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# Telling the Old, Old Stories: Reconnecting With Jesus' Parables Through Biblical Storytelling

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TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORIES  
RECONNECTING WITH JESUS' PARABLES THROUGH BIBLICAL  
STORYTELLING

by  
KATHRYN L SKOGLUND

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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## ABSTRACT

### *Telling the Old, Old, Stories: Reconnecting with Jesus' Parables Through Biblical Storytelling*

by

Kathryn L. Skoglund

Suggests the use of biblical storytelling as a means of presenting Jesus' parables in order to regain their original power. Uses the practice of biblical storytelling, contrasted with simple reading of the text from the Bible. Examines the responses of congregations from two churches comparing reactions of those who heard six parables told as a story to those who heard them read from the Bible. Also notes the connection the method of presentation of the parables has to listeners' engagement with the sermon. Includes discussion with confirmation-aged students regarding the efficacy of biblical storytelling.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV      New Revised Standard Version

NLT        New Living Translation

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION AND RATIONALE

#### **Introduction**

Several years ago, I was serving as a chaplain at an inpatient recovery center for people with drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions. On Friday afternoons I would conduct a service of healing and forgiveness for one of the four units in the facility. It was strictly voluntary—whoever wanted to come from the unit could—and it consisted of music, prayers, scripture, and a time of individual prayer and/or confession and forgiveness.

On this particular Friday afternoon the people attending the service were from the men's extended unit. These were patients who had been in treatment multiple times, were there in lieu of jail or prison, or to receive treatment before they began incarceration. In other words, these men were the hard-core cases and they looked like it; the years of addiction and tough living were visible not only on their bodies, but in their eyes as well.

For the scripture text that day I decided to use the Prodigal Son story, but rather than read it from the Bible, I simply told it, as close to the NRSV version as I could. I didn't want to embellish it or put my own slant on it, but wanted it to be as simple and straightforward as the story really was. I also wanted them to hear it as I assumed Jesus' first listeners heard it: straight from the storyteller's mouth.

They all listened quietly and when I finished I asked if any of them had heard the story before. To my great surprise, of the eight to ten men there, none of them had. I then

explained that this was a story from the Bible. It was a story Jesus told about God and God's love. I told them it reveals how God is always ready to forgive and welcome us home, no matter what we've done or how long we've been gone. I told them this story wasn't just *a* story; it was *their* story about God's love for them.

After a long silence I noticed this one man—this rough, scary-looking, tattooed man—with a tear running down his cheek. In a quiet, awed voice, he said, “That’s a great story.” For perhaps the first time in my life I realized how great that story truly is. I also realized what a huge effect it must have had on Jesus’ audience when he first told it, and still does have on those now, who also hear it for the first time.

### **The Problem**

I have grown up in the church and been a part of it my whole life. Almost everyone I know has at least some familiarity with the Christian faith and the Bible, and this story from Luke is well known among my circle of acquaintances. I have preached many sermons on it, read and talked about it in Sunday school and confirmation classes, but never has it evoked the kind of response it did that day.

I’ve thought about my experience a great deal since that day in the recovery center and have wondered about it. Why don’t Jesus’ parables have the same power for those who are familiar with the stories, as they do and must have done with those hearing them for the first time?

There are a couple of possibilities that come to mind in answering this question. The first is that today we are so far removed from the place and time of the parables and Jesus’ first audience that we no longer connect to the elements of the stories in same way his original listeners did. We don’t understand the cultural implications of the parables,

the homey settings in which they were told, or the points of reference used. For instance, we don't understand the level of animosity between Jews and Samaritans, so when Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in response to the lawyer's question regarding his neighbor we are not shocked when the Samaritan is the only one who shows compassion to the half-dead victim lying by the side of the road. When Jesus talks about a shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep unattended in order to search for a single lost lamb, it is difficult for us to comprehend the foolishness of such an act or the level of danger to which the flock is now exposed. The total loss of dignity exhibited by a father racing down the street in order to meet his prodigal son, returning home at last, doesn't connect with us. Our modern day experiences don't lend themselves to the kind of surprise, shock, and even anger Jesus' listeners would certainly have felt upon hearing such audacious stories.

Kenneth Bailey<sup>1</sup>, a scholar familiar with Middle Eastern culture and traditions confirms this difficulty. Not only are we “twenty centuries away from the peasant world of Palestine in the days of Jesus”<sup>2</sup>, as Westerners we don't understand the cultural values and mores the people of Jesus' day accepted without question. According to Bailey we must move “over and back”<sup>3</sup>; get out of our Western, modern way of thinking and behaving, in order to get any real meaning from a story told to a Middle Eastern audience so long ago. Jesus' listeners would have connected immediately to his parables because

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey spent 40 years living and teaching in seminaries and institutes in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Cypress. For 20 years he served as a professor of New Testament, and Head of the Biblical Department of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Combined Edition)*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Erdmans Publishing Company, 1983), Kindle location 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Jesus was speaking to them about their daily lives. German theologian and scholar of near Eastern studies, Joachim Jeremias (1900-1979) claims these were not works of fiction or some kind of allegory; each of Jesus' parables was "uttered in an actual situation in Jesus' life"<sup>4</sup> and at a particular point in time that made sense for each story. As he points out, while the original hearers understood parables because the elements were so familiar and clear enough for a child to understand, we have a difficult time trying to recover their original meaning.<sup>5</sup>

A perfect example of this would be the parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-8).<sup>6</sup> When Jesus tells this story of a man coming to a friend's house at midnight to borrow bread to feed a newly arrived guest, his audience would have immediately understood the honor/shame dynamic that is an essential part of the story. The hospitality of Jesus' day would demand that the sleeping man get up and help his neighbor, even at such a late hour because the visitor is the guest of the entire village, not just the neighbor needing the bread. To refuse to give bread for the guest would not only bring shame upon the man in need, every member of the village would also be shamed.<sup>7</sup> This kind of assumed hospitality is not an imperative for us in our time. We can no longer relate to the situation about which Jesus spoke, and so many of the subtleties of this and other parables are lost on us. It would seem time and distance has taken its toll on these stories making them anachronistic to our modern ears. However, the response elicited from my

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<sup>4</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise indicated all scripture texts will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Combined Edition)*, Kindle Location 1351.

telling of the Prodigal Son story would seem to indicate that, in many ways, at least some of these stories are timeless and can still affect today's listeners in a profound way.

Perhaps then, there is second possibility that is closer to the mark. The parables have become too familiar, and as the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt", or if not contempt, at least a certain amount of boredom. For those who have grown up in the church, especially a church that uses the Revised Common Lectionary, many of these parables come around at least every three years. The people in the pews have heard these stories of Jesus over, and over, and over again. We know what's coming next and so there is no longer an element of surprise. The lesson begins: "There was a man who had two sons. One day the younger son came to his father and said, 'Father, give me my half of the inheritance'..." and everyone recognizes this as the story known as The Prodigal Son. We know the son takes the money and runs. We know he wastes it all and then comes crawling back in shame and humiliation, hoping his father will at least accept him home as a hired hand. We know the father is overjoyed at his return, pulls out all the stops and throws him a big party, and we are well aware that the older son becomes angry and refuses to participate in the celebration. We are not surprised by the parable's plot twists, or the behavior of the characters involved because we have heard it all before. There are no new insights to be gained or challenges with which we need to struggle. We have filled in all the blanks, no longer need to hear the story anymore, and so we stop listening.

But, maybe the truth about the parables is not either/or, but rather both/and: some are too obscure while others are too familiar to pack the punch they once had. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that the parables no longer have their desired effect. However,

because these tales were such an essential tool for Jesus' ministry we cannot ignore their importance. The preacher, then, must ask the question: Is it possible to help our listeners hear these parables with new ears so they once again regain the power Jesus intended them to have, and if so, how? Based on my experience in the recovery center I would like to propose the use of biblical storytelling as the means to help listeners hear these stories differently and thus reconnect with Jesus' parables in new and meaningful ways. Biblical storytelling, described in more detail below, is not paraphrasing a passage or a re-written, modern day version of the text, but a verbatim recitation of the scripture. In order to determine the efficacy of this method of presenting the parables I will be using an action/reflection model with the two congregations I currently serve.

### **Justification and Rationale**

In the Gospel of Matthew we are told that Jesus' main vehicle for teaching the people about the Kingdom of God was through parables. In fact, Matthew goes so far as to say that it was only through parables that Jesus taught the crowds anything at all (Matthew 13:34). Jesus told parables because, as Amy-Jill Levine, a professor of New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School says, telling stories was "a major part of Jewish culture."<sup>8</sup> She says they "would have been told at home in the evening after dinner, or in the workshops and the fields and the synagogues."<sup>9</sup> Bailey says that the primary literary art forms in Eastern literature are stories and poems,<sup>10</sup> so it is only

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<sup>8</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (HarperCollins e-books, 2014), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Combined Edition)*, Kindle location 225.

natural that Jesus would make regular use of this art form. While the mere fact that Jesus told stories as his method of teaching was not unique, the purpose for his use of these stories was. Jesus did not tell parables in order to exegete a biblical text, as was the common rabbinic practice in his day. He did not use them to build on what others had already taught about scripture. Rather, “Jesus utter[ed] parables with an apparent sense of sovereign freedom”<sup>11</sup> which made his listeners wonder where he got the authority to say the things he did. He spoke of God in ways no other rabbis had. Jesus did not use his parables to reassure the people that they were on the right track in their understanding of God and how God works: “against common assumptions, the parables of Jesus do not always portray typical human behavior as illustrative of God. Time and again the behavior described is not typical, and that is decisive for the teaching at hand about God.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus spoke in parables precisely to confuse his listeners and make them realize that what they had previously thought was completely wrong.

In resorting so often to parables, his main point was that any understanding of the kingdom his hearers could come up with would be a misunderstanding. Mention ‘messiah’ to them and they would picture a king on horseback, not a carpenter on a cross; mention ‘forgiveness’ and they would start setting up rules about when it ran out. From Jesus’ point of view, the sooner their misguided minds had the props knocked from under them, the better.<sup>13</sup>

Not only did Jesus seek to change the understanding of his listeners, he sought to subvert the social order and thus bring the world closer to God’s vision of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Jesus was a “sage whose radical wisdom teachings shaped a

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<sup>11</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus : A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), Kindle location 121-123.

counter-cultural lifestyle in the here and now.”<sup>14</sup> Such counter-cultural ideas can be seen when Jesus said things like “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven” or “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation” (Luke 6:20 & 24). He surprised his listeners when he uttered phrases such as “You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

The parables Jesus told were the means he used most to try to accomplish this goal of subverting the social order. Nothing does that better than telling a story. Tex Sample<sup>15</sup> argues that for people in an oral culture, storytelling is the most effective vehicle for social change.

No amount of discourse can do with traditional and oral people what the concrete, lived stories of ordinary people can accomplish against the organized greed of a system devoted to the bottom line practice of profit at any cost. No sophistication of theory can assault racism as strongly as the telling of an event that brings full-blown empathy to bear on a practice, empathy that can alter discrimination and the organization of hate.<sup>16</sup>

According to Clarence Jordan<sup>17</sup> “The parables of Jesus help us see two realities: the reality of a world whose values must be rejected, and the reality of a new world whose values must be accepted.”<sup>18</sup> Jeremias calls them “weapons of controversy”<sup>19</sup> and

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<sup>14</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 169. For more information on Jesus’ role as subversive sage in Biblical wisdom literature see McKenzie’s discussion on the four pillars of wisdom in her book *Hear and Be Wise: Becoming a Preacher and Teacher of Wisdom*, Abingdon Press, 2004

<sup>15</sup> Sample is an author and Professor Emeritus of Church and Society at St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City MO.

<sup>16</sup> Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> Jordan, 1912-1969, was the founder of Koinonia Farm and a New Testament Greek Scholar.

<sup>18</sup> Clarence Jordan, *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1976), 21.

each and every one of them demands some kind of an immediate response from the people who hear them<sup>20</sup>

The goal of pastors and preachers is also to achieve a visible response to our proclamation of the Gospel. We seek to preach God's word in a way that makes a difference in the lives of our listeners, changes their view of the world and God's Kingdom, and encourages them to live lives in keeping with God's commands. In order to do this we carefully read the scripture text, study it in its original language and context, scour commentaries for insights, and pray that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to God so that God's message is clearly heard and taken to heart. But all of our sermon preparation may be for naught if the text itself is not clearly heard by the congregation.

