday school as well as the oldest adults in worship or Bible study. Often stories about the sacred story are related to Christian learners by Sunday school or Bible study educators. Students miss receiving sacred stories themselves in their oral form. Lectors blandly read from the sacred texts not having internalized the "texts" for an enlivened oral presentation of the story on Sunday morning. Bible study leaders appear to focus more on extracting meaning from particular read words, rather than telling the whole (or part) of the story from memory so the group can grapple with the "contextual" environment.

Andrew M. Greeley, in his sociological study of the religious imagination, asserts,

> The essential human task is not to transform the emotionality and sentimentality of religious experience and religious imagination to mature conviction; the real task is to reflect on the meaning of the conviction that comes with religious experience and is encoded in religious story so that

> one will be able to articulate and explain the convictions to both oneself and to others. Such an application of reflective intelligence to the imagery in the religious preconscious is imperative, essential, and inevitable, not because the religious imagination is pure emotionally (it surely is not), but because it is in the nature of human nature not merely to tell stories but to reflect upon their meaning. Stories, however, are intelligent, artistic creations, not just sentiment, and surely not mere animal imagery. The Church's neo-reactionary thinkers who rail against religious experience as though it were anti-intellectual and devoid of conviction either do not understand the nature of religious experience or are dealing with shallow pseudoreligious experiences....
>
> It has been supposed that the printing press and the school have replaced the dancer, the artist, and the storyteller as key elements in the process of religious education. The classroom teacher, trained in propositional instruction, demanding either catechism answers or, more recently, moral development in a baptised version of the Kohlberg moral development paradigm, represents progress over more archaic and less efficient methods for the transmission of religious values.
> The research suggests that this assumption may not in fact be accurate. While propositional instruction in a classroom or quasi-classroom environment may well be a useful and even necessary adjunct to the development of the religious imagination, storytelling is still the primary method of passing on a heritage.[4]

Biblical storytelling, with encouragement of group reflection on the meaning of the stories, might be a constructive way to nourish people in their faith heritage.

It is known that rabbis, in their theological training, are not allowed to undertake biblical criticism until they have learned the biblical stories and can tell them from the heart and the memory. They take apart for analysis only what they have learned to hold together in story. Learning, knowing, and developing the ability to tell the biblical story might prove to be a constructive element in Christian theological training.

Elie Wiesel says,

> Disciple more than anything else, his [sic] aim is not to plunge into historical exegesis - which surely lies beyond his competence - but to reacquaint himself with the distant and haunting figures that molded him.

> He will try to reconstruct their portraits from Biblical and Midrashic texts, and eventually insert them into the present....
>
> And so, faithful to his promise, the storyteller does nothing but tell the tale; he transmits what he received, he returns what was entrusted to him. His story does not begin with his own; it is fitted into the memory that is the living tradition of his people.[5]

Armed with personal enthusiasm, and a couple of positive and eye opening experiences in both teaching biblical storytelling and doing it in a group context, the author decided to bring the influence of this oral art to the primary group experience of the church, Sunday morning worship. This effort took two forms. First, the pastor learned the Gospel texts for each Sunday by heart, repeating them orally, and experimenting with the tonalities of sound. Various characters in the stories were brought to imagination in order to feel the dynamic of the interaction between dialogue and ideas. This has become the first step in the process of sermon development, the first movement from text to interpretation. It has irreversibly changed the presentation of the Gospel story on Sunday morning. Text is enlivened by sound. While the acolyte may be holding the Bible in front of the pastor as the lesson is "read", eye contact is maintained with the listeners in the congregation, and the presenter is free to move the body with the telling. The congregation is more active in the hearing. Many worshippers have given up following the written words printed on the back of the Sunday bulletin series. The Gospel becomes an event in present sound and imagination, not merely a silently and individually read word from the past.

The second effort to bring this oral art to the Sunday worship was a failure. An attempt was made to train church lectors in the art of biblical storytelling so that their

transmissions of the biblical material might be more vibrant. The parish is gifted with thirty-one people who have volunteered to read the Sunday morning lections on a rotating basis. With two Sunday worship services, and the First and Second Lessons being read by lectors, the congregation involves sixteen to twenty people each month. It seemed reasonable to draw these people together for storytelling training once a month. The group experience might provide an opportunity to learn the dynamics of the texts, to explain their relation to one another for each Sunday in the lectionary series, to dig into some issues of historical/text critical significance, and to enable the lectors to be more confident in their presentations. For three successive months a general invitation was issued, personal letters were written, and telephone calls made to the lectors inviting them to an evening of biblical exploration and training. A total of six people participated, two in each of the three months. This was hardly fulfilling the hope of a group learning experience or the intention of enabling lectors to be storytellers.

This initial effort with the lectors failed for several reasons. First, while many were willing to read, they had to depend on the written word for their confidence and security. Just speaking in front of people frightens many people, including some of the lectors. So, the implied expectation of having to tell the biblical material, and not just read it as they had grown accustomed, was too much for the lectors. Not a few said that if they had to learn the material by heart then they just wouldn't do it. They needed the script.

The second reason for the lectors being unwilling to learn the storytelling mode was a limited investment of their time. Some did spend time to learn the text and to

practice the reading, but others simply got up and read on their assigned Sunday. The quality of expression varied considerably. The pastor has not dismissed willing volunteers because of poor performances, but has sought new ways to instruct individuals to improve their skills.

The third reason for this storytelling training failure may be the most important. Some of the biblical genres simply do not lend themselves to the storytelling mode of communication, and are probably better transmitted in other ways. As the many proponents of narrative theology have called to our attention, most of the biblical material is in story form.[6] Yet much that is important and memorable is in the genre of legal teaching, or poetry, or hymn, or letter, or oracle, or one liner folk wisdom. The variety of genres and the problems inherent in linguistic translations do not always lend themselves to the storytelling motif in communication. So, to expect our lectors to tell what is better read or presented in another way is to place an unrealistic burden on the material.

1. Christine Allison, I'll Tell You a Story, I'll Sing You a Song (New York: Delta Book of Dell Publishing), 1987.

2. Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 52.

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4. Andrew M. Greeley, The Religious Imagination (New York, William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1981) 236-237.

5. Elie Wiesel, Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends (New York: Random House, 1976) xi, xiv.

6. William J. Bausch, Storytelling: Imagination and Faith (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publication, 1984) 11.

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENTS THAT PROMPT BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

Hearing, appropriating, and responding to the good news of God in Jesus Christ gives focus and energy to those who have responsibility for the hermeneutical and homiletical processes. Yet these processes are not accomplished most dynamically alone, in the preacher's study amongst the written words of the text, or the words about the text, but occur in community, with speakers, hearers, and words exchanged around the subject and action of God's Word in people's lives. Oral communication of the good news of God holds the potential of moving the church to a fresh hearing. The aim of biblical storytelling is to effect a fresh hearing of the gospel.

The purposes of this chapter are to reach an understanding of the meaning of biblical storytelling, to show how oral communication relates to biblical hermeneutics, to describe how biblical storytelling has emerged from various critical methods of biblical scholarship, to connect biblical storytelling with story theology, and to identify biblical storytelling with homiletical methods.

UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

The use of the term biblical storytelling in the context of this thesis needs some clarification. What is biblical storytelling?

One way to reach an understandiing of what is involved is to divide biblical storytelling into three separate words - biblical, story, and telling. The biblical record, the written and accepted canon selected by the historical church as its sacred story, is the

proper starting reference for biblical storytelling. The stories recorded in scripture have come to us by way of precedent oral tradition. They were stories repeated in a community of people, and designed to evoke wonder, direction, and response. While we have a received written record to which we give inspired authority we interpret this record in a variety of ways. This variety of interpretation has been accomplished in the last couple of centuries mostly by written means, and has been heavily influenced by a scientific world view and by historical-critical analysis.

Epistemological efforts to prove the truth of biblical assertions by scientific methodologies have left us with only a kernel of statements worthy of being called authentic. The work of Canadian scholar James Breech is illustrative of this as he examines the authenticity of Jesus' statements. In his The Silence of Jesus, Breech explores eight sayings and twelve of the parables of Jesus which scholarly examination has judged to be the authentic voice of the historical Jesus.[1] At least there has been consensus on this core of biblical material. Historical criticism, while trying to distinguish fact from fiction in the written material to find the Kerygmatic Christ in the historical Jesus, has exhausted the expert few in learned debate while leaving many people without a biblical memory with which to carry on in faith. Norman Petersen refers to historical criticism in this way:

> Historical criticism is concerned with the value of biblical texts as evidence for reconstructing the history to which they refer or of which they are documents. Partly because the texts refer frequently to historical events, and partly because these events have been of religious significance for most biblical critics, historical criticism has been the dominant mode of academic biblical studies for well over a century. But the long history of historical criticism in biblical studies has also shaped this mode of criticism into an academic tradition, the historical-critical tradition.

> Consisting of a complex of traditional problems, methods, and solutions (hypotheses, theories, and historical reconstructions), this tradition constitutes the fundamental "scientific paradigm" of biblical studies.[2]

While leaving historical and critical debates to the academic scholars the people in the church have lost contact with the source and norm of their faith and life in the scriptures. Biblical storytelling might be a way for the people of God to reconnect with vitality to their faith history.

James Smart writes confidently about the future of biblical theology.

> The bedrock on which that future rests is surely the double nature of the contents of Scripture - which corresponds to the double nature of Jesus Christ. Everything in Scripture is history and must be open to the most thoroughly critical and reconstructive investigation. But at the same time everything in Scripture is directly or indirectly witness to the reality of God's presence, a presence which, whether in Jesus Christ or in the apostolic witness or in the Old Testament traditions, has always defied the attempts of a purely historical methodology to capture it. It demands therefore a responsible and competent theological investigation and interpretation. But the two cannot be separated, for, just as the divine presence and revelation and the human historical person are one in Jesus Christ, so the Scriptures as a whole are the unfolding of the drama of God's presence and action in a period of history. What takes us back again and again to these ancient scriptures is a resonance between the drama and the drama of our own existences as individuals, as communities and above all as a church that knows its continuity with Israel. We find ourselves, our nature, our destiny, our tragedy, our redemption, our hope of a future, all of them laid open here. It is all of it about us. It is the dialogue between God and man [sic] in which we have our life. Therefore a biblical theology that sensitizes our ears to that dialogue and helps us to hear more clearly what God is saying to us now through these historical records is certain of a future.[3]

Biblical storytelling is the attempt to sensitize our ears to hearing the word of God speaking to people in our world today. It is a tool in the interpretive process.

Biblical storytelling, with its concentration on the oral origins of scriptures, and presentation of the narratives in oral forms for understanding, seeks to incorporate the

insights of written criticism (form, redaction, rhetorical, or literary/narrative) into the creative and imaginative hearing of God's people. Biblical storytelling lifts the written word off the page to appeal to contemporary people who learn primarily through experiential media which incorporate sound, motion, emotion and visual images. According to Thomas Boomershine:

> Another potential contribution of biblical storytelling is to provide a framework for interpretation of the Bible in an electronic age. We now live in the period of the highest degree of change in communications technology since the first century. The problem is we continue to use the methods of interpretation that were developed for the silent print world of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The shift from the predominantly oral culture of the biblical period to the literate culture of the Hellenistic world was an enormous transition. The shift from the literate culture of the modern world to the post-literate post-modern electronic world is at least as major a transition. The reappropriation of the original oral character of the Bible may be an essential step in making it possible to get some distance on the Bible in the world of reading and writing and to interpret the Bible faithfully in radio, television, and film.[4]

Biblical storytelling challenges the negative implications of the word myth, especially as used by Bultmann in his form criticism. The truth value of myth, while being easily dismissed by biblical scholars as being unworthy of sacred communication, is being reasserted as essential and central to the content and process of biblical and personal reality. Robert Béla Wilhelm states it well:

> Today, myth is equated with falsehood, and the Christian is reluctant to accept the Gospel as his personal and communal myth. For almost all contemporary Christians, the underlying truth of the Gospel is equated with its being an anti-myth. That is, Christianity is identified as being primarily an historical reality, and history records objective reality. In contrast, myths are about subjective matters and are therefore less real. Myths are certainly less congenial to the scientific outlook of popular culture with its emphasis on technology, practicality, and a linear worldview. Other ways of experience are regarded as being arbitrary or

> erroneous - fables and fantasies - that can be labelled with the word that is most suspect by contemporary people; myth.[5]

Myth, carried by the narrative form in stories, is the cradle or container of the transcendent truth of God, not a statement of falsehood, unprovable, or suspicious. Biblical storytelling attempts to reinstate basic biblical content into the minds and hearts of God's people so that they may make judgments and take actions based on God's story. Personal stories take on meaning as they relate to the action of God in dialogue with people in biblical stories.

In his advocacy of the truth value of the Biblical narratives, Mark Ellingsen maintains,

> that the need to insist that they (biblical stories) really happened, that they are true, or that we diligently search for their modern meanings are secondary concerns. It is sufficient that we simply relate the biblical account and understand what it literally says - that our preaching be an art of telling those stories to others. Questions of truth, relevance, and modern meaning will take care of themselves because these stories have a way of transforming the lives of those who hear them.[6]

Story is the second important word in biblical storytelling. The elements of the story are to be known from the inside. One needs to pay attention to the characteristics of oral narrative in order to share the story from the heart. Variations in tempo become important. Looking for short sentences which emphasize important points, and slowing down the pace of the telling are keys to effective presentation. Recognizing verbal threads helps to tie the whole story together. Verbal threads are words or phrases in which sounds or ideas are repeated. They form a pattern in rhythm or in content so that recalling one thread helps to draw the memory to the next part of the story or the next episode, where the thread is repeated. It is also constructive to attend to the silences in

oral narrative. Pauses help to highlight what needs to be pondered and specially retained. Silence can also convert sentences, phrases, or episodes within the whole framework. In the silence, as well as the word, God may be heard.

To retain the story in memory one needs to grasp the sensory registers in the text, the key thoughts, emotions, or actions that bring the story to life. Looking for verbs becomes vital. The more one senses, the more one can remember. Since short term memory is clustered most efficiently in seven to ten characters one might re-write (re-print) the story to learn it by seeing its oral dynamics in units of seven to ten words. The way the Bible is printed on the page for text efficiency, paragraphing, and numerical notation is adequate and appropriate for silent reading. It might prove helpful to reprint the text in order to grasp the oral dynamics of the story. This was done for each of the biblical narratives presented in chapter four of this thesis to facilitate short term memory. Retaining the whole story in long term memory for oral presentation is made easier by clustering the bits of stored short term memory. Syntactic links which tie the parts of the story together thematically, or episodic links which tie the whole in a chronological history are more easily seen and recognized in this re-writing process. The purpose of this re-writing is to convert the medium from a writing/reading form to a listening/telling form. When one does this it becomes readily obvious that the original form of the biblical story was oral, that sounds have been recorded on the page which were never intended to be read in silence but reproduced with auditory vibrations.

In learning the story for oral sharing one needs to come to an understanding of how the story is organized by looking at and analyzing the components. Aristotle's

classic Poetics gives us the basic clues of plot, character, thought, and diction.[7] The plot charts the action from an initial setting through a succession of episodes in which character interaction creates tension which is finally resolved at the conclusion either to wrap up the whole or to thrust the story into a yet uncompleted future. The context of a biblical story plot within the whole structure of the gospel helps to clarify its possible import.

Character in the story describes the interpersonal human dynamics and motivations. How does one grasp and portray the subjective perspective or point of view of each character in the story? What narrative comments can be made about the characters to interpret their actions to the audience? What norms of behaviour do the characters portray which evoke our negative or positive judgment? How intimate or distant do we see ourselves in relation to particular characters? Answers to all these questions help the teller get a feel for the characters involved.

Thought refers to the basic idea or ideas contained in the story. When selecting the biblical stories for telling, expressed in Part Two of this thesis, the author was governed primarily by the thought or theme. Knowing the thought or theme directed the search, but did not eliminate the factors of surprise or suspense as the stories expressed their variations on the themes.

Diction involves the behaviour of the teller in the story presentation through attention to sound resonances of words and phrases, and to physical gestures of face, limbs, and body position. Eye contact with the audience is established and maintained by remaining on the same physical plane. The teller sits in the same kind of chair used

by the hearers, and speaks with them directly in front. The teller keeps introductory comments as brief as possible, and uses them only to set the scene or thought context for the story. The teller tries to avoid any descriptions of meaning so that the story can speak for itself.

Once one has paid attention to the oral dynamics, and has analyzed the literary elements of plot, character, thought, and diction, the teller's memory is assisted by "interiorizing" the whole story. How does this story relate to the personal experiences and life story of the teller? What feelings and thoughts did the teller have when undergoing similar tensions and resolutions? Was one's personal conclusion similar to or shockingly different from what happened to the story's character? What about the hearers? Have they, or have they already told, stories of similar action or consequence to the biblical accounts? How might their experiences influence the hearing and absorbing of the Biblical story for themselves now? How will God speak to them through the storyteller? Answers to these questions may not be clear during the time of preparation and learning, but their asking helps the teller to internalize the dynamics of the story for oral presentation.[8]

Telling is the third important word in biblical story telling. One cannot do it alone, as in silent individual reading of texts. Telling is an oral event emanating from a speaker and received by a listener or group of listeners. An interaction of people is required, and an interaction with God is hoped for in the process of telling biblical stories. Telling aims to place the hearers within the original medium through which the

stories of God were communicated to people. The telling intends to make present and dynamic what God wants to say to us and ask from us today.

Telling of the stories opens new communication with people who are influenced and learn primarily from electronic media. In our present media culture people take on meaning and purpose for their lives by responding to the experiences of image and sound which constantly bombard the senses. The dominant system of communication has changed in the last four decades from print and silent reading to electronic experiences of sight and sound. People in their mid-thirties and younger have lived all their lives in an electronic age where books have been displaced by other media. The Bible does not have much importance for many in this culture because it seems an antiquated collection of writings about past events which no longer have relevance. Many believe the Bible can't stand on its own and communicate without an expert scholar or preacher to do the interpreting. The stories, the Biblical narratives have been "eclipsed", as Hans Frei would say,[9] and relegated to reference sources for the historically curious. With silently read print the Bible became an object to be explored alone rather than a series of events which vibrated with sounds of experience and life. It became the written reference upon which theology was done, rather than the storied source from which theology emerged. Word written stifled Word heard.

With the major paradigmatic shift in our age to a media culture, it would seem helpful to express biblical truth and wisdom through action and sound. The stories cry out to be told. It might prove helpful for the church to develop people with new skills,

with an oral memory, so that the church will hear and obey. Biblical storytelling can assist with this interpretive process.

There is a paradox created by the influence of electronic media today which also directs us to the re-emergence of biblical storytelling as an essential component in communicating the gospel. For our most prominent media, movies and television, communication in community is apparently happening because of the visual and auditory interaction between people on the screen. But in fact the receivers of the communication, whether individuals or a group, remain apart from and external to the action. It is received alone by the hearer or viewer and may in fact have a numbing effect because of the variety and rapid change. At least there is no opportunity for the receiver to interact with the action on screen. The exception, of course, comes in the form of phone-in programmes, where telephone and T.V. media combine to cause some human interaction. But they are rare.

The point for our purposes now is that biblical storytelling requires a speaker and audience in community interaction around the story. Without such interaction effective communication is reduced. Learning happens face to face, mouth to ear, action to reaction, to evoke responses of question, wonder, experience, despair and hope. The narratives become live stories in the human interaction of community telling, hearing and discussing.

ORAL COMMUNICATION AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

How does the oral communication of the biblical message relate to methods of biblical hermeuntics?

Transmission of biblical materials relied on the oral tradition of the community both prior to their being written and after the various versions were collected together and approved as authentic and authoritative. Werner Kelber argues persuasively for the role of the community in the formation of the written Gospels, and for the persuasiveness and power of words in an oral culture. He refers to this as oral synthesis, the powerful and binding quality of oral speech. Jesus himself did not speak with a consciousness of written retention of what he said, but "shared the fate of all oral performers prior to the electronic age that his words would not only be misunderstood, but vanish the very instant they came into being."[10]

How, then, were his words and deeds recorded, and can we rely on the authenticity of the records? Kelber maintains that the transmission occurred under two formative conditions, social identification and preventive censorship. Social identification refers to the ease with which common people could remember the spoken word because the words conform to rhythmic and acoustic demands that are practised in their social context. While conforming to social norms the language also displays considerable variability.

> Literalness, 'which has almost become a fetish with literary scholars',[11] is foreign to oral transmission. The inability of spoken words to evade social life inescapably involves them in the whirling wheel of social change. Oral formulas, cliches, and commonplaces assure remembering and transmission while being changeable, adaptable and interchangeable.[12]

We need not be too concerned, therefore, to find the ipsissima verba of Jesus to establish authenticity, but celebrate the wonder and variety of what we hear him saying.

Preventive censorship refers to the quality of community remembering in oral discourse which prevents foreign, boring, or socially unacceptable material from being passed on.

> Auditory amnesia and resultant discontinuity constitute an epistemological issue for oral transmission no less important than the indeterminacy principle for classical physics. Forgetting is a form of death ever present in oral life. No model of oral transmission may be said to be valid that does not seriously reflect on and integrate amnesia, broken paths, and rejection of tradition. The rule of preventive censorship states that a tradition that cannot overcome the social threshold to communal reception is doomed to extinction. Loss and discontinuity no less than growth and continuity dictate the realities of oral life.[13]

What we have in the Gospels is both a variety of written oral transmission and what was not forgotten by the remembering and faithful community. A means to preserve the integrity of the written records and to create and preserve the useful memory of faithful communities in the electronic age is to assert the re-emergence of oral communication through biblical storytelling.

Moving the hermeneutical question of what the text meant to the homiletical question of what the text means for contemporary people involves the community in which the message or messages move, the means of moving it, and the one who does the communicating. Operating simply with written texts may inhibit the preacher or homiletician from conveying the spoken power of God's word. To be effective in an electronic/experiential culture, the homiletician might benefit from beginning with the

spoken stories of scripture shared in community. In presenting the word orally God can become a present and moving force in people's lives. Northrop Frye has said:

> It is already clear that what has been called the metaphysic of presence meets us at every turn in the Bible, and that the spoken word either takes precedence of the written word or lies closely behind it.[14]

Biblical storytelling has emerged as a new focus of energy for interpreting and proclaiming God's Word in recent years due to two frustrations. One frustration refers to dissatisfaction with the historical-critical method of biblical exploration and understanding especially as it has interfaced with proclamation and preaching. The second frustration refers to reactions many persons have to preaching, both within the church and in the culture generally. People are prepared to be bored by and to tune out a read lecture, which may be occasionally interesting, and to be talked at with an endless string of pious moralisms. With the prevalence of television, movies, computer technology, and telephone interaction people today are stimulated by, learn from, and respond to media which excite a number of senses at the same time. Experiential growing in the media age requires more than either silent reading or speaking from a manuscript. Biblical storytelling has moved beyond the limitations of the historical-critical method while not abandoning the insights of that process, nor taking up a naive pre-critical understanding of the scriptures. Biblical storytelling offers a new way to understand the authority and reality of scriptures which invites fresh interpretation, insight, and inspiration.

To grasp these assertions one might be helped by an exploration of how biblical storytelling relates to various recent methods of biblical criticism. One must also

examine the interface of biblical storytelling with contemporary homiletical methodologies.

Walter Wink has become a spokesperson for those who have become frustrated with the historical critical method. He states,

> Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt. It is bankrupt solely because it is incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.[15]

Wink names five basic reasons for this criticism of the historical-critical method. First, the method as practiced was incommensurate with the intentions of the text. The historical-critical method sought to establish the truth of its work through a value-neutral objectivity which looked at texts with detachment as an object of scientific/historical research. Yet, the intention of the New Testament writers, by their own written admission, was to bear witness to the value intensive perspective that their new found faith offered them, and to share with others in the hope they would be changed.

Second, the ideology of objectivism drew historical criticism into a false consciousness. Because historical criticism grew with an academic intellectual bias for detached observation of facts, little attention was paid to the role of emotion, volition, point of view or biases of the gospel speakers and writers. Assured knowledge of what the gospels were saying was expressed in terms of theory, mind, and reason while leaving out practical matters, the body of the faithful, and the factors of emotion and experiential knowing. A false consciousness resulted from the assumption that historical knowledge could somehow be unrelated to the position or point of view of the historian.

Third, biblical studies have increasingly fallen prey to a form of technologism which regards as legitimate only those questions which its methods can answer. Historical critical studies have been effective at applying the methods of the natural sciences to establish the facticity of biblical truth. In doing so they have narrowed the field of questions that could be asked of the biblical material, and left out significant portions which would not apply to their questions.

Fourth, biblical criticism became cut off from any community for whose life its results might be significant. Criticism became the domain of professional scholars who did their work alone or in consultation with other experts in the academic field. The church, the living community of faith through whom and for whom the words of scripture were both spoken and written, was separated from the critical and constructive work of the scholars. The community's struggle for faith, truth, and integrity of vision and witness became unrelated and unimportant to critical scholarship.