Within the structure of liturgy, the act of preaching is connected to the public reading and presentation of biblical texts...[T]he preacher's work is so much easier if a text has been rendered in an evocative way. The public reading of a text is not simply conducted to inform the listener of the words that are lying on the page of some Bible...[T]he way that 'reading' is done says a lot about how valuable the presence of the biblical text is to that community and to the sermon that reflects on it.<sup>21</sup>

Before the sermon can have an effect on the lives of its listeners, the scripture text itself must have an effect on them. God's word should be a life-changing word, but so often that is not the case. Thomas Boomershine, co-founder of the Network of Biblical Storytellers and considered to be the father of biblical storytelling, claims the reading of the scripture texts has

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<sup>19</sup> Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Richard F. Ward, *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 38-39.

tended to become largely meaningless, especially within the Church, because of a lack of preparation and expectation on the part of both the readers and the listeners...no one, either reader or congregation, expects anything to happen during the reading of the Scriptures, and sure enough, nothing happens. The meaningfulness of the reading of the Scriptures in worship has largely died.<sup>22</sup>

According to Boomershine, biblical storytelling is one way to help bring life and meaning back into the presentation of the text. Biblical storytelling is not mere memorization and recitation of a scripture text, it is the performance of a text that has become so well known, so much a part of the teller, that it can be recited as naturally as if is a story experienced directly and personally by the speaker. Biblical storyteller Dennis Dewey defines it this way:

Biblical storytelling [is] a spiritual discipline which entails the lively interpretation, expression and animation of a narrative text of the Old or New Testaments which has first been internalized and is then remembranced, embodied, breathed and voiced by a teller/performer as a sacred event in community with an audience/congregation.<sup>23</sup>

This internalization Dewey talks about, and which Boomershine calls interiorization, allows the story to become such a part of the storyteller that it becomes an embodied word.

The interiorization of the story makes it possible to speak to the interiors of others. Once the story has percolated through the head, the heart, the lower belly and even down to the toes, it can come out of your mouth again, and resonate fully in the telling. It is now part of you and can become a story for someone else.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 132.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis Dewey, "Performing the Living Word," in *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, ed. Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2009), 145-146.

<sup>24</sup> Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, 52.

I have found in my own preaching that the listeners are most engaged in my sermon when I am telling a story. The rustling of bulletins ceases, the voices of children become hushed, all eyes are on me, and all ears are intent on hearing what happens next. Stories, personal or otherwise, connect with listeners in a way that other parts of the sermon do not. The same is true when I relate the scripture text through Biblical Storytelling. People listen differently and thus the words of the text are heard differently.

This became very apparent to me when recently I used this method in relating the text of Genesis 6:5-7, 13-22: the story of Noah and the flood. When it came time for the scripture reading I stepped away from the pulpit and told the story. While I was speaking it was obvious the members in the pews were listening intently. Not only did they pay close attention to the portion of the story that deals with God's decision to destroy the earth because of human sin, they paid attention to what some might consider the more boring instructions for constructing the ark. They listened raptly as God laid out for Noah the measurements, the materials to be used, the instructions for the placement of the roof and door, and the list of the specific types of animals Noah was to bring into the ark. Afterwards, when meeting with members of my Parish Response Group, one of them told me how refreshing it was to hear the text spoken in my own words. This gentleman was very surprised to when I told him that, in fact, I had not used my own words. I had repeated it word for word from the NRSV. Because I had become so familiar with the text in my preparation for presenting it, the words sounded natural and not memorized or rehearsed. Biblical storytelling helped this person hear the text in a brand new way.

David Rhoads, a scholar in performance criticism, relates a similar experience when he performs a text.

When I perform in contemporary settings, people speak of a second naiveté, as though they were experiencing the story or letter for the first time. They comment on the new insights that come from hearing in contrast to reading, how unique it is to experience the whole story/letter at one sitting, how they get drawn into the world of the story, how inflection and tone give fresh meaning to this line or that episode, and how the story/letter/apocalypse impacts them in new ways.<sup>25</sup>

Rhoads believes performing scripture texts is the best way to present them since all of these texts were

either ‘transcriptions’ of oral narratives that had been composed in performance or they were composed orally by dictation and written for use in oral performance. These compositions were oral presentations. There was a performer or storyteller. The performances were heard/experienced rather than read.<sup>26</sup>

While I have used biblical storytelling to perform stories from both the Old and New Testaments, and in the future will also use the technique for the epistles as well, for this thesis I am going to focus only on the use of biblical storytelling for Jesus’ parables.

Since there are many different types of parables: proverbs, allegories, similitudes, metaphors, and short stories, the parables I will be using for my research will be the short stories Jesus told: stories which include characters, a plot (however brief it may be), dialogue, either internal or between characters, and some kind of personal interaction between the characters. I will be using some stories that I believe are familiar to my congregation members and others that may not be as well known. My hope is that through biblical storytelling listeners will connect with these parables in a way they had not before, and in the process, receive new insights about God and God’s Kingdom.

Using biblical storytelling for presenting scripture texts has benefits not just for listeners, but also for preachers, congregations and the church at large. As Dewey stated

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<sup>25</sup> David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part I,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. 36, no. 3 (2006): 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

above, memorizing and internalizing the text is a good spiritual practice, and doing so has allowed me to internally carry with me God's word throughout the week. As I go about my daily activities I have experiences, engage in conversations, and am able to make connections between the text and my current setting that give me a deeper understanding of the scripture passage with which I am working. As I practice the text I make interpretive choices that will affect how I present it to my congregation. For instance, with the parable of the widow and the unjust judge I need to decide how to portray the widow's request to the judge to grant her justice against her opponent. Is she begging him in a pleading voice, or is she angrily demanding that he finally pay attention to her? Is she deferential or fierce in her approach? And what about the judge's decision to finally grant her justice so she doesn't wear him out? As he explains his rationale is he irritated, angered, or amused by her tenacity? All of these require a decision that I, as the preacher, need to make in order to get the point of the parable across. Each decision helps me delve more deeply into the parable, its context, and the purpose Jesus had in telling this story.

I have found that as I am working carefully with the text, words and phrases that I would have normally passed by with a silent reading suddenly become crucial to the story. In preparation for the Genesis text of God and Noah's interaction regarding the ark mentioned above, by reciting it aloud and deciding how to put the appropriate emotion into the text, I realized for the first time the depth of God's sorrow when God saw the wickedness of humankind. "And the Lord was sorry he made humankind and it grieved him to his heart" (Genesis 6:6). Suddenly, it seemed clear to me that this is not a story of anger, judgment, and destruction as it is so often portrayed. It is a story about a broken heart; God's heart was broken because of the complete corruption of the beautiful world

God had painstakingly and lovingly created. Because of that insight I wrote a different sermon than I would have if I had done my normal exegesis and sermon preparation.

The internalization of the text by the preacher gives it a familiarity and new meaning not encountered before. Rhodes concurs: “The experience of translating, memorizing and performing these works has placed me in a fresh medium, an entirely different relationship with these texts than that of a silent reader, and even quite distinct from the experience of hearers in the audience.”<sup>27</sup> He continues, explaining how intimately a storyteller becomes a part of the text.

By taking on the persona/voice of the narrator or speaker in the text, I enter the world of the text, grasp it as a whole, reveal this world progressively in a temporal sequence, attend to every detail, and gain an immediate experience of its rhetoric as a performer seeking to have an impact on an audience. I have gotten in touch with the emotive and kinetic dimensions of the text in ways I would not otherwise have been aware...My students who learn texts for performance also speak of the enlivening of their imagination, a new capacity to identify with the different characters, a fresh sense of the emotive dimensions of the texts, and an experience of their rhetorical power.”<sup>28</sup>

Biblical storytelling not only helps the performer enter the world of the text, it brings the text to life for the ones who hear it as well. The text comes to life because it is presented as it was originally meant to be. “The proper form of the gospel is an oral/aural text, a text that is spoken, heard, performed.”<sup>29</sup> In the performance of the text Jesus is not merely remembered as the person who originally told the parable, he is re-membered.

That is to say, Jesus is made to be physically present. When Jesus is embodied in the story that is told...then Jesus is brought back into the community that re-members him in a vivid and vigorous way. For the duration of the story, Jesus is

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Richard W. Swanson, *Provoking the Gospel: Methods to Embody Biblical Storytelling through Drama* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 16.

not an idea but a physical presence with a voice and a body, a location and a presence.<sup>30</sup>

If Jesus becomes real, then his words and stories also become real and will have a greater effect on the listeners in the pews. Richard Swanson, in the preface to his book calls performance of these re-membered texts, “provoking” the gospel and says “[T]hese old stories, if they are properly provoked as public, physical texts, provoke the gospel out of both audience and players in ways that will continue to surprise, now as through their whole history.”<sup>31</sup> He also says: “If these old stories are well and properly told...audiences will include both insiders to the stories and outsiders. If these stories are well and properly told, they will draw a public audience simply because the stories are good.”<sup>32</sup>

It is for this reason, drawing public audiences of both insiders and outsiders, that biblical storytelling can prove beneficial for the church at large. Our mission as a church is not to simply teach and preach to the ones who are already in the pews, but, as Jesus said to his disciples, our mission is to go and “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 27:19-20a). If, as the apostle Paul says, faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), then what better way to get people to hear and learn about Jesus than by telling his stories? A good story will be told and retold. “A good story is like a secret: too good to be kept.”<sup>33</sup> Stories make good tools for

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>33</sup> William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 31.

evangelism are because they unite us to all of humankind; every story is our story and we can find a bit of ourselves within them. They connect us with our past and help us envision a new future. They promote healing and are the basis of ministry.<sup>34</sup>

Tex Sample also sees a connection between ministry and storytelling. He says

It is my contention that about half of the people in the United States are people who work primarily out of a traditional orality, by which I mean a people who can read and write—although some cannot—but whose appropriation and engagement with life is oral. More than this, I am convinced that most churches have a clear majority of their membership who work from a traditional orality.<sup>35</sup>

He further states: “Mainline churches need to take into account the traditional practices of oral culture in order to minister to the people.”<sup>36</sup> Sample describes many of the unchurched people with whom he has come into contact as “hard living people”,<sup>37</sup> and says they “tend to be a disreputable bunch”,<sup>38</sup> struggling with poverty, family problems, abuse, heavy drug and alcohol use, unemployment, and brushes with the law or the courts.<sup>39</sup> He found that most of them “were oral in the traditional sense...[T]hey dealt with their concerns in a far more concrete, life-based sense that made its more articulate expressions in story.”<sup>40</sup> In order to minister to these hard living people a church “needs to

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<sup>34</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the thirteen characteristics of a good story, see Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, chapters two and three.

<sup>35</sup> Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Tex Sample, *Hard Living People & Mainstream Christians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl*, 20-21.

be oral. This means finding the way to be concretely life-based with people who may very well make up the majority of its members, and the majority of the unchurched as well.”<sup>41</sup>

Sample’s hard living people sound very much like the kind of people with whom Jesus spent most of his time, and to whom he also ministered in a very concrete, life-based way. It seems to make sense then, that we do ministry to both the church and unchurched, the same way Jesus did: not only telling stories, but telling *his* stories, just as I did to the men in the recovery center.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have asked the question as to whether or not biblical storytelling can be used to change the way people hear Jesus’ parables and help these stories regain the power and punch Jesus intended when he originally told them. I have identified their purpose as vehicles Jesus used to teach about the Kingdom of God and subvert the social order of his day. I have defined biblical storytelling and explained why I believe it is an appropriate tool for achieving the goal stated above. I have also explained why I think the use of biblical storytelling with Jesus’ parables will benefit preachers, congregations and the church at large. In chapter two I will look at biblical and theological arguments to support my thesis

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 22.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*God, as everyone knows, created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. And, as we are now aware, he created them through the use of words, for words, of course, are power. “Let it be done” God proclaimed, and it was done. And everything he made was good.*

*Well, God was especially proud and loving of the man and woman he made because he had breathed into them a part of himself, his spirit.*

*But, not surprisingly, the devil was jealous and angry. So one day when God was enjoying the man and woman, the devil casually happened to walk by. He sauntered up to God and asked him what he liked so much about these creatures. And when God opened his mouth to speak, the devil craftily put a bond upon his tongue so that he could not speak! God could not talk! And since God’s creative power was in his words, the devil had bound that power.*

*The devil laughed at God and quite had his way with the man and the woman. Well, as some eons went by, the devil came back to mock God—he couldn’t resist, such is his nature. Well, he came back to mock God. He scoffed at the silent deity and taunted this helpless God. God responded to all this by holding up one finger.*

*“One?” asked the devil. “Are you trying to tell me that you want to say just one word? Is that it?”*

*Yes, God nodded, pleading with his soft eyes and urgent hands.*

*The confident devil thought to himself, “I don’t suppose that even God could do very much harm with one word. Ok.” So the devil removed the bond from God’s tongue.*

*And God spoke his one word, in a whisper. He spoke it for the man and the woman and it brought them great joy. It was a word that gathered up all the love, forgiveness, and creativity God had been storing in his heart during the time of his silence.*

*The word he spoke was Jesus!<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, 115-116.