Fifth, biblical criticism developed in an historical context which has now changed. In the present context it is, as now practiced, obsolete.[16] It was first employed as a tool to destroy expressions of truth in existing orthodoxies with their theological view of history. It undermined the Bible as the sole source of authority in the church, and attacked the historical basis of the Christian faith. It advocated freedom of intellectual inquiry to breathe fresh insight into a conservative view of biblical inspiration and origin. In doing so biblical criticism paid little attention to its own objectivism as an ideology. Today biblical scholarship is moving into a "postcritical" time when the insights of the historical critical method can be viewed as a necessary, freeing corrective to the earlier

naive approaches, but not as the final answer to the hermeneutical problem of what the texts meant.

Wink summarizes his argument as follows:

> To say that biblical criticism has now, like revivalism, become bankrupt, is simply to summarize the entire discussion to this point. It was based on an inadequate method, married to a false objectivism, subjected to uncontrolled technologism, separated from a vital community, and has outlived its usefulness as presently practised. Whether or not it has any future at all depends on the adaptability to a radically altered situation.[17]

Wink goes on to suggest that biblical study is undergoing a necessary paradigm shift, a shift that recognizes the importance of the insights of the historical critical method but goes beyond to new interpretative insights and meanings. Wink's own dialectical hermeneutic includes both new insights gained through the point of view of sociology and the personal dynamics of psychoanalysis in which the texts serve to transform individuals and groups of human beings from having little or no perceived relation to God to being changed by God.[18]

It is in the context of utilizing the insights of the historical-critical method, in being part of the "new hermeneutic" age when what the text does is as important for meaning as what the text says, that the factor of biblical storytelling makes a significant contribution.

STORYTELLING AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

The growth of biblical storytelling out of various streams of biblical criticism has been traced by Thomas Boomershine in his essay "The Reemergence of Biblical Narrative".[19] He cites the work of Hans Frei[20] who maintained that historical criticism

developed as an aspect of Enlightenment thinking. In the Enlightenment the meaning of biblical narratives was separated from its realistic/figural meaning because the story was viewed as a reference for reality beyond the story itself. The narratives took on significance because they referred to reality which was not part of the stories themselves. Reality was etched either in history or ideas. Stories could clarify the meaning of historical events or help articulate reasonable ideas. They were useful as references for meaning but not as bearers of their own intrinsic meaning. Stories no longer had value in their own structure, but took on importance only as sources of history or theology. In Frei's terms, the biblical narratives were "eclipsed" or overshadowed by the concerns of rational and historical theology and lost much of their power to communicate their light to individual experience or communities of faith. People were cut off from the sources of their faith in the biblical narrative tradition. Biblical storytelling seeks to reassert the importance of the biblical narratives themselves, not by returning to a pre-critical literal rendering of story meaning as historical descriptions of fact, but by interpreting the meaning of the stories through the prisms of form, redaction, rhetorical, and literary criticism.

Form criticism has a positive relation to biblical storytelling because of its reliance on the oral foundation of the scriptures.

> Form criticism is the study of the individual units of tradition - sayings, stories, parables, apocalyptic discourses - with a view to understanding how their form is related to their function and history in the primitive church. Form critics assume that most of the tradition originally existed as individual units and that there was a stage at which these units of tradition, stories and sayings, were told and retold by word of mouth; they assume that such traditional units were preserved and transmitted because they served a need and purpose in the church.[21]

By studying the characteristics of oral tradition it became possible to discern forms that were consistent or similar across the various units of narrative. Attempts were made to trace the history of a tradition through its oral and written developments. Form critics emphasized that the narrative units of the tradition must be heard in order to be understood. Oral presentation was important, telling an important ingredient in interpreting. Foundational form critical work focused on the texts as documents of tradition to be analyzed for their theological and historical meaning.[22] There was no need to understand the meaning of the texts through the medium of heard stories. Biblical storytelling seeks to understand the oral tradition processes which formed the written narratives so that persons formed in the literary and textual culture of today may hear the meanings of the stories in a new way.

Redaction criticism has a positive relation to biblical storytelling because it focused on whole books rather than isolated individual traditions. In focusing on the gospels, it attempted to ascertain the role of the final editors in the process of narrative composition while taking into consideration the settings of Jesus' actual historical ministry, the life of the early church which carried the tradition, and the individual evangelist. The variety and differences of the gospel authors in their contexts are observed. Biblical storytelling furthers the work of redaction criticism when it seeks to portray whole books of the Bible. However, the storytelling approach focuses on these books as oral narratives intended for the ear not as documents to be read silently. The editors wrote with the assumption their stories would be read aloud as stories not as an exercise in propositional or historical theology.

Rhetorical criticism feeds the process of biblical storytelling by analyzing the literary types of biblical texts and focusing on technique of narrative and poetic composition. The form of a particular piece of literature helps one to understand what it is trying to communicate. By paying attention to the emphases of rhetorical criticism the biblical storyteller is helped to learn the text for telling. In the telling and hearing of biblical narratives new insights and understanding of the oral origins of the texts may emerge to be given a new hearing for the faithful today.

Literary/Narrative criticism, proceeding from the study of literature in the latter part of this century, has had an important and direct influence on biblical storytelling because it has focused attention on the integrity of each narrative itself. There are many reasons for the rise of literary/narrative criticism of biblical texts and the development of story theology.

BIBLICAL STORYTELLING AND STORY THEOLOGY

Terrence W. Tilley cites four general historic factors which have led to the development of story theology.[23] They were set in the ferment of the early nineteen-sixties in which there was a shaking of theological foundations in both Roman Catholic (post Second Vatican Council) and Protestant (death of God) theological circles. Fresh breezes of questioning authority in a culture of narcissism led to a search for new ways to undertake theology.

The first historic factor was the rise of logical positivism and linguistic analysis in philosophy which challenged the verifiability of religious claims. Religious and moral

language, thus biblical literature, was relegated to the realm of private and subjective influence while the language of science and historically observable common sense was elevated to the status of the only kind of language worthy of meaningful regard in the public domain. Attention was drawn to how various disciplines use language to communicate meaning, so that a fresh look at the forms of biblical texts was the result.

This philosophical influence joined with the second historical factor leading to the emergence of story theology which was the recovery of "The Narrative Quality of Human Experience".[24] This phrase, attributed to Stephen Crites, asserts that human experience is inherently narrative in form. Experiences have a time limited focus, a duration, in which they play out their meaning for people. As events in time, life experiences give birth to stories which have a beginning, a developmental stage, and an ending. As oral events they form patterns of expectation regardless of the length of the experience. These time conditioned experiences, as whole events, are the locus of meaning and memory for people. Critical analysis of such experiences fixes them in time for the purpose of abstract learning, but does not make the event present again for people. Biblical storytelling helps to re-present the action of God to people whose lives are given meaning through story forms. Generalization and abstraction from the experience of story help to fix the meaning in time. Faith memory and discipleship will best be built on an interplay between experience and critical reflection.

> Both ways of thinking about experience - durationally and analytically - are necessary if one remembers that human experience is basically durational and if one remembers that analysis is abstraction from (and distortion of) that experience for a specific purpose, not the basic way of human experiencing. In short, both ways of thinking about experience need to be held in a creative tension.[25]

The third contributing factor to the rise of story theology has been the evolution of biblical criticism. Recent scholarship has moved from viewing texts as sources of historical or scientific truth to recognition of their origins as shared stories of God's relationship with people. The primary form of analysis has become literary/narrative criticism.[26] Mark Ellingsen gives an excellent typology of different literary approaches to biblical interpretation. He distinguishes two schools of thought and groups many contemporary biblical scholars and homileticians into either school.

The first group is composed of those who focus on the story teller. "Story theology presupposes a storied-reality; everyone is a story."[27] This is the view that Crites has suggested. The stories of the bible have a correlation to the storied nature of all human endeavour. The task of the scholar and preacher is to relate other secular or personal stories to the biblical stories which have the same religious intentions so as to evoke faith in the hearers. Theologians like Robert MacAfee Brown, John Cobb, Stephen Crites, James McClendon, Paul Ricoeur and George Stroup are grouped with Stanley Hauerwas, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Dietrich Ritschel in this storyteller orientation. Biblical scholars Walter Wink, Sallie McFague, Daniel Patte, and John Dominic Crossan place their orientation in this story theology mode. In the homiletic field the names of David Buttrick, Richard Jensen, Eugene Lowry, George Bass, Thomas Long and Edmund Steimle are associated with the power of the story form in the analysis of texts and in the formation of sermon material which corresponds to the moves and structures of the texts.[28] The author's own mentors in the process of sermon formation also place primary emphasis on the power of story to communicate biblical messages and

truth. These include H. Grady Davis,[29] Morris J. Niedenthal,[30] and Eduard Riegert.[31]

This thesis places emphasis on the told or oral story as a primary means of evoking a fresh hearing of the biblical message. In this process three ingredients interface to result in the received word - the speaking of the biblical text/story itself, the speaking of the preacher as mediator of the biblical story, and the speaking of the listeners whose own stories relate to what is heard. Davis refers to the art of the one who preaches recommending that he (sic) write for the ear.

> When he [sic] is wording his theme or message, when he is composing his structural assertions, when he is writing his sketch or the sentences and paragraphs of the sermon, when he sets down any words whatever, the preacher must hear how they sound when spoken, each combination of syllables, each phrase when joined with other phrases to make a sentence, each sentence when joined with others to create the movement of language.[32]

In learning the biblical texts for telling one is struck by the realization that the biblical authors wrote for the ear, and reminded of the oral origins of the texts themselves. Biblical preaching is assisted by paying attention to the oral dynamics of the written word.

Niedenthal places emphasis on the importance of the listener's story as it relates directly and dynamically to the biblical story and the preacher's story. When connections are made the voice of God speaks in new and refreshing ways.

> Preaching to an assembly of people with different needs and different experiences can be perplexing. But it has become apparent now that there is a common story, a shared story, and that it runs deep in people's lives, affecting profoundly the ways in which they feel and think and live.
>
> It isn't enough however for the preacher merely to know in a detached, intellectual way that this story is a large part of the story of

> each listener. Rather, each listener must recognize his or her own story in its universal and therefore in its particular dimensions, in what the preacher says. The listener must feel, "Why, that preacher understands what it is like to face what I have to face"![33]

The effectiveness of the connection between the biblical text, the preacher's words, and the listener's receptivity is built on the narrative quality or narrative structure in time of common human experience.

The second group of literary/narrative critics focus on the biblical narrative itself utilizing the tools of new literary criticism to arrive at a descriptive interpretation. Arising out of the concerns of the philosophy of linguistic analysis this group's effort has been to analyze the characteristics of narrative while regarding the external references of texts as of secondary importance. Major theological figures in this literary analysis include Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Robert Alter, Brevard Childs, and Northrop Frye. Homileticians in this group include Frederick Borsch and James Earl Massey.[34]

Whether one subscribes to either the story theology or the biblical narrative group, the primary importance of the literary/narrative criticism of biblical texts has been to understand Bible texts to have meaning as narratives rather than as teaching illustrations of propositional theology.

> The fact that the Bible contains stories was supplanted by the recognition that the Bible is composed of stories - myths, legends, satires, allegories, histories, apocalyptic, parable, etc. This marks a significant shift in vision. The biblical narratives came to be seen not as secondary illustrations, but as the context in which the rest of the material was developed.[35]

Biblical storytelling grows out of this literary/narrative criticism. Thomas Boomershine clarifies the relationship well:

> Rather than beginning with an understanding of the causes of the final narrative, biblical storytelling begins with the experience of the final narrative as a story. Furthermore, biblical storytelling explores and then renders the attitudes of the storyteller, the characters of the story, and the turns in the plot through an actual telling of the story. The meaning of the stories is not then described in theological terms but is known wholistically in the experience of the story itself. In this way, people come to know that the meaning of the story is more than the sum of its causes.[36]

Biblical storytelling acknowledges the importance of understanding written texts as literary narratives. But these narratives were written for oral presentation to be repeated aloud from memory or with the aid of a text. In the telling new hearing and new meaning may be gleaned from the narratives. Biblical storytelling appears to be an important link to finding fresh understandings of the biblical message.

The fourth contributing factor to the increase of story theology, according to Tilley, has been the erosion of the myths of the Enlightenment.[37] The principal myth of the Enlightenment is a story that tells us stories are old fashioned or irrelevant in finding or establishing truth. Reason emerged to define what it meant to be human. Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell demonstrate the process as follows:

> The plot was given in capsule form by August Comte: first came religion in the form of stories, then philosophy in the form of metaphysical analysis and then science with its exact methods. The story he tells in outline is set within another elaborated by Hegel, to show us how each of these ages supplanted the other as a refinement in the progressive development of reason. So stories are pre scientific, according to the story legitimating the age which calls itself scientific. Yet if one overlooks that budding contradiction, or fails to spell it out because everyone knows that stories are out of favor anyway, then the subterfuge has been worked.[38]

The modern age has been raised to believe that "narratives are irrelevant to truth and truth is irrelevant to narratives".[39] The triumph of reason was based on four central

convictions: the myth of individual autonomy, the myth of evolutionary progress, the myth that there is a real world out there awaiting human discovery, and the myth that science is radically different from art.[40] However one views the legitimacy of these convictions, their being questioned and re-evaluated has led to the insight that they all have a story, or myth, world of their own which establishes their credibility. We live in a time of numerous ways to understand the world, of various constructs of meaning, of different stories to tell, and of diverse points of view. All have a part in contributing to our faith and action in the world. It might prove constructive to appraise and evaluate them for their benefits and liabilities. Stories, rather than being outdated or useless, are now recognized, told, and examined as a foundational means of establishing the truth.

Biblical storytelling emerges as an important means to unlock the treasures of biblical narratives in the modern world. We live in a time which has not only exploded and explored the truth or falsehood of various myths, but also in a time of great technological change which has altered how we learn, how we pay attention, how we process information, how we form our values, make our decisions, and take action.

BIBLICAL STORYTELLING AND HOMILETICS

What part does biblical storytelling play in the homiletical process which produces sermons?

Biblical storytelling has emerged as a new focus of energy in recent years in the field of homiletics and preaching

This is partly due to perceived frustration with preaching as boring, irrelevant, abstract, or moralistic. Homiletician Fred Craddock asserts that "boredom is a form of evil". [41] Edward Markquart details a number of contemporary criticisms of preaching, the first one being that "most preaching is too abstract and academic, too theoretical and theological".[42] This criticism is connected to an alternative possibility in biblical storytelling. Storytelling does not negate the benefit of abstractions, models, or theories for learning, but asserts the primary impact of story on people's memory and decision making. H. Grady Davis writes:

> We preachers forget that the Gospel itself is for the most part a simple narrative of persons, places, happenings and conversation. It is not verbal exposition of general ideas. Nine-tenths of our preaching is verbal exposition and argument, but not one-tenth of the Gospel is exposition. Its ideas are mainly in the form of a story... We overestimate the power of assertion, and we underestimate the power of narrative to communicate meaning and influence the lives of our people.[43]

Biblical storytelling may be an effective bridge between the stories of God's action with people in the accepted canon and the theological work of contemporary people.

Utilizing the techniques of literary/narrative criticism in biblical study much homiletical emphasis has been placed on aligning the form of a sermon with the form or structure of a biblical text so that the impact of the message may have the same result for a contemporary congregation as it had on first century groups of the faithful.

For some the search for a contemporary story which parallels a biblical story becomes the primary methodology in sermon construction. Michael E. Williams is a case in point:

> In my preaching today I include numerous stories other than biblical narratives. I do not choose these just to "warm up the crowd" or to illustrate some philosophical or theological "point". Rather, I attempt to discover those stories that provide a doorway into the world of the biblical text, to touch similar feelings or shatter expectations as the parables often do. Any theological reflection or historical background can be woven into the very fabric of the telling. Stories provide pathways of imagination into the biblical worlds and back into our own.[44]

While such a method seems to be attractive intentionally it may prove extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish on a weekly basis. To find a contemporary story which parallels exactly the biblical story one must have a huge store of story memory or an extremely inventive and imaginative mind. It is not the intention of biblical storytelling to tell stories which parallel the biblical accounts, but to learn and tell the biblical stories themselves. Observing and analyzing the structure, content and action of the biblical stories for oral presentation is an important beginning step in the process of sermon formation.

David Buttrick, in his massive study of homiletical methodology, pays attention to the dynamics of the biblical texts as literature which not only have things to say to us in terms of meaning, but which also do things to us which affect our hearing and doing.[45] Through their use of language the texts have a performative effect which holds the potential to evoke a response in the hearer. Assessing and coming to grips with the movement of the text, through its plots and intentions, gives the preacher input for a sermon which has similar movement and dynamic impact.[46] When the preacher first learns the text by speaking it, the preacher can better grasp the sense of its original intention and move forward with constructing sermon moves and connections. The preacher's consciousness is more attuned to the original presentation mode of the text.

As the preacher develops the flow of his/her own sermon this consciousness of oral quality plays a decisive role. Buttrick bears witness to this when he questions how one can test the basic structure of a sermon. The test question is: "Can the basic structure be read out loud in sequence and make sense?"[47] Three sub questions for structural creation of the sermon also have to do with oral presentation:

> Does one phrase follow another naturally without strain or non sequitur? Are all phrases simple, noncompounded sentences (except within narrative passages)? When read aloud does the entire sequence seem to come together in consciousness and make a meaning?[48]

These same questions are used when the biblical storyteller encounters the written text in preparation for oral presentation. What connectors between phrases or sentences are keyed to one another as memory pointers for the flow of the action? How can longer sentences be broken down to simple memory phrases or pieces to commit to memory? How does the sound of the text affect the experiencing of it? When the preacher begins the homiletical process by learning the textual basis of the sermon in its oral form, developing the structure of the sermon words can be accomplished more efficiently.

Buttrick argues that there are a number of stages which are necessary in the formation process of a sermon: "a study of the text, a basic structure, a sketch, a final structure, and a script - in whatever ways these stages may be accomplished, they are necessary."[49] This preacher would add, either prior to the stage of studying the text or at least as a part of that stage, the stage of oral learning/expressing of the written text. Such an effort is a labour of love in two directions, in the direction of the original performative mode of the text, and in the direction of the contemporary congregation who hunger for a living word from God. If preaching is mediating the content of the

gospel to contemporary congregational recipients, as Buttrick asserts,[50] then telling the gospel story seems to be an important step in the sermon formation process. The creative and imaginative processes are moved by more than the preacher's mind, and the resultant sermon holds the potential for a more dynamic and lasting effect on the hearer's consciousness and response.

> In the ancient world spoken language was employed in more sophisticated ways than in our linear culture. First century folk grasped language like a tool, choosing form and style and structure to shape purpose. Thus biblical language is language designed to function in consciousness.[51]

Sermon language is designed to function in the consciousness of contemporaray people so that faith and response are evoked.

Thomas Long uses the metaphor of storyteller to describe the work of many preachers.[52]

> Storytelling preachers do not choose the narrative form arbitrarily but because they believe that narrative is superior theologically and communicationally. Theologically narrative is superior because, at its base, the gospel itself is a narrative.[53]

It is argued that because most of the Bible takes on narrative form it is fitting for sermons to do the same. As a communications tool, the sermon functions most effectively when it takes on the narrative form because story is the way humans receive messages most deeply. This is the argument of Stephen Crites, cited previously. Long comments:

> What do listeners like in sermons? We like stories. We live our lives out of them. We remember in stories, dream in stories, shape our values through stories.[54]

Stories function in sermons in various ways. In some cases they are used as illustrations of the rational or logical points that the preacher wants to establish. Used in this way they serve to give anecdotal evidence for the idea or ideas that are being presented, to ground the preacher's appeal to the mind in the experience of the listeners. Stories may be in the sermon, or the entire sermon may take the form of a story. This is the homiletical view of Eugene Lowry who believes that sermons should move along in time not by a linear logic of philosophical points, but by the experiential logic of narrative experience.[55] When sermons move along according to the plot of a narrative they have a greater listening appeal than if they progress from one static point to the next. However, rigid adherence to narrative form in sermons may not be faithful to the biblical texts when the texts themselves are not narratives.

Stories may also function in the sermon to involve the audience in a new way by leaving the conclusion open ended. As listeners become involved in the ambiguity of the story experience they take on some responsibility for finding the meaning as the story applies to their own life experience. Open ended stories in sermons or as the sermon become a vehicle for sharing stories of faith by people in the community. This interactive process of homiletical development is part of the intention of this thesis process. Hearing the stories from the Bible, hearing the faith stories and questions of the faith community, hearing the sermon, and hearing the feedback, all intermix to make the homiletical event.

Long sums up the strength of the preacher as storyteller metaphor when he says

> It balances the concern for the objective truth of the gospel with a passion for religious experience. By weaving the stories of human experience into

> the biblical narrative, and by naming the theological dimension of those experiences, the storyteller announces, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In addition, the storyteller image is attentive to the rhetorical craft of preaching without forcing its gospel into an alien rhetorical mold.[56]

Long also mentions two weaknesses of the image of preacher as storyteller which are important for our consideration. First, storytelling "tends to underplay the non-narrative dimension of scripture and to narrow the communicational range of preaching to a single method."[57] The scriptures contain various kinds of literature which communicate to receptors in multiple ways. Placing complete emphasis on the story forms in scripture may limit the range of material the preacher can utilize in sharing the good news. Long details various strategies for preaching based on the forms of texts one encounters in scripture - psalms, proverbs, narratives, parables of Jesus, epistles.[58] In that context he defines preaching as an activity which combines the hermeneutical and homiletical functions into one process:

> Preaching does not involve determining what the text used to mean and then devising some creative way to make that meaning pertinent to the contemporary scene. Preaching involves a contemporary interpreter closely attending to a text, discerning the claim that text makes upon the current life of the community of faith, and announcing that discovery in the sermon.[59]

The preacher is helped to "discern the claim of the text" when the effort is made to make the written word into sound, when the story, or other literary form, is made into speech early in the process of sermon formation. By beginning with the telling of several biblical stories around a biblical theme and receiving feedback, the author was enabled to hear the emerging claims of the texts on the community of faith before the sermon was preached. The feedback came in the form of questions, propositional statements, and

stories. Thus, the sermon became more of a shared community dialogue around an issue of faithful significance to the church.

The second weakness of the image of preacher as storyteller is that "there is a deep theological danger in measuring preaching by its capacity to generate religious experience".[60] As the storytelling preacher attempts to interweave contemporary stories with God's story in scripture the result may be simply a muddling of stories. The telling of personal stories and interpreting their meaning may or may not have a relation to the Christian story. Simply telling a human interest story may replace the gospel story or confuse the gospel story in people's consciousness. That is why the emphasis in this thesis has been on telling a series of biblical stories. The focus has been on the shared story of the biblical community interfacing with the shared story reaction of the contemporary faith community.

Some storytelling theologians assert, however, that all stories, whether biblical or personal, are ultimately theological.

> All stories are meant to be "theological". Humankind needs theological stories because human beings are fundamentally interpersonal and because if the Christian God's promise is true, then humankind is fundamentally related to God as person. Since story is the only means by which the interpersonal reality of humankind can be expressed in its cognitive and affective fullness and since our relationship to God is fundamentally interpersonal, it follows that storytelling and story listening provide the most appropriate means of enabling us to live in this relationship.[61]

The personal God revealed in the stories of and about Jesus Christ is the subject and content of this thesis process as the pastor/preacher and faith community interact with the word. In the process of hearing it is hoped that the listeners' imagination will be drawn into a relationship with God so lives are changed by the voices of the good news.

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CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LENTEN STORYTELLING PROCESS

The meaning of the word homiletics has roots in the Greek language which are important for homiletical method. Homiletikos means of or for conversation, affable. Homilein means to be in company, converse. Homilos means a gathering or company. Homiletics, it seems, is an oral process of conversation amongst an affable company of people who have gathered for the purpose of speaking with one another, presumably about important matters. This thesis is a written record of an oral process focused on biblical stories in the life of a contemporary congregation. The process began with the written record of God's word in the Gospels lifted off the page through the oral art of biblical storytelling. Speech conveyed the messages which were heard by the gathered company. The gathered company then spoke back to the storyteller through guided and recorded conversation. The speaker listened to what was heard. He then reflected, learned to speak another biblical story on the same theme, and shared insights orally in the sermon. Other sermon hearers responded to the messages they received. This homiletical process involved the teller, the biblical story, and the listening and responding community in an ongoing cycle of communication designed to advance God's word.

It was the goal of the process, reported and analyzed in chapter four, to effect a fresh hearing of the gospel messages in the community of Christ Lutheran Church, Waterloo, Ontario.

The process used the practice of oral communication in biblical storytelling, the existing structures of parish life, and the current spiritual needs of people to effect a fresh

hearing of God's Word amongst God's people. A six week series of biblical explorations was constructed in the parish served by the author who is the pastor. Following selection of themes by the church council, biblical stories from the Gospels were chosen which spoke to the themes. The stories were learned by heart so that they were told with some oral emphasis not found in read material.