## **Biblical Overview**

Throughout the Bible the power of the spoken word is evident. From Genesis to the Book of Revelation the Divine word creates new realities and proclaims God's purpose in and for the world. With a word God created the universe and everything in it: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light..." (Genesis 1:3). In the book of Revelation the rider on the white horse is called the Word of God, and "from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Revelation 19:15). When God speaks things happen. God assures us through the prophet Isaiah:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return until they have watered earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

God called Abram and Sarai to a new life, gave them new identities, and promised that generations would come from this old, childless couple (Genesis 12:1-2, 17:1-8). Though the fulfillment of the promise took twenty-five years, and Abraham and Sarah were almost 100 and 90 years old respectively, nevertheless "The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him" (Genesis 21:1-2).

With a word a young virgin named Mary became the mother of the world's savior. The angel Gabriel told her she would conceive and bear a son, and it was so (Luke 1:28-38). As Luther says, with "these words Christ comes not only into her heart, but also

into her womb, as she hears, grasps and believes it.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus himself is the Word of God: “and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus is “all that God wants to say in his story...God’s Story-Word in the flesh.”<sup>3</sup>

As God’s Word, the words Jesus speaks in the gospels are equally as powerful as God’s own spoken and creative word. As the Great Physician nothing is beyond Jesus’ ability when it comes to verbal healing; he can cure Peter’s mother-in-law’s fever (Luke 4:38-39), Bartimaeus’ blindness (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), and a man’s withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). He can heal paralytics by speaking words of forgiveness (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26) and exorcise demons by rebuking them (Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:33-36). It doesn’t matter how many people come to him for help; Jesus can heal two possessed men (Matthew 8:28-34) or ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) all at once. Neither time nor distance makes his words less efficacious. Jesus can heal a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years simply by telling him to take up his mat and walk (John 5:1-9). A centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10), a royal official’s son (John 4:46-54), and a Canaanite woman’s daughter (Matthew 15:21-28) are all made well even though Jesus is nowhere near them when his words are spoken. Not even death can hinder the power of Jesus’ words of life: Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43), the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-15), and Jesus’ friend Lazarus, already dead four days, return to life when Jesus calls to them (John 11:17-44). Nature itself listens to Jesus’ voice and obeys his command: a fig tree

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, Luther’s Works 36, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, American ed., 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).

<sup>3</sup> Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, 115.

withers (Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-21) and the winds and waves subside (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). A word from Jesus' mouth transforms the world around him.

In the Bible the power of the spoken word is not limited to only God's authority. Words spoken by human beings also have the capacity to transform. In Genesis even God feared the power of the spoken word and so God scattered the language of the people as they built a tower to heaven because "...they all have one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6). In the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-27:45), when Jacob stole the blessing meant for his brother he changed both of their futures:

The *word* of blessing creates a blessing and the *word* of curse creates a curse. Furthermore we must understand that a word once sent forth from the mouth of the speaker could not be called back. The word, good or bad, was set loose in the world to create new realities.<sup>4</sup>

Even if Isaac had wanted to rescind the blessing given to his younger son he wouldn't have been able to. The die was cast, the words were already spoken and a new reality was created for each of his sons. Later, when Jacob wrestled with God at the ford of Jabbok, he refused to let go until he received a blessing from his adversary and once again this blessing changed Jacob's life by giving him a new identity and a new purpose (Genesis 32:22-32).

There are other Biblical examples of lives being changed by the spoken word. In what is perhaps the shortest sermon ever, Jonah converted the entire nation of the savage Ninevites: men, women, children, and even the livestock were filled with remorse and

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<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1980), 13.

covered themselves in sackcloth and ashes at the king's command, simply because Jonah uttered these words: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4-9).

Nathan, another prophet, was able to bring a great and powerful man to his knees in guilt and shame because of the words he spoke, this time in the form of a parable. King David heard Nathan's story of a poor man whose only lamb, as beloved as any child could be, was taken by a rich man in order to feed his guest. David became enraged by the injustice of this act. He vowed to enact punishment against the arrogant rich man who took what he wanted without consideration for anyone else. When Nathan was sure he had captured David's imagination completely by his morality tale he shocked the king by proclaiming "You are the man!" The truth of David's adulterous sin of taking Bathsheba as his own was revealed, David was overcome with remorse, and immediately confessed his wrongdoing before God (2 Samuel 12:1-7).

Nathan's parable was an effective tool used to change the heart and mind of Israel's most powerful man, because it spoke the truth to David in a way that he could easily hear and understand. If Nathan had simply come straight out and condemned David for his misdeeds he would have run the risk of turning the king's wrath toward the prophet rather than toward the actual guilty party. Instead he told his story and let David condemn himself. Such is the genius of parables. As Jordan says: "[A] parable is something you use when the situation is very dangerous. You hide your truth in it; it's a literary Trojan horse."<sup>5</sup> This is how Jesus used his parables as well: as a way of teaching dangerous ideas in dangerous situation, in order to change the hearts and minds of his listeners. "[T]he parables are not innocent and neutral stories designed for our momentary

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<sup>5</sup> Jordan, *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation*, 41.

amusement or to confirm a commonsense approach to spiritual development. This is not ‘story time’ but ‘life-changing time.’”<sup>6</sup> Jesus told stories because his message was a matter of life and death; the Kingdom of God is at hand, those who have ears to hear must either accept or reject it. Jesus spoke in parables because they were the best tool for telling the truth in a way that his listeners could easily hear and understand.

### **Theological Overview**

In the first chapter of his book *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* William Bausch tells this story:

When the Israelites heard the first word of the Law in the Ten Commandments, so the old rabbinical story goes, they swooned. Their souls left them. So the word returned to God and cried out ‘O Sovereign (sic) of the Universe, You live eternally and your Law lives eternally. But you have sent me to the dead. They are all dead!’ Thereupon God had mercy and made his word more palatable.<sup>7</sup>

He then goes on to say that the story has two points: the first is that God’s word has power. It is God’s very self and who can endure God’s presence? The second point is that in order to make God’s ‘word-presence’ more palatable, God’s solution was to retell it in stories. “Why? Is there something in stories that of their very nature express the way and mind of God more than any other expression?...Jewish tradition openly says yes.”<sup>8</sup>

When Jesus told parables as his means of reaching and teaching his listeners, he wasn’t being innovative; he was simply following the custom of his culture. The people of Israel told stories about the presence of God and the actions of God that they had experienced throughout the ages. “By remembering and telling them, Israel experiences

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>7</sup> Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

those events again.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, “[I]n telling and listening to the stories of Jesus, early Christians made connections with their own lives that made clear to them how God was present.”<sup>10</sup> As modern day listeners the same can be said of us. My experience at the treatment center was evidence of how this can be the case. Hearing the story of a father’s unconditional love connected those men with a God they had never encountered before.

For Luther, this kind of deep and meaningful encounter occurs when we proclaim the Gospel.

The Gospel should not really be something written, but a spoken word which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture but gospel, meaning good news or a proclamation that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth.<sup>11</sup>

It is through our proclaiming scripture that our “poor bodily voice...brings the whole of Christ to the ears; then it brings him into the hearts of all who listen and believe.”<sup>12</sup>

The spoken word is essential to our Lutheran theology. In his explanation of how the sacraments work Luther answers the question as to how the water of baptism can give us forgiveness for our sins, deliver us from death, and grant us salvation:

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God that water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 123.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, *Word and Sacrament II*, 341.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther and Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 485. From the third article of The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the Small Catechism.

In the same way he talks about the connection between the Word of God and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce [forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation], but the words "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins." These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they declare: the forgiveness of sins.<sup>14</sup>

The message is clear. Without the words the physical elements are just elements. Without the words there is no sacrament. Without the words we have nothing to offer those who come to the font or to the table. Without the words of Christ given to us through scripture we as preachers and proclaimers of the gospel have nothing to say.

The question that needs to be asked then is this: if it is only the spoken word that is needful in order to bring Christ into the hearts of all who listen and believe, can't that be accomplished simply by reading the text aloud? Is the memorization and performance of a text necessary? Perhaps not, but at one time or another most of us have attended a worship service where the scripture text was read in a most *uninspiring* way. Either the reader rushed through the text because he felt uncomfortable in front of people and just wanted to get the job done, or her voice was so monotonous and bored sounding that our minds drifted off to something far more exciting, or the lector stumbled through the names of people and places so badly we all became confused as to who did what, where, and the whole point of the story was lost.

Boomershine says reading the scripture text in worship is actually a kind of storytelling.

Unfortunately these storytelling occasions have tended to become largely meaningless, especially within the Church, because of a lack of preparation and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 489.

expectation on the part of both the readers and the listeners. Particularly in Protestant communities, the Scripture lesson has increasingly become a mere pretext for the sermon... no one, either reader or congregation, expects anything to happen during the reading of the Scriptures, and sure enough, nothing happens. The meaningfulness of the reading of the Scriptures in worship has largely died.<sup>15</sup>

If Boomershine is right and the scripture has become merely a pretext for the sermon, then not only is the listener at a disadvantage, the preacher is too. If the text is presented poorly, even the best sermon will suffer for it. Biblical storytelling can change that. "There is vitality and energy when the stories of the actions of God are told directly to the congregation without the presence of a manuscript or the formality of the lecturn."<sup>16</sup> The listeners become engaged with the text, and are then engaged with the sermon that follows. There is a twofold benefit when the pastor or lector takes the time to memorize and tell the Gospel narrative rather than simply reading it.

Performing the scripture text brings modern day listeners closer to the way in which Jesus' original listeners first heard his words, and then, later, how first century Christians heard the Gospel. Because most of the people in the early years of the faith could not read, the only way they could experience the story was through oral performance.<sup>17</sup> The performance was always a communal event and the fullest understanding of the text was only possible through the medium of the storyteller.

It is the human interpreter, through whom the Spirit works, who is the vehicle for true understanding... It is assumed that the text itself does not carry the full meaning. The text is only a partial communication of meaning. The full meaning is found only in the living voice commenting upon the text.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>17</sup> Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19.

The tone of voice, the movement of the body, the gestures of the hands all combined to help the listener actually experience the event being portrayed. The text became an embodied word.

Greek and Roman rhetoricians of the day understood the “intense power that could be generated by the embodied word”<sup>19</sup> and practiced long and hard to create the desired effect when they performed the particular piece they were presenting.

It was through the embodied word that the faith was first passed on. David Rhoads says that ancient Judea was primarily an oral culture in which there were “some scribes and a limited number of manuscripts that were available to elites...[B]ut for the vast majority of people the ethos of an oral culture pre-dominated.”<sup>20</sup> This means that the first Christians heard the stories of Jesus and about Jesus through the voice and performances of those who were with him or to whom the stories had been passed down.<sup>21</sup>

If we as preachers want the scriptures to come alive for our listeners, if we want to continue to pass on the faith to our children, and our children’s children, and for generations to come it makes sense to use the same means used by the first evangelists. Biblical storytelling can help us do that.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the Biblical and theological rationale for using biblical storytelling to help listeners hear Jesus’ parables in a new way. I have talked

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>20</sup> Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part I,” 9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17.

about the power of the spoken word and the use of parables as a means of speaking dangerous truths. I have also talked about the importance of presenting scripture—God’s word to us—in a manner that is engaging and evocative of the way Jesus’ original listeners heard his parables. In chapter three I will discuss the writers and books that have been the most helpful in my research for this topic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to make the case for the importance of biblical storytelling for Jesus' parables there are several areas of study that need to be discussed. If we want to compare the reaction of modern listeners to Jesus' first audience we must first look at the purpose of the parables themselves and how Jesus intended his listeners to hear them. Literature on oral culture and the power of the spoken word must also be examined, as well as books and articles on storytelling, preaching, and performance criticism are also important in understanding how these areas of study intersect with biblical storytelling. Finally, there are four theses that are connected in one way or another with this topic that will be reviewed.

#### **Parables**

While the abundance of work on parables makes it impossible to read everything that has been written on the subject, there are several books that I have found helpful. Joachim Jeremias discusses the importance of recovering the original meaning of the parables and the situations in which they were told in order to understand them.<sup>1</sup> Jeremias says that Adolf Jülicher, a professor of church history and New Testament in Marburg Germany and the father of modern research on parables, proved that the former way of

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*.

interpreting Jesus parables as allegories “was utterly alien to the parables of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

However, according to Jeremias, Jülicher didn’t go far enough in his work. It isn’t enough to simply say how the parables should not be interpreted, the original meaning of the parables still needs to be discovered, and that involves knowing the specific context in which they were first uttered.<sup>3</sup> Jeremias claims that

the parables of Jesus are not-at any rate primarily-literary productions, and that it is not their object to lay down general maxims; but that each of them was uttered in an actual situation in Jesus’ life, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover, as we shall see, they were mostly concerned with a situation of conflict-with justification, defence (sic), attack, and even challenge.<sup>4</sup>

The parables have a double historical setting: the actual incident in which they were told, and the history of the parables before they were written down. In order to get back to the original meaning and reaction to them we must get back to the original setting in which they were first told.<sup>5</sup>

Over time the parables have been so transformed their original meaning has been blunted, thus dulling the intended reaction as well.<sup>6</sup> As he breaks down the setting and the meaning of each of Jesus’ parables Jeremias comes to this conclusion:

In our attempt to recover the original significance of the parables, one thing above all becomes evident; all Jesus’ parables compel his hearers to define their attitude towards his person and mission. For they are all full of ‘the secret of the Kingdom of God’ (Mark 4.11)-that is to say, the certainty that the messianic age is dawning. The hour of fulfillment has come; that is the keynote of them all.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>6</sup> For Jeremias’ ten principles of transformation see *Rediscovering the Parables*, 16ff.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 181.

Kenneth E. Bailey says that in order to understand the parables of Jesus one must understand the culture from which Jesus came and in which Jesus spoke. In his study of the parables he says “Oriental exegesis”—a method which uses the standard critical tools of Western scholarship in combination with cultural insights gained from ancient literature, contemporary peasants, and Oriental versions of texts—is necessary<sup>8</sup>. One example among many of this type of exegesis is found in chapter six of his book *Poet and Peasant* in which he carefully breaks down Jesus’ parable of The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8).<sup>9</sup> Combining an assessment of the Middle Eastern understanding of honor and shame with a close examination of the Greek word *αυαῖδεια* Bailey comes to the conclusion that this word, normally translated as “persistent”, is better translated to mean “avoidance of shame.”<sup>10</sup> Thus the point of the parable is not, as it is often interpreted in our churches, that we must be so persistent in our prayers that God will finally answer them. Rather, the point of the parable is that if a sleeping man will get up and honor his neighbor’s request for bread in order to avoid being shamed, how much more can *we* expect an honorable God to grant *our* requests?<sup>11</sup> Jesus’ original audience would have easily understood this to be what Jesus meant when he told this parable because this honor/shame component was an important part of their lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Combined Edition)*, Kindle location 272-274.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 1313.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 1510-1514.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Frank Stern<sup>12</sup> and Amy-Jill Levine<sup>13</sup> both look at the parables specifically in light of Jesus' Jewish roots. Stern takes the Old Testament understanding of terms like "the Kingdom of God", the "Son of Man", and the ancient Hebrew beliefs about life after death and examines how Jesus used those well-understood ideas and redefined them for his own unique message.

In the introduction to her book Levine says that all too often Jesus' parable are reduced to platitudes "such as 'God loves us' or 'Be nice' or, worse, assurances that all is right with the world as long as we believe in Jesus."<sup>14</sup> She continues:

If we stop with the easy lessons, good though they may be, we lose the way Jesus's first followers would have heard the parables, and we lose the genius of Jesus's teaching. Those followers, like Jesus himself, were Jews, and Jews knew that parables were more than children's stories or restatements of common knowledge. They knew that parables and the tellers of parables were there to prompt them to see the world in a different way, to challenge, and at times to indict. We might be better off thinking less about what they "mean" and more about what they can "do": remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb. . .<sup>15</sup>

According to Levine, understanding Jesus' first audience will help us better understand the purpose of the parables themselves. Their purpose was to upset the order of society and to help his listeners look at the world in a new way.

In her work on Wisdom literature, Alyce McKenzie lays out the characteristics of traditional wisdom that guided the Jews of Jesus' day. She states that the house of wisdom is built on four pillars: The Bended Knee, The Listening Heart, The Cool Spirit,

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<sup>12</sup> Frank Stern, *A Rabbi Looks at Jesus' Parables* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

and the Subversive voice.<sup>16</sup> Although Jesus exemplified all of these pillars in his life and teaching, it was his subversive voice and the revolutionary nature of his parables that got him into the most trouble with the authorities.

Clarence Jordan, in his book *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation* agrees:

It is clear that Jesus was a revolutionary. We do not have space to lay out the massive evidence supporting this contention, other than to point out the obvious: Jesus was crucified. Storytellers don't usually get crucified. Yet it was a parable that led Jesus right to the brink of ruin.<sup>17</sup>

Capon too, sees Jesus' message, in the form of his parables as the thing that was the most upsetting to the religious leaders of his day. He says in the Gospel of Mark, as early as chapter two, the authorities have begun devising plans to be rid of Jesus and his teachings because of their subversive nature.

In Mark 2:6, 16, 18, 24, and 3:2, they're increasingly sure there is something about Jesus' message that they want no part of. By 3:6 their certainty has been extended to not wanting any part of Jesus himself either, and to actually making plans to kill him. And by 3:22 they have their case complete. Not only is he an irreligious and therefore bogus messiah who should be killed as soon as possible; he is also the exact opposite of the Messiah: he is, they are convinced, the devil incarnate.<sup>18</sup>

If Jesus' parables were able to elicit such strong reactions in his original audience we need to find a way to help modern audiences experience their power once again.

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<sup>16</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, *Hear and Be Wise: Becoming a Preacher and Teacher of Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Jordan, *Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*, Kindle location 594-598.

### Oral Culture and the Power of the Spoken Word

Walter Ong<sup>19</sup> and Richard Jensen<sup>20</sup> both talk about the power of the spoken word in the kind of oral cultures we encounter in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Ong describes the spoken word not just as sound that is heard, but as an event and says

it is not surprising that oral peoples commonly, and probably universally consider words to have great power. Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power...In this sense, all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms, is 'dynamic'.<sup>21</sup>

He also reinforces Jeremias' proposition that Jesus used everyday occurrences in his parables in order to help his listeners connect with his teachings, stating "oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings."<sup>22</sup> Jesus used parables to explain the concept of the Kingdom of God because they concretely illustrated the ideas he was trying to get across.

Jensen too speaks of the dynamic nature of speech and the necessity of hearing scripture proclaimed rather than simply reading it silently. He quotes Luther: "If Christ is simply someone we read about in a book like the books that Moses wrote...then Christ becomes just another instructor."<sup>23</sup> Instead Christ's words must be spoken aloud. He calls

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<sup>19</sup> Ong, 1912-2003, was a Jesuit priest and Professor of English Literature at St. Louis University.

<sup>20</sup> Jensen, 1934-2014, was a Carlson Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago.

<sup>21</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York: Methuen, 1982), 32.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching*, 74.

Luther's view of the use of the human voice in preaching almost sacramental in nature:

“What an astonishing view of preaching and the use God makes of the bodily voice!

Through our voices, through our oral proclamation, Christ comes to the ears and hearts of those who hear and believe.”<sup>24</sup>

Whitney Shiner tells us that the only way people in the first century could experience the gospel was through its performance. He says the “level of literacy in the Roman Empire was nowhere near the level of literacy in modern Western cultures. Most people could not read.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the faith was passed on to early Christians by either hearing stories told to them from first hand witnesses to the events of Christ's life, or by listening to the stories told and retold by others.

Shiner makes the case that if we want the scriptures to affect our modern day audiences the way the original hearers were affected, oral recitation of the text is necessary. He says Greek and Roman rhetoricians

understood how to use the power of the embodied word to bring into the present the events that happened, or might have happened, in another time and place. The performed word creates events right before your very eyes and makes you feel them as if you were there.<sup>26</sup>

If this is the case, and if “[W]e are standing right before Jesus when *reading* his parables”<sup>27</sup> as Jeremias says, how much more is this true when we are re-telling the parables as a story in the same way Jesus did?

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>25</sup> Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables*, 10. Italics mine.

## Storytelling

In his book *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* William Bausch discusses the role of storytelling in the development of faith and the theology of the church. He outlines thirteen characteristics of a good story and describes what makes it such an effective vehicle for passing on and growing the faith. He also lists six paradoxes of story and the reasons they unsettle us and challenge our worldview, and ten propositions for why stories are so formational for the church. He says stories precede and produce the church. “The story exists first, then people are caught by it, savor it, reflect on it, retell it, preserve it, and pass it on (tradition). When many people are caught by, believe in, and celebrate the same story, you have a church.”<sup>28</sup> According to Bausch stories connect with us at our “deepest levels and convince us of truth.”<sup>29</sup>

Tex Sample would agree: “the capacity to tell stories and to make moral argument in narrative form is a profound ethical skill. Hardly anything else has such moral legitimation and persuasion. John Milbank argues that story is more basic than theory and discourse.”<sup>30</sup> He also talks about the role of storytelling in social change among oral cultures:

What then are the practices of traditional and oral people that relate to social change?...The first of these has to do with storytelling itself. No more radical activity exists. No amount of discourse can do with traditional and oral people what the concrete, lived stories of ordinary people can accomplish against the organized greed of a system devoted to the bottom line practice of profit at any cost. No sophistication of theory can assault racism as strongly as the telling of an event that brings full-blown empathy to bear on a practice, empathy that can alter discrimination and the organization of hate. Nowhere in the searing indictments of

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<sup>28</sup> Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, 197.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture: Living with Will Rogers, Uncle Remus, and Minnie Pearl*, 38-39.

feminist thought is found a power to match that of the stories of women caught at the bottom of all the hierarchies. The central role of stories needs to be understood by Christians if for no other reason than their place in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>31</sup>

Stories are central to our lives and help us make sense of our place and purpose in the world. Thomas Boomershine says that “the stories of our lives are empowered and given meaning by being connected with God’s story.”<sup>32</sup> For this reason we need to recover the storytelling nature of the gospel. He claims we have lost the understanding of that storytelling nature:

the gospel has come to refer to a set of ideas that are a summation of the basic beliefs of the Christian religion. In fact, the Church now tends to think of the gospel as a set of abstract ideas based on the study of the canonical documents but divorced from story. The gospel has lost its original character as a living storytelling tradition of messengers who told the good news of the victory of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

By reclaiming the living storytelling tradition and embodying the parables Jesus told we are making him as fully present to modern day listeners as he was to his original audience.

### **Preaching and Performance Criticism**

There is a close connection between the performance of a scripture text and both the writing and preaching of the sermon. In *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching* Richard Ward examines the act of preaching in light of performance studies and says “preaching is performance, a complex of creative processes that punctuate the preparation, enactment, and embodiment of sermons. Preaching calls

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>32</sup> Boomershine, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 17.

on inspiration, but also depends on a variety of competencies and skills.”<sup>34</sup> Not only should scripture texts be communicated in such a way that helps the listener in the pew make sense of what is heard and said in worship, “a sermon that fails to take the oral/aural quality of the scripture seriously (whether in the sanctuary or the study) flattens the effect that scripture and sermon can have in the listener’s imagination.”<sup>35</sup> It is for this reason that Ward recommends oral reading, recitation, and retelling scripture stories in sermon preparation. He believes these activities will “help train the voice and body to ‘see’ the text with new eyes and hear it with new ears. They can also teach our voices and bodies to ‘think’ in ways that will enable our own sermons to come alive in the hearing and imaginations of our listeners.”<sup>36</sup>

Ward calls an effective oral reading of scripture “embodied theology” and says “Poor, indifferent public readings muffle [the Bible] further, aggravate confusion over what texts mean, and deaden the Bible’s presence and vitality even in the communities for which it was written.”<sup>37</sup> For Ward embodying the text fuels the homiletical imagination and “enlivens our own communication about the text.”<sup>38</sup>

Ruthanna B. Hooke also talks about embodied communication in an unpublished manuscript entitled *Real Presence: Sacramental Embodiment in Preaching*. She connects deep breathing exercises to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and says these exercises allow preachers to be fully present, not only with their listeners but also within their own

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<sup>34</sup> Ward, *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 87.

bodies. This frees the body to communicate fully the meaning of the words one wishes to speak. She echoes Boomershine when she says that performance of a text is not the mere recitation of it, but is portraying the text as an event or telling the story of the text.