Discussion of the heard word in the stories was focused with a questionnaire.[1] Three response groups were formed to respond immediately to the presentation of the biblical stories. Each group was provided with a cassette tape machine to record the sharing without having to depend on a scribe taking notes. Tapes of the conversations were then transcribed. Written seeing as well as oral hearing both helped the storyteller and preacher to analyze the impact of the stories on the gathered worshipping community. Once digested, this response material was used as input to the formation of the sermon for the following Sunday. Thus, the homiletical process received input from both the written word (the biblical stories) made into speech and the spoken responses of the hearing public. After the sermon on Sunday, feedback was solicited from a small group of worshippers, using a prepared feedback questionnaire as a response guide.[2] This enabled the preacher to hear what was most significant in the communication process of the Gospel.

This process emerged partly from the failure of previous efforts to train lectors in the storytelling process so that discussion of the scripture stories might lead to better hearing and speaking. Inventing or imposing new structures or requirements for

established traditions which were working in the parish with limited effectiveness was not the way to effect a fresh hearing.

The decision was made to utilize the present structure of life in the parish to establish the oral tradition in a new way, to effect a fresh hearing. In the liturgical season of Lent it has been traditional to worship on Wednesday evenings from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week. However, there was no prescribed liturgical form for the Wednesday evenings. The content was usually invented by the pastor and/or a small group of planners. The pastor decided to share some biblical stories around the theme "Hearing the Voices of the Good News".

The question then became what voices should be heard, which stories selected? How does one address which issues with the good news? A list of various aspects of the ministry of Jesus, as he addressed himself to both individuals and groups was constructed. The purpose of this list was to discern which areas of ministry seemed most important to a group of contemporary church people. A topical selection survey was drawn up listing twelve ministry categories. They were: ministry of healing, ministry of power with justice, ministry of teaching, ministry of suffering, ministry of prayer, ministry of nurturing, ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness, ministry of freeing from fear and oppression, ministry of economics, ministry of warning, ministry of change in direction, and ministry of empowerment. These twelve aspects were shared with the church council. The council was asked to select the six most important aspects of Jesus' ministry to them at this time. The six categories rated highest were reconciliation and forgiveness, prayer, power with justice, freedom from fear and oppression, change in

direction, and healing, in that order. It was surprising, in a time of financial recession, that only two people mentioned Jesus' ministry of economics in the survey.

With the six themes selected an attempt was made to match the general topics with the assigned gospel texts for the six Sundays in Lent. This was the responsibility of the preacher, who acts as the middle person in the triangle between the contemporary felt needs of the people and the liturgical tradition of the church which recommends the series of texts for each Sunday in the year. The themes and assigned texts were matched as follows:

1 LENT - HEALING - LUKE 4:1-13

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

2 LENT - FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND OPPRESSION - LUKE 13:31-35

Jesus' words to Herod, and his lament over Jerusalem.

3 LENT - CHANGE IN DIRECTION - LUKE 13:1-9

Jesus on repentance and the parable of the fig tree.

4 LENT - RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS - LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32

Parable of the forgiving father.

5 LENT - POWER WITH JUSTICE - LUKE 20:9-19

Parable of the tenants in the vineyard.

6 LENT OR PASSION SUNDAY - PRAYER - LUKE 22:1-23:56

Jesus' death, including the prayer in Gethsemane.

With the topical agenda set for the entire season, attention was turned to selection of biblical stories to tell on the Wednesday evenings prior to the Sunday mornings. Four general principles guided the choosing. First, the Sunday gospel text was not included in the Wednesday evening collection of stories. Since there is a selection of gospel stories from which to choose which address each theme, there was no felt necessity to repeat a story from Wednesday on Sunday. Part of the benefit of biblical storytelling is to share with people that there are both a variety of interpretations of any one story, and many stories addressing themselves to one theme in manifold ways.

Second, most stories were selected from the Gospel of Luke, because Cycle C of the liturgical triennium focuses on Luke's Gospel. Thus, the liturgical tradition was honoured while adding material that does not appear in the lectionary. Some of the stories selected were included in cycle C, but not heard by many people because they were lections for the middle of the summer.

Third, the collected stories were selected to reveal some scriptural variety in dealing with the topic. A few stories were chosen from other Gospel writers than Luke, or from St. Paul. Just as different people hear and respond to the same story in different ways, so also different Gospel stories address the same theme in different ways. Variety adds spice to the living word.

Fourth, the story telling segment of the Wednesday evening events was limited to fifteen minutes maximum. That meant that no more than seven stories were included in any one session. In the multi-media age the attention span of all people is reduced. Even fifteen minutes of doing one thing tests limits of concentration.

With these principles in mind the storyteller and preacher's first step was to listen to the Gospel of Luke in its entirety. "The Bible on Cassette", the New Revised Standard Version produced in 1990 by Hosanna, was used for this hearing.[1] While the presentation on the tape was more orally read Gospel than told story, it used a variety of voices to capture some of the action dynamics. As the Gospel drama unfolded in sound, the listener noted where particular parts related to the selected themes.

Once the collection of stories was selected for each Wednesday's theme, the storyteller began the process of internalizing them for oral presentation. Each story, from the NRSV, was re-written so that the dynamics of the story were more readily seeable. Biblical storytelling does not deny the importance of the written texts. Rather, it seeks to re-present the writing in oral form while remaining faithful to what has been written. Thus, the words were not changed, but rearranged with episodic spacing, dialogical encounters, changes of scene or address, connection of verbal threads, intonations of emotions, all visually expressed. This process made it easier for the story learner and teller to sense the action of the story, to know where there was tension and resolution, to involve the teller's body in expressions of movement, and to remember word sequences.

Then the stories were practised several times, orally, to hear the sound of the stories. Practice tellings were recorded on cassette tape, played back and re-heard, so that the teller could hear his voice and make corrections. This improved the teller's capacity to emphasize, to know when to pause, to slow down the pace of speech, and to improve enunciation.

Paying attention to the physical conditions for story listening plays an important part in story hearing. The listening environment of the worship space was altered to assist the hearing and responding. Fortunately, all the hardware in the worship space was movable. The Wednesday evening worshippers were directed to sit in the two blocks of chairs immediately facing the altar. Three circles of chairs (at either side of the altar area and at the back) were assembled for discussion groups after the storytelling. An individual chair was set in front of the altar next to a small table on which stood a lit candle in a wreath. This arrangement was intended to convey a more intimate atmosphere than is regularly available on Sunday morning with bright lights and readers standing at a higher level behind a pulpit. The audience was as close to the storyteller as space in the sanctuary allowed. Each of the storytelling segments of the Wednesday evenings was videotaped by a church member. The stories were told from the chair with a loose leaf notebook of the re-written stories in the teller's lap for security. Each of the stories was preceded by a few brief introductory comments to set the scene or locate the passages in the greater gospel story.

After the storytelling period, the assembled gathering self-selected one of the discussion groups. Each was given the same list of six questions as a guide (see appendix 7) and a cassette tape player to record the conversation. The primary purpose of this phase of the communication process was for the audience to respond to the hearing of the stories. From the reporting of the dialogue which followed each collection of stories it became clear that different people were stimulated by different issues. The conversation flowed quite easily. Many people were surprised and pleased that they were

being asked to interact immediately with the stories and each other. It heightened the audience's willingness to listen and absorb the messages when they knew they would be expected to respond. Some even took notes.

The general format of the "questionnaire" used to generate discussion each week was the same, although it varied week by week depending on the theme of the evening. It was constructed with open ended questions to enable the gathered faithful to begin to do their own communal theology. The first question was designed to evoke the strongest, and perhaps most compelling, messages from the collection to learn what the people heard most deeply. The second question tried to appeal to their "imaginative shock",[4] looking into what was surprising or new in the stories. The third question sought to discern how the stories might impact on the hearer's daily lives as they respond to changes. The fourth and fifth questions attempted to probe the future by asking for further reflection on earlier issues discussed and by asking unanswered questions. The last question was designed for the people to share personal stories related to the topic for the evening. In actual fact these stories emerged quite naturally in the course of the conversation while the participants discussed questions one through five. Discussion time was limited to approximately fifteen minutes. No one was pressured to say anything if they did not want to speak. Most people said something even if it was no more than a comment or question about remarks made by another participant.

Following the Wednesday evening sessions the three separate discussions were transcribed by the teller and preacher. Digestion of this material became part of the process of sermon formation. The preacher realized that there was more interpretative

material than could possibly be used on any one Sunday. However an attempt was made to relate some of the discussion material to the Gospel text in the Sunday sermon.

Each Sunday sermon was recorded on a cassette tape and transcribed from the tape. Either on Sunday morning following the worship, or within forty-eight hours of the service, a Sunday sermon feedback group was convened. To channel the energies of each of these groups a separate questionnaire was developed (see appendix 7). It was inspired by the work of Reuel Howe in Partners in Preaching.[5] The same questionnaire was used to guide the discussion each week. The feedback was tape recorded and transcribed during the first four weeks. Since the sermon for the fifth Sunday was a brief children's message in the context of a twenty fifth anniversary service at which the Bishop preached, an attempt was made to build in feedback from the children as the message progressed. The text for the sixth Sunday was the entire twenty second and twenty third chapters of Luke since it was Passion Sunday. The two chapters were presented in a dramatic reading during the sermon time, and were followed by a brief sermonette on Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46).

The preacher now has more insight into the thinking, feeling, and acting of the people in the congregation, and much theological reflection to utilize and address in future sermons. The trilogue between people, pastor and living word continues to direct and call us into the future.

1. See Appendices 1-6.

2. See Appendix 7.

3. "The Bible in Cassette", New Revised Standard Version (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Hosanna Bible Tape 1990).

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CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS

WEEK 1 - THE VOICES OF THE HEALING GOSPEL

STORIES AND GROUP RESPONSES

On the first Wednesday evening seven stories were told which related to Jesus' ministry of healing. They were selected to demonstrate a variety of approaches to Jesus as well as a variety of initiatives by Jesus in undertaking a healing ministry.

Following is a list of the stories told, the textual referent, and the summary titles given by one of the small group discussion leaders prior to discussion of the hearing.

Stories told by author	Text	Group leaders' recall title
Healing of the paralytic	Luke 5: 17-26	the roof
An epileptic boy healed	Mark 9: 14-24	the sick son
Two stories related to leprosy	Luke 17: 11-19	ten lepers (one came back in praise)
	Mark 1: 40-45	one leper
Jesus healing: those close to him (Simons' mother-in-law)	Luke 4: 38-41	rebuked demons
Jesus healing: those removed from him (the centurion's servant)	Luke 7: 1-10	the faith of the centurion
John questioning Jesus' work	Luke 7: 18-23	John the Baptist (where Jesus had just been healing many of them)

It is noteworthy to observe that one of the discussion group leaders tried to recall the total configuration of all seven stories by focusing on a memorable object or person in the story, not on the action dynamics of the story. He chose nouns for recall - roof, son, leper, demons, centurion, John - rather than the dynamics of the story expressed in verbs or in relationship interaction. What he could picture in his mind's eye was, perhaps, sufficient for recall of the story. But such one word descriptions can serve to inhibit or skew the meaning of the story and the hearing of good news. It is like calling Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the meaning is focused on the gracious love of the father for both sons, and his joy in welcoming them home to a new life.

The primary impression on which all three discussion groups focused, however, was the faith of the people in the stories to anticipate a healing word or action from Jesus. Faith of people is not a new subject, especially in a Lutheran church where people have been exposed to the doctrinal summary statement "we are saved by God's grace through faith." What was new or fresh and surprising in this hearing of the biblical stories was from where the faith was coming. It was coming from a leper, a Samaritan, a Centurion, friends of the sick person, not from the disciples. Outcasts, foreigners, those whom the "in-group" distrusted had more faith than the disciples. In some cases, this insight shifted group discussion away from hearing the healing gospel to concern for confident outreach to others. One person recalled how, in the story of the healing of the Centurion's servant, Jesus was willing to go to the home of a leader of the enemy camp. He related that action to Jesus' encouragement of his disciples in Matthew

25 to go to the prisons, the poor, etc. A fresh hearing of a Gospel story about healing assisted this person to make connections with a previously remembered Gospel story about discipleship. This fresh hearing also enabled some in the group to affirm an outreach ministry that was already ongoing through the congregation in the form of Prison Fellowship Canada.

Another fresh hearing from these stories of healing was the inclusiveness of Jesus. He did not discriminate against anybody, but welcomed anybody and everybody regardless of personal origins or conditions. This was a fresh and challenging hearing in a relatively homogeneous congregation. The people realized that this inclusiveness of Jesus is a different message than many churches portray, especially the fundamental churches who demand conformity to their own norms under threat of future damnation.