When students allow breath, feeling, and personal experience to come to the words of scripture, the words become destabilizing and impossible to contain within culturally bounded norms. Students are often shocked to discover the iconoclastic force of Scripture, once they allow their bodies to fully breathe in these sacred words and what they mean.”<sup>39</sup>

Like Shiner, David Rhoads states that “oral performances were an integral and formative part of the oral cultures of early Christianity and the primary medium through which early Christians received and passed on the compositions now comprising the Second Testament.”<sup>40</sup> Not only that, it is very likely that the texts of the New Testament were not first written and then orally interpreted. Rather, they were spoken first, then written sometime later during the performance life of the text. He uses the letters of Paul as an example. Paul composed his letters orally, they were recorded by a scribe, then carried by hand to their destination in order to be delivered, once again orally. It is also likely that Paul gave the deliverer directions on how the letter should be performed: tone of voice, emphasis, gestures, and the proper emotions that needed to be conveyed.<sup>41</sup>

According to Rhoads studying and interpreting the texts only in their written form without taking into account the dynamic of their oral performance can lead to

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<sup>39</sup> Ruthanna B Hooke, “Real Presence: Sacramental Embodiment in Preaching,” (Luther Seminary, St. Paul MN) (accessed June 23, 2013), 19.

<sup>40</sup> Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part I,” 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

“misconceptions and misjudgments about their potential for meaning and their possible rhetorical effects.”<sup>42</sup>

Because the performer embodies the text the medium and the message interact with each other and the audience is affected by this interaction. Every performance is an interpretation of the text and new meaning is created by every nuance of interpretation. Not only that, but the audience too becomes a part of the interaction by their response to the interpretation portrayed by the performer. The performer can test a particular interpretation with an audience to see whether or not it will “play.”<sup>43</sup> For Rhoads the value of using the performance as means of interpretation can either open up or narrow the range of plausible interpretations and meaning of the text.

Ronald Allen agrees with Rhoads and other scholars when he says “virtually every part of the Second Testament was generated in and for communities centered in speaking and hearing.”<sup>44</sup> Most people in the first century were illiterate; only members of the upper or ruling classes could read and write, so the average person only had access to a text through hearing it performed. When a document was read publicly, the listeners experienced authors as actually present.<sup>45</sup> For Allen, a written text in the Second Testament is an “arrested performance” because it arrests or freezes an oral/aural moment in time. He says it is up to modern interpreters to “release the performative quality of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>43</sup> David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies -- Part II,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. 36, no. 4 (2006): 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Allen, “Performance and the New Testament in Preaching,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J Schmidt, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), Kindle location 1926-1927.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 1943.

text for today.”<sup>46</sup> The way to release this performative quality is to commit the text to memory so preachers can carry a text with them throughout the week, and feel the resonance between the scripture text and the world today.

### Theses

In my reading I’ve read four theses that are connected in one way or another with my topic. Christopher Colby Smith’s thesis is entitled “*Preaching as Performance: The Appropriation of Skills and Elements of Acting Performance for Preaching*.” In this thesis he explores the connection between the message of the sermon and the way both the scripture text and sermon are performed. He says “Content and delivery are message and medium, inextricably bound.”<sup>47</sup> Working with an acting coach he explored the importance of presence in performing both the scripture text and the sermon. He did breathing exercises to help with vocalization, he rehearsed to make gestures and movements appear more natural, and he found that mental and physical presence in the performance required strenuous exercise. While his thesis focused mostly on performance of the sermon it closely connects to my thesis in his understanding of the theology of the incarnation of Christ as the Word of God, and the importance of embodying that Word in order to make the spoken word an event that touches his listeners and has an effect on their lives.

In his 2006 thesis entitled *Biblical Storytelling and Preaching* Dennis J. Goff wanted to see if using biblical storytelling would help his listeners connect the scripture

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Kindle location 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Colby Smith, “Preaching as Performance: The Appropriation of Skills and Elements of Acting Performance for Preaching” (Luther Seminary, 2007), 3.

text more closely to his sermon.<sup>48</sup> In his context the preaching text is generally separated from the sermon by a hymn and/or other scripture texts. He felt that by the time he was going to preach, the text itself had been forgotten and so the efficacy of his sermon was diminished. He believed that using Biblical Storytelling in presenting the text helped his people connect the sermon to the text despite the separation between the two.

In order to test his supposition he interchanged reading the scripture text with telling the text, surveying the congregation to determine which was more effective for remembering the passage. He discovered that embodying the text through Biblical Storytelling was the better of the two methods.

Goff's thesis is similar to mine in the use of Biblical Storytelling for presenting the scripture text. His method of gauging effectiveness for presentation is also similar to mine: alternating between reading and storytelling and surveying the congregation. There are differences in our approaches as well. I am using storytelling only with Jesus' parables and the author uses various texts from both the Old and New Testaments. Like Smith's thesis, this thesis focuses more on the sermon event and uses the scripture text to enhance the effectiveness of his preaching. I am primarily interested in the scripture texts and finding out if biblical storytelling will help listeners connect to them in a way similar to the way I imagine Jesus' original hearers did.

A thesis by Amelia Boomersshine examines her experience using biblical storytelling with incarcerated men and women in Ohio.<sup>49</sup> Working with a group of

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<sup>48</sup> Dennis J Goff, "Biblical Storytelling and Preaching" (A Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Amelia Cooper Boomersshine, "A Breath of Fresh Air: Spiritual Empowerment through Biblical Storytelling with Incarcerated Men and Women" (United Theological Seminary, 2015).

women in the Montgomery County Jail in Dayton, and men in the Chillicothe Correctional Institute in Chillicothe, she used a method called “Circle of the Word”<sup>50</sup> to teach the practice of biblical storytelling in order to help these men and women connect the biblical stories with their own personal stories and give them encouragement and hope for the future. She believes her “Breath of Fresh Air” program could become an important part of a restorative justice program within the prison system. “It seeks to address the spiritual dimensions of restorative justice. It also adapts for use a primary practice of restorative justice, the peacemaking circle.”<sup>51</sup>

The workshops she held as a part of her study took a four-part form: “learn the story, explore how the story was heard in its original context, connect with the story, and tell the story.”<sup>52</sup> For these workshops the author used the passion, death and resurrection stories from the Gospel of Mark. There were 12 participants in each workshop and there were 9 workshops total. The author hoped that using biblical storytelling would positively impact the lives of her research subjects by addressing the brokenness of mass incarceration. Her data seems to bear this out. She sees the possibility of using biblical storytelling systemically to bring restoration to the lives of those who are incarcerated.

Boomershine’s project is similar to mine in that she seeks to use biblical storytelling as a way of reconnecting scripture to the power of the spoken word. She emphasizes the importance of understanding the original context in which the scripture text was heard in order to discover ways to elicit a similar response from a modern day

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., abstract, iv.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 60.

audience. She hopes to recreate the event of hearing a biblical story told as opposed to simply read silently. She uses many of the same sources I have used in making her argument for biblical storytelling.

Certainly her target audience is different than mine, although besides doing her research with incarcerated individuals she also includes members of her church congregation as part of her study. Her project goes beyond merely telling the stories to an audience to actually teaching the audience how to learn and tell the story themselves. Her thesis looks not only at biblical storytelling but also at the prison system itself and the foundations for the restorative justice movement.

The fourth thesis I read is the one that most closely resembles mine. Peter Joseph Lawson's thesis is on finding a way to help "recapture the punch" of Jesus' parables.<sup>53</sup>

Lawson's thesis is based on the same observation I have made:

If the original intent of the gospel writer was to provide a 'shock' or 'surprise', as is often the case with the parables, it can at times be difficult to provide the same shock or surprise, either because of the parable's familiarity or because of the lack of familiarity of the points of references within a certain parable."<sup>54</sup>

He makes the case that in order to elicit a reaction similar to the reaction of Jesus' original listeners it is necessary to understand Jesus' intent in telling the parables and the context in which the audience heard them. He also discusses the importance of storytelling in an oral culture and how story connects deeply with the imagination. Further, the parables he focuses on are three of the story parables I included in my research: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, The Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Joseph Lawson, "Recapturing the Punch of the Parables: How the Reactions to Select Sermons on the Parables Were Experienced and Evaluated by a Select Gathering of Members of the Brownlee Woods Presbyterian Church in Youngstown Oh" (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 4.

There are significant differences in our approaches, however. The most significant difference is that Lawson chose to re-write the parables, placing them in a modern day setting and comparing them with the original parables found in scripture. He convened a group outside of the worship setting and presented both the re-told version and the original version of the parable in the same meeting with 20 minutes of discussion between each parable. He preached two separate sermons, one for each method of presentation.

I see significant problems in the author's approach. In his thesis Lawson references David Buttrick's warning that in re-writing Jesus' parables "one has to be so careful it is 'hardly worth trying.'"<sup>55</sup> I would agree with Buttrick's caution. Jesus' parables are simple and yet profound which makes them difficult to duplicate. As Frederick Buechner says

"[Jesus] suggests rather than spells out. He evokes rather than explains. He catches by surprise. He doesn't let the homiletic seams show. He is sometimes cryptic, sometimes obscure, sometimes irreverent, always provocative."<sup>56</sup>

One needs to be a master storyteller in order to match the beauty and power of Jesus' parables. Lawson admits that some of the comments he received on his re-written parables indicated that his stories lacked the beautiful simplicity of Jesus' parables. His listeners were sometimes distracted by extraneous details and back-story, and found it difficult to stay focused on the main point. I also wonder if hearing the parables presented differently and yet back-to-back in the same session prevented the listeners from being affected by their surprise and shock the way the author hoped they would. Still, in the end

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>56</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 62.

Lawson thought his audience preferred the re-told parables and were affected by them in the way he had hoped.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I reviewed the writers and literature that were instrumental in the development of my thesis. I discussed books and articles on the parables, oral culture and the power of the spoken word, Biblical Storytelling, preaching and performance criticism and four theses that included elements that were similar to this thesis. In the next chapter I will describe the details of my project and the methodology I used to test my hypothesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

So far I have discussed Jesus' parables and his purpose in using them as his vehicle for teaching his listeners about the Kingdom of God. I have made the case for the use of biblical storytelling as a means of presenting the parables to congregations in order to elicit a reaction similar to that which Jesus intended. I have reviewed literature that supports this idea. In this chapter I will describe the methodology, context, and the research tools used to determine if this is, in fact, possible.

#### **The Methodology**

The question I am asking with my project is "Can biblical storytelling help listeners hear Jesus' parables in a new way so they regain the power and effect Jesus intended when he first told them?" In order to answer this question I used an action/reflection model with a qualitative research approach. My colleague and I preached a sermon series on Jesus' parables throughout the summer months of 2015 in the two congregations in which we serve as pastors. Thirteen parables were used in the sermon series, but only six parables were chosen for the research. I developed and administered surveys to congregation members in both churches. The surveys included basic demographic questions, multiple choice questions, and open ended questions to gauge how the listeners reacted to the method of presentation of the parables as well as how the presentation affected the engagement and reception of the sermon preached

following the presentation of the text. I asked my colleague to reflect on his experience of using biblical storytelling, how he perceived the congregations' reactions to it, and how it affected the sermon he wrote and preached in connection to the parable for that particular Sunday. I noted my own reflections and perceptions, and held a discussion with my confirmation class to discover their reaction to biblical storytelling as opposed to a regular reading of the scripture text.

### **The Context**

In 2008 I was called to serve full-time as co-pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Montevideo MN. Montevideo is located in Chippewa County, approximately 130 miles straight west of Minneapolis, in a river valley where the Minnesota and Chippewa rivers converge.<sup>1</sup> The 2010 census lists the population of Montevideo as 5,383 people. Ninety one percent of the population is white, 8.3% is Latino. It is a largely agricultural area however other employers include the health care field, the school district, and manufacturing plants such as Jennie-O Turkey Store, and Friendship Homes, a company that makes single and multi-section manufactured homes. The median household income is \$43,357.00 and the median value of owner-occupied housing units is \$87,500.00. Almost 14% of the population lives below the poverty line.

In regard to religious affiliation, 88% of the population designated some kind of religious affiliation: 61% ELCA, 13% Catholic, 9% Reformed, 7% Lutheran (either Missouri Synod or WELS) and 10% other. There are three ELCA churches in town, as well as a Missouri Synod church. Trinity is the middle sized ELCA church and has 1,136

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<sup>1</sup> All demographic information is taken either from the 2010 US census or the 2014 ELCA congregational reports for the two churches.

members. The congregation was formed in 1904 with twelve charter members. During the majority of its history a solo male pastor served the congregation. Over the years the staff has also included either a youth director or a family life coordinator. In 1995 a seminary graduate was called to be the first associate pastor, to work with the soon to be retired lead pastor. For a number of reasons the situation did not work well and in 1998 the associate left the call. The pastoral ministry model once again went back to a solo male pastor as the leader.

In 2005 my current colleague, Pr. Tim Ehling was called, but as the membership grew, more help was needed. It was at that time I was called to serve as co-pastor. I am the first female pastor to serve this congregation. It is a multi-generational congregation with ages ranging from newborn to mid 90s. The ethnic make-up of the congregation is overwhelmingly white, with a heavily Scandinavian/ Western European heritage. Many of the members are employed either by the school district or as health care workers. The average weekly attendance in the fall and winter is approximately 160. That number drops significantly in the late spring and summer months when many members leave the city and go to lake cabins on the weekends.

In 2011 it became clear that Trinity could not financially support two full-time pastors so a partnership was formed with a smaller church about 15 miles away. Maynard Lutheran's previous partner church left the ELCA as a result of the 2009 churchwide decision that gay and lesbian clergy could be in committed, same sex relationships and still serve as rostered leaders in the church. Maynard church contracted with Trinity for the equivalent of half time pastoral services.

The community of Maynard has a population of 366 of which 92% is white and 6% is Latino. It is located in an area that has a large Dutch Reformed denominational influence. The major source of income in and around the community is from farming. The median income is \$41,328 and the median house value is \$56,500.00. Approximately 8% of the population lives below the poverty line.

The church itself is one of two churches in town, the other being a Presbyterian church with fewer than 20 members. Church records indicate there are 401 baptized members with an average weekly attendance of 68. That number is well below the number in 2004, which was 105, but attendance has been slowly climbing from the 2010 average of 51. Many of those listed as current members do not live in the area, but they maintain their affiliation with their home congregation in order to be buried in the church cemetery. Most of the membership is 50 years of age or older however, in the past year younger couples with small children have begun to join the congregation. The average age is 60-65, and much of the pastoral work consists of pastoral care for aging members, consisting of nursing home, hospital, and home visitations.

Although Maynard is the smaller of the two churches, both in membership and physical size, it is more difficult to capture and maintain the attention of those present during the reading of scripture and the preaching event. The sound system is poor and set up in such a way that it is difficult for the preacher to tell if she or he is being heard. For the past several years there have been few if any small children present in worship: now that there are more young families attending older members seem easily distracted by the noise and activity of the little ones. Both my colleague and I have commented that even with the use of a microphone we feel we need to almost shout in order to be heard and

connect to the listeners in the pews. Members of my Parish Response Group from the Maynard church have indicated that this is, in fact, the case.

In order to serve both churches within the parameters of the partnership my colleague and I chose to split our workload so that each of us would serve 3/4 time at Trinity and 1/4 time at Maynard. Because of their size, Trinity holds two worship services each Sunday and Maynard holds one. We tried many configurations of worship schedules in order to accommodate both churches and finally decided that Trinity would hold services at 8:00 and 11:00 and Maynard would hold its service at 9:15. Only one of us preaches each Sunday, therefore the one who is preaching on a particular Sunday leaves the 8:00 service at Trinity immediately after the sermon, drives to Maynard to conduct the 9:15 service, and then returns to Trinity to preach and preside at the 11:00 service. During the summer of 2015 when this project was implemented, the leadership of Trinity Church decided to hold only one service due to lack of attendance. Therefore, the summer worship schedule changed to an 8:00 service at Trinity and a 9:30 service at Maynard.

### **The Project**

There were four components to the research for this project: congregational surveys, an interview with my colleague regarding his experience with biblical storytelling, my personal reflections on the biblical storytelling experience, and a discussion with the confirmation class that I teach. Each component is described below.

#### **The Congregational Portion of the Project**

This portion of the project was conducted during the months of June, July, and August of 2015. Prior to beginning the research I placed an article in the congregational

newsletter to inform them of the upcoming project (See Appendix A). Throughout the summer my colleague and I preached a series on Jesus' parables. I conducted my research using six of thirteen parables on which we preached during the series. I chose the following parables for my research: Luke 12:16-21 (The Rich Fool), Luke 18:1-8 (The Widow and the Unjust Judge), Luke 18:9-14 (The Pharisee and the Tax Collector), Luke 16:19-31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus), Luke 10:30-37 (The Good Samaritan), and Luke 15:11-22 (The Prodigal Son). I chose these parables because I wanted a mixture of both more familiar and less familiar parables. It was my assumption that most of the congregation members would have heard The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son stories many times, while the parables of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector and The Rich Fool may have been familiar to some but less familiar to others, and the parables of The Widow and the Unjust Judge, and The Rich Man and Lazarus would be the least familiar of the six.

I asked my colleague to present and preach on two of the parables and I presented and preached on four of them. The parable was either read from the Bible or told as a story and the congregations were surveyed to determine which method was most effective. If the parable was read at one church, that same parable was told as a story at the other church and vice versa. Each church heard three parables read, and three told as stories. The schedule of parables used for the research is listed in the table below.

**Table 1: Project Schedule**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Presenter</b> | <b>Parable</b> | <b>Trinity Church</b> | <b>Maynard Church</b> |
|-------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 6-21-15     | Pr. Tim          | Luke 12:16-21  | Read                  | Told as a story       |
| 6-28-15     | Pr. Kathryn      | Luke 18:1-8    | Told as a story       | Read                  |

|         |             |               |                 |                 |
|---------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 7-26-15 | Pr. Kathryn | Luke 18:9-14  | Read            | Told as a story |
| 8-2-15  | Pr. Kathryn | Luke 16:19-31 | Read            | Told as a story |
| 8-9-15  | Pr. Tim     | Luke 10:30-37 | Told as a story | Read            |
| 8-23-15 | Pr. Kathryn | Luke 15:11-22 | Told as a story | Read            |

The normal practice of each church is to have a lay leader read the scripture but in this project the preacher was the one who read or told the story. I chose to forgo using a lay leader for the sake of consistency. I wanted to make sure a poor reading of the text didn't influence the way it was heard, which could have an affect on the data for preference of method used to present the text. When my colleague and I read a text in worship we both read with expression in order to help the listener understand it as well as possible. We did not change our style of reading for the purpose of this project: the listeners heard the texts as they always do when we read them. My colleague is also familiar with biblical storytelling and so he was comfortable telling the stories and had good interaction with the listeners when he presented the parable as a story. In order to help the members of the congregation identify which method was being used for presentation, when the parable was read, it was read from the pulpit, and when it was told the preacher stepped away from the pulpit and told the story from the front of the sanctuary. In all cases but one the text was taken from the NRSV. The same sermon on that day's parable was preached at each church and it was presented from the pulpit using a manuscript. Congregation members were asked to complete and return surveys in order to gauge the effectiveness of each method of presentation of the parable.

### The Congregational Surveys

Surveys (See Appendix B) and pencils were handed out to all members of the congregations as they entered the worship area. The surveys were anonymous. At the beginning of each service I explained that the surveys were being used as a part of my research project for this thesis. Participation in filling out the survey was completely voluntary. If members did not want to fill it out they didn't have to; completing and returning the surveys implied consent to use the data collected. Although adult participants were not required to sign their names, if the participant was under eighteen I asked that a parent sign the survey to indicate parental permission for a minor's participation. I explained that the majority of the questions pertained to the method of presentation of the parable, but two questions pertained to the connection between the method of presentation and the sermon preached following it. After the sermon I allowed several minutes for completing the survey before moving into the hymn of the day. The church ushers collected completed surveys during the offering.

Multiple-choice questions were used to identify age, gender, congregational membership, level of familiarity with the parable, how it was presented and by whom, level of interest as the parable was presented, and preference for the method used to present it. Open-ended questions were used to gauge the participant's reaction to the parable and the method used to present it, whether or not hearing the sermon changed the understanding of the parable, if the method of presentation affected how the sermon was heard, and what the participant thought Jesus was saying with the parable. I also gave participants space to write other comments. I color-coded the surveys to distinguish one congregation from the other and entered the data collected into an online site entitled

SurveyMonkey.com. Any surveys that indicated that the participant was under 18 and that was not signed I discarded. I tried to spread the parables for which I was administering the surveys throughout the course of the summer in order to avoid “survey fatigue”. Unfortunately, because of unforeseen circumstances there was a stretch of three Sundays in a row in which surveys were administered. On the third Sunday I heard comments such as “another survey!” and in Maynard the number of surveys returned was the lowest of the summer. However, that was not the case at Trinity: the number was similar to three other Sundays in which surveys were administered and returned. In general, congregation members from both churches were supportive and cooperative for this part of the research.

### The Interview with My Colleague

I spoke with my colleague, Tim Ehling, after he presented and preached on two of Jesus’ parables to get his reaction to the process of biblical storytelling and how he perceived the response of the congregations to the two methods of presentation. I first asked him how he went about preparing to present the parable using biblical storytelling. He said that he began by memorizing parts of the parable and repeating those parts throughout the day, living with the text, and carrying it with him as he went about his work. He referred to it as getting the story “inside” himself. He would use the memorization as a spiritual practice, beginning in the morning and then going back to it throughout the day in order to make sure he had everything memorized correctly. By the time Sunday came he was ready to tell it comfortably.

### My Personal Reflections

This portion of the research reflects my own feelings and impressions as I presented the texts to the congregations. Although I reference some aspects of the data collected on the surveys in regard to my perceptions of familiarity and engagement with the text in the following discussion, a more detailed examination of the specific data collected during each of these presentations will be reviewed in Chapter Five to determine if my impressions were correct.

On June 28, 2015, I presented the parable of The Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8). I read the parable from the Bible at Maynard Lutheran and told it as a story at Trinity Lutheran. A brief review of the surveys indicated that the parable was either somewhat familiar or not familiar at all to the majority of listeners at both churches. As indicated above, it seemed difficult to capture the attention of those present at the worship service in Maynard, during both the reading of the text and the preaching event. Almost half of the surveys collected at Maynard indicated that the listeners were somewhat interested when the text was presented. In contrast, it appeared to me that the listeners at Trinity were more engaged when the parable was presented as a story. There was more eye contact, less noise, and in general I felt a better connection with the listeners as I told the story. The response to the sermon seemed similar at both churches.

On June 15, 2015, a young, white gunman shot and killed nine African American members of Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in the hopes of starting a race war. This was another in a long line of incidents of racial violence and tension over the past several months. There had previously been

protests and riots in Ferguson MO, and Baltimore MD to protest the deaths of young black men by police officers.

These incidents were weighing heavily on me, and as I prepared to present this parable of the widow and the unjust judge and the sermon following it I chose to emphasize as the central theme of the text the importance of justice for the oppressed. Rather than portray the woman as pleading with the judge for justice I portrayed her as angrily demanding it as her right. At the beginning of the service I read a letter that Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the presiding bishop of the ELCA, had written in response to the murders and racial unrest and referenced that letter later in my sermon (See Appendix C for written manuscripts of all the sermons used for the research). The overall response I got from the storytelling presentation at Trinity and the sermon at both churches was positive.