Hearing these stories of faith produced fresh inspiration to continue in and deepen the faith already present in the hearers. Many important and life changing personal stories of healing were related by the participants which paralleled the Gospel stories. In all cases faith and prayer played a key role in the healing, especially the faith and persistence of the friends of those who experienced the healing. In a sense, the hearing of a Gospel story of faith and healing became an "aha!" experience for the participants as they recalled what had happened to themselves. For example, the faith persistence of those who lowered the paralytic through the roof was recalled by a woman who has been healed of terminal and inoperable cancer. She had been in bed at home for ten months and attributes her present health to the prayerful persistence of the congregation, the help of the medical team, and her faith in God to heal. A similar witness was made

by a woman with diabetes who received a new lease on life through a kidney transplant, and a man with alchoholism whose fifteen year sobriety was attributed in large measure to a group of faithful friends. The point is that a fresh hearing of the biblical stories of healing produced similar stories from the people's experience which deepened the faith commitment of the whole community of the church. Educators maintain that reinforcement is a key element in learning. In this case, the fresh hearing of the told biblical stories of healing reinforced the stories of healing in the lives of several people which had been supported and encouraged by many faithful people.

A fresh hearing for some was the insight that Jesus took a holistic approach to healing people. This was heard from the story of the paralytic healing. Inner healing, of mind, spirit, and emotions was viewed as more far reaching than outward signs of healing. The story of the healing of the boy with epileptsy was also viewed in a holistic way.

One participant, who was an experienced story reader to her children, expressed the benefit of sitting down and being told the biblical stories. As a receptor of the stories she commented on the oral presentation by the pastor, including gestures and voice tonalities, which made the stories come alive in a new and different way.

Another participant heard Jesus' decision to choose to heal the leper (Mark 1:40-45) for the first time. It caused her to reflect on her relationships with others and to act with more initiative to bring about reconciliation and healing. She was motivated not to wait any longer for another person to act when healing of relationships was desired, but

to do something positive for change. If Jesus could take such initiative perhaps that was a motivator for her own actions.

An important aspect of telling biblical stories so that a fresh hearing of the good news occurs is the power of the story to evoke fresh and open ended questions for discussion and reflection. Following are some participants questions. Did Jesus always know he had the power to heal? When the disciples asked why they couldn't heal, was it because they didn't have enough faith in Jesus, or in themselves? Suppose my faith is not strong enough to make me well - I was going on the faith of God's action in making me well! Which is it? Is healing dependent on whether or not you fight against the faith?

Others were impressed that Jesus didn't want to make a public show of his healing ministry, but insisted on privacy and asked that people not be told. This seemed to be an authentic sign that the healing was from God. It was viewed to be in stark contrast to the "faith" healers like Ernest Ainsley on television where show and tell are everything.

SERMON ON THE HEALING GOSPEL AND FEEDBACK DISCUSSION

Text: Luke 4: 1-13 - Jesus' temptation in the wilderness

The sermon which emerged from reflection on both the assigned Gospel text and the group responses to stories on the healing gospel did not take the form of a story. It was, however, heavily influenced by analysis of the temptation story as the preacher internalized the text for telling. What emerged from the dynamics of the temptation was

a sense of challenge to Jesus' identity and his purpose in living, and the ongoing continuation of these challenges. The preacher heard both the holistic view of healing and the concern for group prayer and support which emerged from the group discussions.

The sermon began by asking the question of connection between the story of Jesus' temptation and his ministry of healing. How does Jesus' life and ministry inspire and inform the lives and ministries of contemporary people?

The sermon moved to define health as having a sense of wholeness, or balance, in one's identity, and a sense of purpose in one's doing of life. When either identity was undermined or purpose disruped dis-ease was the result.

These aspects of health became connectors to the story of Jesus' wilderness temptation as he fought to maintain his identity and purpose. The sermon moved to analyze through recall these aspects of the story. It also highlighted the ongoingness of the battle to prevent disruption of both identity and purpose. What happened to Jesus also happens to people today. Two resources were then suggested for taking up the battle for health - the importance of a community of caring people, and the practice of prayer. These resources were connected to Jesus' response to the tempter, and to his lifelong practice of prayer.

Learning the story of the temptation for telling helped the preacher understand significant dynamics which emerged as key points in the sermon. The sermon, while not in the form of a story, was the result of the preacher listening with both ears. One ear listened to the story of the biblical text, and the other to the stories of the people. This dual listening to story made connections possible in the sermon.

Response from the sermon feedback group indicated that the messages and connections were communicated to the listeners. Temptation and healing were viewed as ongoing things to be encountered by people. Faith and prayer were viewed as resources for coping and growing on a daily basis. One person thought a connection between the temptation of the devil and healing was different. Another made the connection when she realized the balance of identity and purposeful living could not be changed by the devil when one resisted temptation.

The participants all expressed appreciation for the pace, oral style, and folksiness of the words. One participant remembered the point about the ongoing temptation by the devil. It made an impression on him because it was not read from a page of sermon manuscript but was spoken with off the page folksiness. He noted that if you speak as you write it is a little different than if you speak without writing. Although the preacher had the written manuscript for this sermon in front of him, the discipline of biblical story learning for oral presentation made itself felt in the presentation quality of the sermon. Lively speech communicated more powerfully in the preaching than literary manuscript reading.

The respondents also made note of their need for both continuity and change in liturgy and sermon. They discussed this need in contemporary terms because they had heard the sermon point that Jesus was helped to resist the devil's temptation by recalling stories that were passed down orally through his faith tradition. The heritage of passing stories became helpful in managing change effectively. Story sharing was viewed as an effective means to reach out to new people with the good news.

WEEK 2 - THE VOICES OF THE LIBERATING GOSPEL

STORIES AND GROUP RESPONSES

Seven stories were shared under the title "Jesus' Ministry of Freedom from Fear and Oppression". They were: the stilling of the storm (Luke 8: 22-25); the mission of the seventy (Luke 10: 1-12); Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-41); Jesus encouraging the disciples to be fearless (Luke 12: 2-12); Jesus' teaching on anxiety (Luke 12: 22-34); Jesus calms the disciples fears and commissions them (Luke 24: 36-49); Paul's perspective on fear in the disciples of Jesus (Romans 8: 12-17).

The strongest impressions from those hearing these stories and lessons were their simpleness and directness of expression. The primary message was to stop worrying about daily life because all of life is in God's hands. Take on a spirit of adoption as God's children so that fears are released. The experience of hearing the collection of stories was totally refreshing for one participant because it re-affirmed his confirmation verse learned fifty-seven years previously - "In God I trust; I am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me" (Psalm 56:11). Hearing the stories enabled total long term recall of a related scripture.

Another participant got hooked on the first story (the stilling of the storm) and found it difficult to hear how the rest of the stories and teachings addressed the theme of freedom from fear and oppression. Others focused on the admonition not to worry. Maintaining such an attitude was easier said than done, or could be irresponsible when one is concerned to provide for loved ones. Some were surprised to hear that the disciples weren't really sure Jesus was who he said he was.

When one person heard for the first time the recommendation that a disciple should carry one purse for the rest of his/her life a discussion ignited around getting priorities straight in a materialistic culture. Most agreed prioritizing is a daily fight against accumulation of things. The fresh hearing of the biblical stories touched off a familiar debate centred on not worrying about riches.

In another discussion group hearing stories of freedom from fear led to an argument focused on related concerns. Some felt that the rest of the created order was well looked after but that humans were the only ones who insisted on looking after themselves so that they struggled with fears of tomorrow. Others felt creation struggled mightily and was filled with fears itself, especially as humans were killing their own life support systems.

For others a fresh hearing of these biblical stories evoked text critical questions. Historical differences between Bible times and contemporary culture sometimes made understanding and interpretation difficult. Differences in points of view and contradictions between texts were acknowledged. A broader acceptance of the variety of biblical messages reduced the anxiety to harmonize them all or to justify one in relation to another. A fresh hearing of diverse stories helped some participants change their attitude toward the Bible as a whole, acknowledging the need to read or hear the stories in their context. Knowing differences in setting helped participants live with contradictions in meaning.

Hearing biblical stories related to the subjects of worry and selecting priorities touched off recall of another text for one man, the story in the twelfth chapter of Luke

where a successful farmer plans to build bigger barns to store his wealth for an easier future. His life will end abruptly, however, so his planning is judged foolish. The lesson that changed this participant's life from his recalled story, as well as the told stories was that one ought not overemphasize the things that are not that permanently important. These stories helped him to reassess priorities and finally to accept retirement. Others in the group, who are still fearing loss of control, affirmed the value of planning and the goal of finding a happy medium between worry and providing for the future. Hearing some of the biblical stories was met with resistance because it meant changing one's lifestyle.

SERMON ON THE LIBERATING GOSPEL AND FEEDBACK DISCUSSION

Text: Luke 13:31-35 - Jesus' words to Herod and lament over Jerusalem.

The formation of the sermon depended upon learning the sound of this text for oral presentation. The teller and preacher had to answer two questions. How might Jesus have sounded when addressing the Pharisees about the threat of Herod? How might Jesus have sounded when thinking about Jerusalem? Two different expressions of emotion emerged. A fearless fighting mood, free of any worry, grew out of direct opposition, but a brooding, worrisome acceptance arose in the face of rejection. It appeared to the preacher that Jesus had mixed emotions when contemplating the future which were the result of whether he encountered opposition or rejection.

The sermon began by identifying these different emotions, and grew by analyzing why they may have been present. It then moved to ask two questions of the hearers.

How do you face opposition? How do you handle rejection? It affirmed Jesus' freedom from fear of opposition because he knew for whom he was willing to die. It affirmed his lament over rejection because humans have been given the freedom to choose whether or not to follow God. It challenged the hearers to decide.

The sermon's form was not a story, nor did it contain a story for illustrative purposes. The analytic form depended upon an effective and mood changing oral presentation of the Gospel text. Biblical storytelling and preaching about the story depended on each other to effect a fresh hearing of the gospel. In this context they worked in a complementary fashion.

The response group effectively heard the messages of this biblical text through the telling and the preaching. The respondents were especially attuned to both opposition and rejection in their own lives as they have experienced long term unemployment due to the recession. The first reflection was to focus on Jesus' probable disappointment toward those who rejected him. The participant shared a sense of guilt in his own life and the lives of others when people fail to be effective witnesses to Jesus in our culture.

Real surprise was expressed at the notion that Jesus could be strong willed, aggressive, almost feisty in the face of threatening opposition. The respondents believed persons today could be free of fear if they sense Jesus is with them in their trials and conflictual encounters. Several personal stories of faith were shared which demonstrated freedom from fear in conflictual situations when people initiated communication and understanding. The Gospel story of Jesus paralleled the participant's storied experience.

Several comments were made about the preacher's speaking style. He was regarded as easy to listen to and understand because of the use of simple language that helps common people receive the messages. He was perceived to speak in today's language without the use of antique or theologically complex words. The preacher perceives that this quality of speech is the direct result of learning the biblical stories for telling. In this case the telling of the biblical story gave fresh hearing to the formation of the sermon and fresh insight to the listeners of both the biblical text and the sermon.

WEEK 3 - THE VOICES OF THE TRANSFORMING GOSPEL

STORIES AND GROUP RESPONSES

In week three seven stories were told which focus on Jesus' urging people to repent or change the direction of their living, thinking, or acting. The seven stories were: the call of Levi (Luke 5: 27-32); Peter's confession and Jesus' call to discipleship (Luke 9: 57-62); woes against the Pharisees and lawyers (Luke 11: 37-54); the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31); forgiveness for the repentant (Luke 17: 1-4); and the ruler seeking God's direction to eternal life (Luke 18:18-30).

This collection of stories was most difficult for the listening groups to accept, not because they were complicated narratives but because the changes recommended were too hard to accomplish, if not impossible. Charges were made by some respondents that these texts were not relevant because of the two thousand year gap in time and culture. Are we being asked to do the same things today, if we are to follow Jesus? The Pharisees seemed to receive bad press but were complimented on being good tithers.

Who could possibly need to repent for sins against another as many as seven times in one day? The general flavour of the stories smacked the listeners in the face with a fresh call for radical behavioral change. The astounding nature of the admonitions was heard as law with some people vowing to try harder at what seemed impossible to accomplish. Others greeted the calls for change with the question of who can be saved, and realized anew that the answer is by God's grace. In the midst of personal inadequacies and past regrets some respondents heard the call to keep going forward without looking back and with eyes fixed on something or someone to follow.

Hearing these stories told evoked fresh concerns and questions from the audience. How rich is rich? Do we have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus? Some churches seem to glorify poverty these days. Was Jesus fair with the Pharisees, or just a good fighter? The story of the rich man and Lazarus was heard for the first time by some and had a profound effect on others with its graphic description of hell across an unbridgeable chasm separating people from God eternally. They heard the message to repent now, before it might be too late. Others expressed their desire to make their own right decisions, and maintain a hunger and thirst for God.