On July 26, 2015 I presented the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:10-14) as a story at Maynard Lutheran and read it from the Bible at Trinity. Both churches indicated that this parable was either very familiar or somewhat familiar to them. This time the connection with the listeners at the Maynard church was much better than it had been previously when the parable was simply read. I sensed that they listened better and were more interested in the text. I got positive comments from members as they left worship that day and they appeared to appreciate the way the parable was presented. One of the things that listeners mentioned as helpful was that I changed locations as I talked about each of the characters. When portraying the Pharisee I stood in the very center of the sanctuary, easily visible to those in the pews. However, in the text it says the tax collector stood far off, so although I remained in the front of the sanctuary I

moved to a location farther from the members, and more difficult for all of them to see. Congregation members commented that this helped them clearly see the different mindset of both men. Previous to the sermon I had placed several mousetraps on the pulpit, and set them off at various times while I was preaching, and comments indicated that this was also helpful in grabbing and maintaining the attention of members as I spoke.

At Trinity the congregation listened well when the text was read, but I did not feel as personally connected with the members than I had previously when I told the parable as a story. Both churches appeared to respond positively to the sermon.

On August 2, 2015, I presented the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) as a story at Maynard church and read from the Bible at Trinity church. Again it appeared that the engagement with the text was better in Maynard when it was told as a story. I did not feel the same personal connection with the listeners at Trinity that I did in Maynard. The sermon was well received at both churches.

Finally, on August 23, 2015, I presented the parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-22) as a story at Trinity and read from the Bible at Maynard. The congregation at Trinity seemed very engaged with the text as a story, and not as engaged when it was read at Maynard. This was the final survey taken for the project, and I received positive comments from both churches on the sermon.

### The Confirmation Class Discussion

On October 21, 2015, I conducted a discussion on biblical storytelling with my confirmation class consisting of 41 seventh grade students. My purpose in using the confirmation students as part of the research was to see how listeners who most likely were unfamiliar with this parable would hear and respond to it when told as a story rather

than simply read as a text. Previous to this class I met with the students' parents to explain the project for this thesis and receive permission to use the students' responses for the project. I asked the parents to return the permission slip with their signatures as well as the signatures of the students participating in the discussion (See Appendix D). I also explained the project to the students and assured them that they did not have to participate in the class discussion if they did not want to, and that I would not use any responses if I had not received a signed permission slip from their parents.

The discussion was on the parable of The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35). The other adult teacher in the class first read the scripture text. The class was then asked the following questions: "Have you heard this parable before?" "What do you think Jesus was trying to say with this parable?" "Did you think the parable was interesting?"

I reminded the students of something I had taught them in another class, that originally stories about Jesus were not written down but passed from one to another through the spoken word in order to help others learn about Jesus and his purpose on earth. People told stories in order to help others come to believe in Jesus, and Jesus told stories in order to help people understand God better. After a brief explanation of biblical storytelling I then told the parable, using the same version that had been read to them earlier.

After the discussion the students were put into small groups and given the chance to practice biblical storytelling on their own. I wanted to make it easy for the students since this was the first time they would be doing this kind of an exercise, so rather than a parable I chose a brief text: the story of Jesus calming the storm using either Matthew 8:23-27 or Luke 8:22-25. After approximately 25 minutes the students re-grouped to

discuss their experience. They said it was difficult to memorize the text word for word, but many of them were able to relay the different aspects of the story even if they had not completely memorized it. We talked about their ability to remember what they had practiced so they could re-tell the story to someone else. They would be passing on the faith by sharing these stories that they had learned. At the end of the class time I asked the students if they enjoyed the exercise and other than one or two exceptions the students stated they enjoyed it and would like to do it again.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology used in my thesis project. I have described the context in which the project took place and have discussed the four research tools I used to gather the data to answer the question “Can biblical storytelling help listeners hear Jesus’ parables in a new way so they regain the power and effect Jesus intended when he first told them?” In Chapter Five I will examine the results of the surveys and reflections to determine if biblical storytelling can be used effectively to help Jesus’ parables regain their power.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In Chapter Four I discussed the details of the project for my thesis. I described the context in which the project took place and outlined the methodology for administering the parable series surveys. I also explained the discussions I had with my colleague and my confirmation students. In this chapter I will report the results of my survey. I will begin with more general information and then move to specific results on each of the parables surveyed. Then I will discuss my colleague's reaction to biblical storytelling, and the reactions of the confirmation students.

#### **Surveys**

##### General Information

At each of the worship services used for my research, surveys and pencils were handed out to members as they entered the sanctuary. I instructed the ushers at each church to give surveys to members who were approximately 12 years (confirmation age) and older. A total of 297 surveys were completed and returned: 175 were returned from Trinity, 116 were returned from Maynard, and six surveys did not indicate from which church they were returned.

The majority of the surveys returned were from respondents between the ages of 46 and 65, with those who were over 65 making up the next largest group. Female respondents far outweighed male respondents. Of the 277 people who responded to the

question regarding membership 267 indicated they were members, and 194 respondents indicated membership of over 10 years. Familiarity with specific parables will be discussed below, but overall, more than half indicated they were very familiar with the six parables presented during the series, and out of all 297 surveys returned, 208 indicated that they were very interested when the parable was presented, no matter what method was used. In the same vein, 217 out of 232 respondents said they liked the manner of presentation, whether the parable was read or told. Possible reasons for this response will be discussed in Chapter Six. For those who responded as to whether or not hearing the sermon changed their reaction to the parable itself, a little over half of those who responded to this question said it did (146 versus 126). One hundred and sixty two people indicated the method of presentation for the parable affected how they listened to the sermon as opposed to 112 who said it did not affect them. For a detailed analysis of the statistical results of the above statements please see Appendix E.

I will now compare the survey responses for each parable used for the survey.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

The parable of The Rich Fool was presented on June 21, 2015, by my colleague, Pastor Tim Ehling.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Trinity Church**

At Trinity the parable was read from the Bible. On that Sunday 85 people attended and 27 surveys were returned. Two surveys were returned by respondents under

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<sup>1</sup> When the number of responses for a particular question don't add up to total numbers of surveys returned for that particular Sunday it is because some respondents skipped that question. See Appendix E for details.

<sup>2</sup> For the sermons corresponding to each of these parables please see Appendix C.

the age of 18; one each from respondents between the ages of 18 and 25, and 26 and 45; and 11 each from ages between 46 and 50, and over age 50. Seventeen respondents indicated they were female and eight indicated they were male. Twenty-four respondents said they were members and one was a visitor. Sixteen respondents indicated their membership was between 10 and 50 years; four were members for less than 10 years and two were members for more than 50 years. Fourteen respondents said this parable was very familiar to them, 10 said it was somewhat familiar, and two said it was not familiar. Fifteen said they were very interested when the parable was read, 11 said they were somewhat interested, and one was somewhat disinterested. No surveys indicated the respondent was very disinterested. Question five<sup>3</sup> of the survey asked respondents if, being familiar with the parable, they heard anything new in it. Only 11 respondents answered this question in the affirmative. One respondent simply said “always.” Six respondents’ answers referred to the parable itself, and included things like “the part about tearing down and building bigger was new,” “his occupation as a farmer,” and “that he had enough for future years.”<sup>4</sup> Four of the responses referred not to the parable itself, but to the sermon that followed the parable. Examples of these responses include “We are blessed because it is God that provides everything we have,” “how blessed we are,” and “the aspect of serving, not just giving.” When asked to list two words that described the respondents’ reaction to the parable some of the words listed were “blessed,” “scared,” and “greed.” These reactions were based on the amount of goods the farmer had acquired,

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<sup>3</sup> The survey did not list biographical information such as age, gender, membership, and length of membership as numbered questions, however the statistical analysis program did, therefore survey question numbers and statistical analysis numbers do not match. For example, question #5 on the survey appears as question #10 on the information in the appendix. When referring to specific questions I will use the numerical order on the survey.

<sup>4</sup> For individual comments please see Appendix E.

his sudden death, and his wanting to build bigger storage bins. Twenty-five people responded to the question of whether or not the sermon changed their reaction to the parable. Sixteen people answered no, nine answered yes. However, when asked if the method of presentation for the parable affected how they listened to the sermon 15 responded positively and 10 responded negatively. Some of those who answered yes indicated that they wanted to hear what the pastor would say in the sermon about how they should share their blessings. Others said the parable helped them focus on what the sermon was going to be about. When asked what they thought Jesus was trying to say in this parable, many of the 23 people who responded said something similar to the idea that we are blessed to be a blessing to others, that we should share what we have been given, or that everything we have is from God and so we should use it to help others. On this first survey, as I was explaining the purpose of the thesis to the congregation I realized question 11 was poorly worded: “Which method of presentation did you prefer: the parable being read or told?” Since each church only heard one method of presentation on any given Sunday a question asking them to compare methods wasn’t helpful. I later changed the question to read “What do you think about the way the parable was presented?” and had them circle that they either liked it, or didn’t like it.<sup>5</sup>

### **Maynard Church**

The parable of The Rich Fool was told as a story at Maynard church. Fifty four people were in attendance that Sunday and 21 surveys were returned. There were no respondents under the age of 18 or between the ages of 18 and 25. Two respondents were

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<sup>5</sup> After two more sets of surveys were returned I realized the question needed to be refined even more so I added a third option. The surveys handed out in August allowed the respondents to say if they liked it, disliked it, or thought it was simply OK.

between the ages of 26 and 45, 10 were between the ages of 46 and 65, and nine were over 65 years of age. Fourteen respondents indicated they were female, five indicated they were male, and two skipped this question. Eighteen of the respondents were members and three were visitors. Two people had been members for less than 10 years, five had been members between 10 and 25 years, eight had been members between 26 and 50 years, and two had been members for more than 50 years. Ten respondents said this parable was very familiar, five said it was somewhat familiar, and three said it was not familiar. Eighteen respondents said they were very interested when the parable was presented, and three said they were somewhat interested. No one indicated they were either somewhat disinterested or very disinterested. Only three people commented that they heard something new in the parable. One responded, “God is enough,” another said “be thankful for the blessings we have, they are all gifts from God.” A third said “same story but better to listen to when told.” When asked to list two words to describe their immediate reaction to the parable some of the words used were “blessings,” “rich,” and “interested.” Five respondents mentioned farming or the farmer in regard to what triggered their reaction to the parable. Only five people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable. Fourteen people indicated that the method of presentation affected how they listened to the sermon. In the comments made regarding this question three people said they preferred hearing the parable as a story: “a story is better than preaching,” “the story kept my attention rather than a Bible reading,” and “he told it like he was talking personally to me.” Others indicated that it was easier to relate it to the sermon, and that it seemed to be put in a new context. Responses to the question regarding what they thought Jesus was saying with the parable were similar to the

responses from Trinity: we need to be thankful for our blessings, share them with others and remember that it is God who provides for us. The congregation at Maynard was also advised to skip the question regarding which method they preferred since it was poorly worded.

### The Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

I presented the second parable on June 28, 2015. It was told as a story at Trinity.

#### **Trinity Church**

Eighty-six people attended the worship service and 35 surveys were returned.

There were no respondents under the age of 18, one between the ages of 18 and 25, three between the ages of 26 and 45, 16 between the ages of 46 and 65, and 12 over the age of 65. Twenty-two respondents indicated they were female and 13 were male. Thirty-one respondents were members, and one was a visitor. Six respondents were members for less than 10 years, 13 indicated they had been members between 10 and 25 years, 10 had been members between 26 and 50 years, and two had been members for more than 50 years.