The cumulative effect of hearing these stories of change, as well as other stories in previous weeks, began to be felt in week three. Continued hearing had an impact on people's values and priorities. Some suggested giving more of their money to the church or other worthy causes as a demonstration of priority changes. Others reflected on the slow and long term process of change in their lives, and were critical of the types of

conversions viewed on television or in pentecostal circles which display impressive emotionalism but don't last.

After hearing biblical stories for several weeks some respondents marvelled at three important aspects of the good news. First, they were amazed at how patient God is with people. Second, God's patience was tied to God's willingness to forgive. This surprised the author because the stories of reconciliation and forgiveness were scheduled to be told the following week. The third aspect of good news heard through the stories was the wisdom of God. People did not have to worry about the future if they could give up control of their lives into the hands of God. One person shared the need to give up controlling her children's lives to allow them space to grow. Another told a story of how God's graceful will to bless people had changed her daughter's anger and self hate.

Some respondents expressed frustration in hearing these change parables by complaining they told people what to do but didn't show them how. There were no rules or procedures on how to forgive, for example, just the expectation of unqualified and continued forgiveness. A specific request was made to the preacher for a sermon on how to forgive.

SERMON OF THE GOSPEL OF CHANGE AND FEEDBACK DISCUSSION

Text: Luke 13: 1-9 - On repentance and the parable of the fig tree

The sermon was a conscious attempt to parallel the content and flow of action in the biblical text. Jesus began with questions about outrageous suffering and death that were fresh in the minds or memories of his hearers, and moved to a call to repentance.

Then he told the parable of the fig tree. The preacher began with the why questions people ask at the time of unfair or brutal death. He then moved to the question of how people are living their lives by asking what people were planning to do with the time they have left to live. Possible changes in attitude and action were presented in rapid fire progression, and were based on the kinds of change agonies which the preacher heard emerging from the mid-week story responses. The sermon concluded with a contemporary story of personal change which affirmed that positive change was possible for followers of Jesus.

Response to this sermon was instant and inspired. People requested copies to read. They heard that change was not only law but gospel and possible for them to accomplish in their lives. The preacher believes this fresh hearing occurred for three reasons. First, he heard the difficulties people were having with change as reflected in the story discussion groups, and included some of these dilemmas in the sermon. Second, he listened to the dynamics of the biblical text and intentionally constructed a parallel sermon, moving from questions and assertions to story.

Third, the preacher told a contemporary gospel story of positive and life giving change. By far the most moving part was the concluding story. People have remembered this story for many succeeding weeks.

The sermon feedback group commented that the sermon was effective because of its down to earth, clean language. It was neither esoteric nor abstract. It was contrasted with two funeral sermons heard by participants in other churches. One, in an evangelicalistic Bible fellowship church, was expressed in pejorative and judgmental

terms (repent, now is your chance to be saved). The other was lofty and theoretical with no personal means for growth. The author believes that the positive reaction to this sermon was due not only to the practical language of its questions and assertions, but also to the power of story used to proclaim good news.

Several people suggested the sermon gave them hope because it was a current positive application of a gospel story in the midst of a negative world, and because it helped them believe realistic change was possible for themselves.

WEEK 4 - THE VOICES OF THE FORGIVING GOSPEL

STORIES AND GROUP RESPONSES

Six stories or teachings of Jesus were shared under the title of reconciliation and forgiveness. They included: the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7: 36-50); Jesus brings judgment and urges reconciliation (Luke 12: 49-59); lost and found forgiveness - the parable of lost sheep, coin, and son (Luke 15: 1-32); Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10); Jesus on the cross (Luke 23: 32-38).

The principal hearing of the response groups to these stories was that there was hope for all kinds of people through the forgiveness and acceptance that God offers. The crucifixion scene and the Zacchaeus story particularly impressed the groups. Jesus' connection of anger with murder was both surprising and upsetting. Some just disagreed with his interpretation of the commandment.

Others heard the call to take responsibility to be reconciling agents - to work beyond the anger, to settle with one's accuser before going to court to avoid jail. Some

observed that there were many prominent or readily recalled stories in the New Testament whose subjects were sin and forgiveness. The storytelling clarified this conclusion in a fresh way. Recognition of sin was necessary in order to heal from it. A fresh appreciation of the tax collectors as legal and licensed rogues was observed when they were compared to contemporary members of parliament.

Because of the new hearing of these stories one person questioned whether they were all directly from the Bible. It was felt that interpretation was necessary because of different legal systems and customs. This highlighted the need for both biblical storytelling and preaching in contemporary terms to clarify the gospel messages.

Some thought it strange to identify the woman as a sinner. Weren't all people sinners? Or, do some people think of themselves as above or beyond sin? Why was the identification necessary?

Sin was recognized as being pervasive both within and outside the church. Church people were viewed as those who knew their need for forgiveness from their sins.

Hearing these biblical stories clarified the belief that no matter how bad a person is or becomes God stands ready to change ones life. The idea that God wants to forgive people, not condemn them, stood out as a source of positive change of direction for many people. The amazing acceptance of God held out promise for a new life. A congregational member who had served significant penitentiary time for major crimes was held up as an example of change in life direction as a result of hearing about the acceptance and forgivenes of God through Jesus. People heard a warning against

prejudging people in the biblical stories from Jesus. That insight was refreshing and sobering.

SERMON ON THE FORGIVING GOSPEL AND FEEDBACK DISCUSSION

Text: Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32 - Parable of the prodigal son

The sermon began by stating that this parable was easy for people to hear because of its familiarity, but difficult for people to understand because forgiveness is very hard to do. Jesus' parable could seem both extremely extravagant and terribly unfair.

The sermon moved to examine the three characters from the point of view of fairness and extravagance. It turned on the assertion that we as human beings need both to receive and give forgiveness for our health and reconciliation. The question became how?

The rest of the sermon attempted to answer that question. A first step suggestion was to pray for the power to forgive which comes from a place or person outside ourselves. A story was used to illustrate the action of God's power to forgive. It was the story of Corrie Ten Boom meeting a former S.S. guard after World War II. She became paralysed when he had asked to shake her hand, but she prayed, confessing to Jesus that she couldn't do it and pleading for the power of Jesus' forgiveness. Through the prayer forgiveness was released. The story proclaimed that forgiveness takes hard work which was one of the feedback agonies from the story listening group. Here story was used to describe graphically an important aspect of how to deal with the subject of forgiveness.

The preacher had heard several pleas from the story listeners for a sermon on how to forgive. So, this sermon progressed further to recommend several steps, including acknowledging the hurt, making a decision to forgive, realizing the process may not be instantaneous, forgiving ourselves, and trying to view the offender in a new light.

The sermon moved back to focus on receiving what God has to offer through forgiveness by evoking images of the father in the parable, particularly God's extravagant mercy and God's ability to absorb our anger. It closed with an invitation to come to the altar, bringing whatever burdens needed forgiveness, for a special prayer with the laying on of hands in the Service of the Word for Healing.

Good news was definitely heard by the sermon respondents. They focused especially on the extravagance of God's offer to forgive, and God's capacity to absorb anger. These ideas seemed both unbelievable and refreshing to the respondents. They were helped by the progression from story analysis of the character's relationships in the parable to several suggestions on how to forgive followed by a return to the story illustration and the parable. They were particularly moved by the suggestion that help was available from God through prayer to cut through the hurt and anger. Participants were definitely challenged to take more initiative in acting to be forgiving agents.

WEEK 5 - THE VOICES OF THE CONFRONTATIVE GOSPEL

STORIES AND HEARING DISCUSSION

Five stories of or about Jesus were shared. They dealt with how Jesus handled some issues of power and justice. They included: feeding five thousand people (Luke 9: 10-17); the question of who is the greatest (Luke 9: 46-50); preparing and using power (Luke 12: 35-48); sharing power, the great dinner (Luke 14: 15-24); and the parable of the pounds (Luke 19: 11-17).

The variety and challenge of this collection of stories most impressed the listeners. In some cases they caused confusion. Further interpretation was desired. In one case the only familiar text was the feeding of the five thousand. The last two parables were particularly difficult. Some had their image of Jesus as a nice, gentle, guy confronted by the harshness of some of the stories. They were surprised by Jesus' harsh sound. Could Jesus be angry like the banquet host? Could Jesus really reject people who make up excuses? Doesn't he want people to get a second chance? How does forgiveness fit in with justice?

Others were moved by the story of feeding the five thousand to make distributing food to the starving world a matter of justice. Action in the midst of poverty was declared a possible way to use Christian talents.

Others were intrigued by the way the stories interacted with one another, moving from meeting a huge feeding need to wanting to put ourselves above other people, to the contrast in managing other people's affairs, to refusing invitations because of business. This led to a discussion of the risks and dangers of getting involved with justice issues.

Some were threatened and concerned with the message of the parable of the pounds. They did not like thinking about God judging their use of their talents.

The groups were challenged to examine their lifestyles and priorities as a result of hearing these stories. Realizing that having more means more obligations, they were more willing to be prepared, to have their lamps lit, and to work through the perplexities of difficult decisions for action.

Because some of these stories were difficult to accept some respondents raised the question of historical distance of the texts from the present time. They felt the problems of linguistic translation, contextual setting, and interpretation might have interfered with their understanding.

WEEK 6 - VOICES OF THE PRAYERFUL GOSPEL

STORIES AND GROUP RESPONSES

Eight stories were shared which focused on the prayer life of Jesus. They included: Jesus' preaching to the disciples and the crowd (Luke 6: 27-31); the transfiguration (Luke 9: 28-36); Jesus' sayings on prayer (Luke 11: 1-13); the unjust judge (Luke 18: 1-8); the pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18: 9-14); cleansing of the temple (Luke 19: 45-48); Jesus' prayer before his arrest (Luke 22: 39-46); and the last two-thirds of his high priestly prayer (John 17: 6-25).

The primary impressions of the respondents to these stories centred on three concerns of prayer. First, the agony and earnestness of Jesus' prayer in the garden struck some as being very different from our corporate prayers in church which seem so

dispassionate. Second, the urgency to keep praying with persistence had a challenging ring. A question was raised whether persistence might be nagging and therefore an inappropriate approach to God. Most felt the urgency to be assertive and persistent was necessary, but that nagging was aggressive and off putting. The third primary concern was for answers to prayer. Such results might surprise and be different than hoped, or arrive at an unexpected time. In either case there was an expectancy that answers would be forthcoming and be potentially life changing. Persistence was the principal fresh hearing.

One respondent remarked that, although he had read or heard the stories before, upon hearing the stories again it was like hearing them for the first time. Encountering them orally brought refreshing and inspired response. All seemed ready to be persistent in prayer, and to put themselves in a new frame of mind to accept what they were supposed to do when answers arrived.

SUMMARY REFLECIONS

From twenty to forty people participated in each of the Wednesday evening biblical storytelling events. The average was twenty eight. Fifteen people completed a final questionnaire.[1] The positive response indicated to the author that biblical storytelling is indeed an important vehicle for a fresh hearing of the good news.

Respondents felt their faith had been nourished and strengthened through the process of hearing and discussing the biblical stories. The oral manner of presentation enabled the stories to become alive and more real for the listeners. The format of

hearing and questioning what was heard helped participants grow to trust the relevance of the gospel stories while giving the freedom to question and be challenged by the messages. Personal faith journeys were enlivened by new insights. These journeys were profoundly moved by the reaffirmation that though all people are sinners they need and receive the forgiveness of God. Persistence in prayer greatly assisted a sense of connectedness to God. The most difficult stories for participants to hear were those which challenged people to change their life styles or re-examine their priorities, and those which confronted people with important choices which had long term consequences. Hearing the stories of the healing, liberating, and reconciling gospel resonated with the people's own life experience stories and affirmed their call to continue in the faith.

All participants felt more able to reflect upon and share with others their relationship to God as a result of hearing the stories and participating in the discussion. Some felt humbled and shy about sharing but grew in confidence through the story listening process.

All participants believed their hearing of the biblical word was sharpened by the experience of listening to biblical storytelling. They were impressed by the variety of the parables and the application of the stories to their daily lives. Some heard new stories they had never encountered previously, while others heard new things in stories with which they were familiar. The structured questionnaire proved to be a good discipline for increasing the usefulness and impact oF the stories. Many claimed more careful and qualitatively different attention to the reading of the lessons on Sunday

morning as a result of the new insights received through biblical storytelling. They listened in a new mode with sharpened interest.

All participants encouraged the pastor to continue biblical storytelling within and outside the congregation. Some were eager to invite community friends. Others were motivated to develop a richer prayer life and deeper theological reflection. One suggested we change the term bible study to biblical storytelling and dialogue. Several suggested expansion of congregational programmes to include special services with storytelling, multiple forms of sermonizing using drama and mime, and events involving the whole family in the telling and the hearing.

1. See Appendix 8.

CONCLUSION

This thesis reports efforts in one parish to effect a fresh hearing of the good news of Jesus Christ through the art of biblical storytelling. While working with different groups in the congregation three intentional efforts were made. The first effort was to tell biblical stories to diverse listening audiences. The second step in this process was to ask analytical, critical, and open ended questions of the hearers to discuss what they received from the oral presentation of the Gospel stories. The third step was to generate and encourage conversation around the stories encountered so that new understandings, motivations, or questions for the future might be developed. In this process the good news of God in Jesus Christ was heard in new ways.

A group of young learners in seventh and eighth grade confirmation classes heard an extended narrative portion of Matthew's Gospel so well that they were able to share it, without reading, in congregational worship. People still remember that event two years later. A group of mothers with young children are realizing the value of educating their children through storytelling as a result of being invited to hear and reflect on biblical stories being told. A mixed group of worshippers, young and old, congregational members and newly curious seekers, were invited to hear the gospel in a new way by focusing their ears and attention on clusters of told stories grouped around various aspects of Jesus' ministry. Sermon feedback groups were invited to reflect back to the preacher that which they heard in his sermon. Through intentional probing and the use of structured questionnaires, conversation developed around the theological issues revealed in the hearing. Hermeneutical questions of what the stories meant in their

original historical context combined with homiletical issues of what impact and consequence the stories have for people today. The result was a new hearing, and a new excitement about hearing in company, as people, together. searched for a word from God in their daily lives.

The author was struck with the ease and eagerness with which the people responded to the invitation to listen to a new presentation of the biblical stories. All were invited to listen with the expectation that they would have something useful or helpful to say in response to the hearing. All knew their response would be made orally in a group context. It is the author's contention that these factors combined to sharpen hearing abilities.

The listeners were asked to participate in the homiletical process by internalizing what they heard from their own accumulated background of story learning. They were asked to listen without any prior evaluative judgments placed either on the biblical stories or on their own personal stories. Interpretive comments, clarification questions, and flashes of insight emerged quite naturally in the course of the conversation. In all cases the grounding for this group homiletical work was in the told stories from the Bible. In the sharing the people's stories became metaphors for the biblical stories. Sharing was spontaneous and considerate with an earnest desire to understand and share.

In this process the pastor was cast in a different role than normally expected. The pastor as storyteller does not negate the roles of interpreter or congregational theologian, but invites the listeners to be a theological community who are expected to interpret what they hear through their personal filters. The pastor as storyteller does interpretation in

the selection of stories presented, and in the mode and manner of the oral communication. The listeners also put the pastor as storyteller into the role of listener when they feedback what they have heard. This helps the pastor as a preacher in the formation of sermons which speak to the primary concerns of the people. Story listening frees the congregation from excessive dependency on the pastor as sole theological authority, and trusts the authority of the scriptures as heard word.

The setting of the story sharing seemed to have a positive impact for a fresh hearing of the good news. For the Wednesday evening story sharing, the worship form was kept simple and brief so that the attention span of the listeners/participators was focused primarily on the stories. There were no physical barriers (pulpit or book) between the teller and the listeners. These factors helped raise the heard word as the primary intention of the worshipping community. Whether participants heard the biblical stories for the first time, or re-heard familiar stories, the changed context facilitated a fresh hearing opportunity. Clustering several stories together around common themes also contributed to a fresh hearing by giving participants the basic ingredients to compare and contrast differing points of view. This new hearing became evident in the group discussions which followed the storytelling.

The sermons produced during the six week Lenten series do not read well. However, as events in sound and action they held the participant's attention, and generated both fresh hearing and wrestling with implications. This was evident from the comments made by the sermon feedback groups.

Congregational remarks about their preacher speaking in plain language, not in

high sounding phrases above people's comprehension, were affirming for this homiletician's efforts and intentions. Knowing sermon feedback was requested and expected made the preacher more nervous and less confident about the sermons produced. There was a certain amount of risk in emerging from behind commonly accepted safety zones. Sermons in this congregation have not been traditionally the subject of intentional community discussion. Nor have interpretive and homiletical dialogue been perceived as congregational responsibilities. These efforts centred around the heard word and produced growth for both pastor and people.

While the form of the sermons seemed analytical and rational, they attempted to follow the structural action of the texts on which they were developed. Points were derived from learning the texts by heart for oral presentation. The pattern of sermon formation still tends toward making rational points from the texts, rather than either telling stories within the sermon, or constructing an entire sermon in the same mode as the text on which it is based.

The author believes that changing the form of the sermon week by week frees the congregation from getting into a listening rut and assists in fresh hearing. Yet the pattern of expectation in a point by point sermon does not seem to grasp people in deeply meaningful ways. Stories seem to have a more significant impact and are remembered longer than anything else.

New hearing can also arise from overhearing. This was the purpose of the youth message in week five of the Lenten series. When a child asked whether the pastor believed the many stories in the Bible, not a few overhearing adults were very attentive.

The Bishop, who was present and overhearing, has used the story of this dialogue in several of his sermons. A story has been retained in memory for continued sharing and interpreting.

Biblical storytelling can also be used to enable people to hear an extended biblical narrative. This was what occurred on the last Sunday of the Lenten series, Passion Sunday, when the extended narrative of two chapters of Luke was recommended as an optional reading. The author told the two chapters, and then focused a brief homily on one element in the narrative. An extended sermon would have been inappropriate in the listening time available in the liturgy.

FURTHER STORYTELLING OPPORTUNITIES TO EFFECT A FRESH GOSPEL HEARING

Having reflected on the processes of biblical storytelling in the parish to effect a fresh hearing of the gospel, it remains to make some suggestions for further opportunities for oral presentation of the Gospel stories to effect a fresh hearing.

The first suggestion is to create a biblical storytelling festival. The stories told might focus on a particular kind of story in Gospels like Jesus' parables, miraculous healings, or relations to authorities. They might also focus on a theme repeated in the Gospels like the Kingdom of God, the titles used for Jesus, or his ethical teachings. Alternatively, an entire Gospel might be told, or a large section of a Gospel like Jesus' sermons on the mountain or plain, Mark's Gospel, or Luke's journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. Events in Jesus' life and death might be told in the appropriate liturgical

seasons. For example, both infancy narratives from Matthew and Luke might be told in the same festival near Christmas time. The different gospel versions of the passion might be told in succession during a holy week festival. Comparison sharing of the resurrection stories might occur during an Easter vigil or in the Easter season.

A second suggestion would be to cluster various biblical stories for telling around the needs and issues which emerge from the people in the congregation. To do this effectively it would be useful to develop and administer a needs assessment survey with various groups in the congregation at different times, and to consult with congregational leadership as was reported in chapter three. Once biblical stories have been selected which address the emergent needs they could be told to target audiences. Unlike the format of the six week series in Lent, reported in chapter four, it might prove helpful for the storyteller to tell fewer selected stories and to follow the telling with a guided analysis of the structure and meaning of the stories. It might prove instructive for the storyteller to lead such a discussion to draw out responses from the listeners.

A third suggestion for fresh hearing of Gospel stories through telling would be to vary the media responses of the listeners. Rather than relying on a structured questionnaire to guide group discussion one might encourage the visual creation of collages to represent the hearing and learning. Others may wish to recreate the action of the stories using modern characters and language. Use of role playing and mime may also help to evoke new meanings and insights.

A fourth suggestion would be to establish biblical storytelling workshops to train congregational leaders in oral sharing of Gospel stories. This might prove helpful for

Sunday morning lectors, Sunday School teachers, evangelism visitors, personal counsellors, prayer group leaders, and health care givers. A helpful training instrument for Sunday lectors would be to rewrite the printed text so that the action of the passage might be more readily visible for oral presentation.

A fifth suggestion to increase the hearing of the good news through biblical storytelling would be to record the telling on videotape for distribution to those who are isolated at home, to people who are inactive within the church or attend worship irregularly, or to cable and public television stations for seasonal or occasional broadcast.

A daring suggestion to increase the hearing of the good news might be to sponsor a public telling of a whole Gospel, or a significant portion of a longer Gospel, in a theatre to a wider audience than gathers in a local congregation. It could prove fascinating to examine the differences in hearing and perception between a public audience and a congregational audience.

A final suggestion would be to recruit and train a small group of skilled storytellers within the congregation to present together extended biblical narratives using several voices. This might be accomplished occasionally at regular worship services as well as at other church events.

The most important place for a new hearing of the good news through biblical storytelling remains in the local congregation at worship. It would prove helpful if worship liturgies were constructed which allowed for immediate congregational feedback of the heard word - in storytelling and sermon - through group discussion.

Appendix 1

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

The healing ministry of Jesus - March 4, 1992

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about the stories? Why?

2. Did you hear anything surprising or new?

3. What changes in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' healing activity are most important for you?

5. What questions do you have about Jesus' healing ministry today?

6. Can you relate a story of healing in your life?

Thank you for your responses,
Pastor George

Appendix 2

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry of Freedom From Fear and Oppression
March 11, 1992

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about the stories, and Jesus' teaching? Why?

2. Did you hear or learn anything surprising or new?

3. What changes in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' activity, and call to you to respond -
   a) most frighten you?
   b) help to free you from fear?

5. What questions do you have about Jesus' desire to free you from fear or oppression?

6. Can you relate a story of freedom from fear and oppression in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Thank you for your responses,
Pastor George

Appendix 3

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry of Encouraging Changes in Direction
March 18, 1922

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about the stories? Why?

2. Did you hear or learn anything surprising or new?

3. What changes of direction in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' call to change directions are most important for you?

5. What questions do you have about Jesus' urgings to change direction?

6. Can you relate a story of repentance or change in direction in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Thank you for your responses
Pastor George

Appendix 4

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry of Reconciliation and Forgiveness
March 25, 1992

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about the stories? Why?

2. Did you hear or learn anything surprising or new?

3. What changes of direction in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' call to reconciliation and forgiveness are most important for you?

5. What questions to you have about Jesus' urgings to be reconciled and to forgive?

6. Can you relate a story of reconciliation and forgiveness in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Thank you for your responses,
Pastor George

Appendix 5

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

Jesus' Ministry of Power with Justice
April 1, 1992

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about the stories? Why?

2. Did you hear or learn anything surprising or new?

3. What changes of direction in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' empowerment and call to justice are most important for you?

5. What questions do you have about Jesus' power and sense of justice?

6. Can you relate a story of empowerment and justice in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Thank you for your responses,
Pastor George

Appendix 6
HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus
Jesus' Ministry of Prayer - April 9, 1992

Questions for group discussion

1. What impressed you most about these stories?

2. Did you hear or learn anything surprising or new?

3. What changes of direction in your life might occur from this hearing?

4. What aspects of Jesus' call to prayer are most important for you?

5. What questions do you have about Jesus' prayer ministry?

6. Can you relate a story of prayer in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Thank you for your responses
Pastor George

Appendix 7

PASTOR'S SUNDAY SERMON FEEDBACK QUESTIONAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let the questions be your leader and guide. Answer them only as you heard or saw. There are no right or wrong or written answers.

2. Find a place to gather, plug in the cassette recorder, turn it on to record, and discuss your responses to the questions (1/2 hour maximum).

3. Please refrain from arguing with each other or making judgments about what each other says. Ask questions of clarification from each other, but ask Pastor anything you want, and make evaluative comments about the sermon.

4. Return the cassette and recorder to the office.

QUESTIONS FOR RESPONSE:

1. What did the pastor say to you in the sermon?
   (Do not try to reproduce what the pastor said; this question asks for what you heard.)

2. What difference, if any, do you think the sermon will make in your life and relationships, or was it only of passing or theoretical interest?

3. In what ways were you challenged, drawn to greater devotion, or motivated to act in your areas of responsibility?

4. Did pastor's style and method, language, manner of delivery, and illustrations help or hinder your hearing of his messsage? Explain.

5. What relations did you see, hear, or feel between the worship and the preaching?

6. What questions, topics of concern, or suggestions do you have for further sermons on this or related subjects?

Thank you very much for your thoughtful responses to these questions. You have helped improve my preaching of God's Word. Pastor George E. Mayer

Appendix 8

HEARING THE VOICES OF THE GOOD NEWS
Explorations in the Ministry of Jesus

Final Evaluation

1. How did the hearing of the Biblical stories in the past few weeks affect your faith?

2. As a result of the hearing and discussion, do you feel more or less able to reflect and share your relationship with God?

3. Has your hearing of the Biblical word been sharpened by this experience? If so, how?

4. How might we continue the practice of Biblical storytelling in this congregation, or in the community?

Thank you for your responses,

Pastor George

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