Two respondents indicated this parable was very familiar to them, 13 said it was somewhat familiar, and 18 said it was not familiar. Eighteen respondents said they were very interested when the parable was presented, 14 were somewhat interested, and three were very disinterested. Nine people responded to question number five, which asked if being familiar with the parable they had heard anything new in it. The response of four people referred to the parable itself, and five referred to the sermon preached. Three of the four people who referred to the parable indicated that because they were unfamiliar with it, everything was new. One simply wrote the word “justice” indicating that was a new word or idea for them. Some of the responses that were connected to the sermon

referred to comments I had made about the widow and why Jesus chose the specific words he did in the sermon: “Words can change the whole meaning of what was said,” and “Why Jesus chose the word ‘widow’ instead of woman.” Thirty-one people wrote words to describe their immediate reaction to the parable. Some of the words were connected to the parable itself, others were connected to the sermon. Words such as “arrogant,” “helpless,” “anger,” “frustrated,” “unjust,” “confused,” and “actor, play” I attributed to referencing the parable. Other words such as “racism,” “hope,” “belief,” “scales,” and “Christian” I attributed to ideas from the sermon. The word “justice” showed up many times and could have been referring to either the sermon or the parable. Four people indicated they were confused or puzzled and I assumed, or hoped, they were referring to the parable rather than the sermon. When asked what triggered their reaction the responses of 10 people referred to the parable and most of those were regarding the attitude of the judge toward the widow. Two of the 10 referred to the presentation of the parable itself: one said “The way the pastor told the parable: tone of voice and everyday language,” the other mentioned the movement of my hands during the telling. Eleven responses referred to the sermon. Some of those included phrases like “current events,” “changing one word changes the meaning,” “the recent tragedies and the widow in the parable,” and “nothing until I heard the sermon.” Eighteen people responded that the sermon did not change their reaction to the parable, 14 said it did. Several people mentioned that the sermon helped them understand the parable better. Others thought the sermon helped connect the parable to the current state of the world, especially in regard to racism. Sixteen said the way the parable was presented affected how they listened to the sermon, and sixteen said it did not. Fourteen people added comments for this

question. Six of them said they preferred hearing the text as a story. Some of those comments were “Good to hear it spoken, not read,” “I listened more carefully than if it had been read,” and “There is something special about scripture that has been memorized.” Others said they understood the parable better after hearing the sermon. One person indicated she listened better because she had to fill out the survey. Twenty-four people commented on what they thought Jesus was saying with the parable. The most common comments were about living a Christian life, and how we should act toward others. Other themes involved treating people equally and not being judgmental. Thirty-one people liked the way the parable was presented, and two did not. Twenty-six people added comments to this question. Ten said they appreciated the storytelling using phrases like “It catches our attention better than reading by a lay person,” and “Told in a story-like fashion-as it would have been told originally.” Others expressed appreciation for the way the sermon connected to the parable. Five people added comments at the end of the survey. Four of them expressed appreciation for the sermon and one stated that she appreciated the presentation.

### **Maynard Church**

The parable was read from the Bible at Maynard. Fifty-two people attended worship, and 13 surveys were returned. No one under 18 or between the ages of 18 and 25 returned surveys. One respondent was between the ages of 26 and 45, four were in the category of 46-65 and eight were over 65 years of age. Seven respondents were female, and two were male. Ten were members, and two were visitors. Two respondents indicated they had been members for less than 10 years, three had been members between 10 and 25 years, one indicated membership between 26 and 50 years, and two were

members for more than 50 years. Two respondents said the parable was very familiar to them, six said it was somewhat familiar, and five said it was not familiar. Six people said they were very interested when the parable was presented, four were somewhat interested, two were somewhat disinterested, and one was very disinterested. Three people responded that they heard something new; one person was disgusted by the behavior of the judge, one referred to the sermon saying “justice makes a difference,” and one said “I think we always hear something new every time.” Eleven people listed words that described their reaction to the parable; the most common among them were “justice,” “widow,” and “injustice.” Six people responded to the question regarding what in the parable triggered their reaction. Three of the responses referred to the parable itself, and three referred to the sermon. Responses that referred to the parable were “The woman coming back repeatedly,” “The way it was presented,” and “The widow had to keep coming.” The responses that referred to the sermon were “It clearly explained what the parable was about,” “The need for justice,” and “Personal story.” Five respondents indicated the sermon changed their reaction to the parable, three said it did not. Three people commented on this question saying the sermon helped clarify the parable. Eleven people responded to the question about whether or not the method of presentation affected how they listened to the sermon. Five people said it did and six said it did not. Three people included comments: “I paid very close attention to the sermon,” the sermon “explored the depth of the parable,” and one respondent heard “something new each time.” Nine people responded to the question about what Jesus was saying with the parable. Most of the responses dealt with living a Christian life and treating others with justice. Eight people liked the way the parable was presented, and two people disliked it.

There were also eight who commented on this question. Three comments were about the way the text was presented. One person said the presentation was too slow and needed “some fire.” Another said they have a hard time understanding “Bible lingo.” One person expressed appreciation for the way it was read “with distinctive pronunciation.” The other comments referred to the sermon saying it made the parable clearer and it was relevant to their lives. Two people added comments at the end of the survey, one critiqued the sermon saying it needed to connect more to our daily lives, and the other elaborated on the sermon theme of the power of words and how they affect our attitudes and actions.

#### The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

I presented the parable of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector on July 26, 2015.

The parable was read from the Bible at Trinity.

#### **Trinity Church**

Worship attendance was not taken on this Sunday, but 32 surveys were returned. No one under 18 returned a survey and one survey in the category of 18-25 years of age was returned. Six people between the ages of 26 and 45, 16 people between the ages of 46 and 65, and nine people over age 65 returned surveys. Twenty-two of the respondents were female and 10 were male. Thirty respondents were members and one was a visitor. Nine people indicated a membership of less than 10 years, 10 said they had been members between 10 and 25 years, eight said they had been members between 26 and 50 years, and two had been members more than 50 years. Sixteen people said the parable was very familiar, 15 said it was somewhat familiar and one said it was not familiar. Twenty-six people said they were very interested when the parable was presented and six

said they were somewhat interested. Twenty-seven people commented on whether they heard something new in the parable. Five of the comments simply said no. Of the twenty-two people who responded positively, five referred to the parable itself, and three of those comments applied to the scripture text used. One thought the text might have been paraphrased (it was not: I used the NRSV when reading), one thought there was more to the scripture than I had read, and one simply stated they liked the version used. One comment said the parable was not clear, and the other mentioned the need for humility. Sixteen of the comments referred to the sermon preached. Some of those comments regarded the theme of focusing on God, and the traps we can get caught in when we are either too arrogant or too humble. Twenty-seven people responded to the question asking for two words to describe their reaction to the parable, although 18 of those responses referred to the sermon rather than the parable, and one referred to the pastors rather than the parable or the sermon. The most common themes were humility, honesty and arrogance, with 10 of the respondents listing one or more of those attributes. When asked what in the parable triggered those reactions 20 people responded, but 15 of the responses referred to the sermon preached rather than the parable itself. Twenty people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable and 12 said it did not. Eighteen people commented on this question, with many of the responses stating the sermon helped them understand the parable better and how it applied to their lives. Twenty people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon and 11 people said it did not. All of the 16 comments for this question referenced the sermon rather than the parable, especially the use of mousetraps as props.<sup>6</sup> Twenty-six people responded to

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<sup>6</sup> See sermon #3 in Appendix C.

the question regarding what they thought Jesus was saying with the parable. The major themes of the responses were keeping the focus on God rather than oneself and the need to be humble. All thirty-one respondents to this question liked the way the parable was presented, but of the 24 comments included, 22 referred to the sermon and not the parable. One respondent said, in regard to the parable being read, "It was fine. That's standard practice." Ten people added comments at the end of the survey. Nine expressed appreciation for the sermon and one liked the hymn sung after the sermon.

### **Maynard Church**

The parable was told as a story on this Sunday. Fifty-four people attended worship and 19 surveys were returned. One respondent was under the age of 18, two were between the ages of 26 and 45, nine were between the ages of 46 and 65 and six were over 65. There were no respondents in the category of 18-25 years of age. Eleven respondents were female and six were male. Fifteen respondents indicated they were members and two were visitors. Three respondents said they had been members for less than 10 years, six had been members between 10 and 25 years, two had been members between 26 and 50 years, and four had been members for more than 50 years. Twelve people indicated they were very familiar with the parable, four were somewhat familiar, and three were not familiar with it. Although the parable was told as a story one person thought it had been read from the Bible. Fifteen people said they were very interested when the parable was presented and four said they were somewhat interested. Twelve people responded to the question regarding whether they heard anything new. One person responded that the arrogance displayed by the Pharisee was amplified by the presentation. Ten people referred to the sermon rather than the parable with the major themes being

humility and the possibility of being so humble that it turns into its own kind of arrogance. Fifteen people listed two words to describe their reaction to the parable. Six listed words that were in reference to the parable itself, seven listed words that referred to the sermon, and the responses of two people were unclear whether they were referring to the parable, the sermon, or both. The word used most in this section was “humble.”

Eleven people responded to the question about what triggered their reaction, and of those 11, nine referred to something in the sermon and two referred to the parable. Twelve people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable and four said it did not. Ten people commented on this question. For some the sermon clarified the meaning of the parable, others said the sermon reminded them to focus on God rather than themselves. Ten people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon, and four said it did not. Ten people commented on this question with nine saying the presentation kept their attention and helped them focus on the sermon better. One person said the physical movement while telling the parable helped clarify what was happening. Seventeen people responded to the question about what Jesus was saying in the parable. The major themes of their responses were keeping the focus on God and being humble. Sixteen people said they liked the method of presentation, no one said they disliked it. Fourteen people commented on this question. Two referred to the parable saying it kept their attention and they liked the way it was staged. Twelve people referred to the sermon saying the sermon made them think about their own lives, and it helped them see things differently. Six people added comments at the end of the survey, with five expressing appreciation for the sermon, and one relating the meaning of the parable in their own words.

### The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

On August 2, 2015 I presented the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus at Trinity, reading it from the Bible.

#### **Trinity Church**

Sixty-three people attended worship on this Sunday and 18 surveys were returned. One respondent was under 18 years of age, two were between the ages of 26 and 45, 10 were between the ages of 46 and 65, and four were over the age of 65. No respondents between the ages of 18 and 25 returned surveys. Twelve of the respondents were females and six were males. All of the respondents were members: two for less than 10 years, 10 for 10-25 years, four for 26-50 years, and one for more than 50 years. Seven people indicated the parable was very familiar to them, 10 said it was somewhat familiar, and one said it was not familiar. Thirteen people said they were very interested when the parable was presented, four said they were somewhat interested and one said s/he was somewhat disinterested. Fourteen people responded to the question regarding whether they heard something new in the parable. Two people said no. Five people referred to the parable and nine people referred to the sermon in answering this question. Seventeen people listed words to describe their reaction to hearing the parable. Seven people referred to the parable itself, nine referred to the sermon and one was unclear as to which it was referring. Some of the words written were “guilt,” “sad,” “rich,” “poor,” and “scared.” Fifteen people responded to the question regarding what triggered their reaction. Five people referred to something from the parable, and nine referred to something they heard in the sermon. Of the ones who referred to the parable, most expressed disgust at the behavior of the rich man. Most of the people who referred to the

sermon said they saw a connection with their daily life. Eleven people indicated that the sermon changed their reaction to the parable and seven said it did not. Ten people added comments, with the most common one being about seeing the “invisible” people around us. Five people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they heard the sermon and 13 said it did not. Five people commented on this question. Two said the sermon made them think about their lives and how they behaved, one said the presentation of the sermon made it personal, and another said the sermon connected well to the parable. Eighteen people responded to the question about what Jesus was saying with the parable. The majority of the people said Jesus wants them to see and help those in need. Seventeen people liked the way the parable was presented and one thought it was “OK.” Fifteen people commented on this question and all but one referred to something they heard in the sermon. The other respondent said, “It was OK-pretty traditional.” Seven people added comments at the end of the survey. Most of them expressed appreciation for the sermon and how it related to their lives. One expressed appreciation for the pastors.

### **Maynard Church**

This parable was told as a story at Maynard. Sixty-three people attended worship and 18 surveys were returned. There were no respondents younger than 18 or between the ages of 18 and 25. Two respondents were between the ages of 26 and 45, nine were between the ages of 46 and 65, and five were over the age of 65. Twelve respondents were female and five were male. Sixteen of the respondents were members. Seven of the respondents indicated they had been members for less than 10 years, one between 10 and 25 years, five between 26 and 50 years, and one had been a member for more than 50

years. Ten people said this parable was familiar to them, six said it was somewhat familiar, and two said it was not familiar. Ten people said they were very interested when the parable was presented and eight said they were somewhat interested. Ten people responded to the question about whether they heard something new in the parable. Six referred to the parable and four referred to the sermon. One did not understand what it meant when Lazarus went to Abraham after he died, one said the chasm between heaven and hell was new, and one said asking for Lazarus to be sent to the rich man's family to warn them was new. The four that commented on something they heard in the sermon noted the rich man's self-centeredness and seeing the "invisible" among us. Sixteen people listed words that described their reaction to the parable. Three of those who commented referred specifically to the parable, eight referred to the sermon and five could have been referring to either the parable, the sermon, or both. Some of the words listed included "repent," "sad," "see," and "oozing sores." Thirteen responded to the question about what triggered their reaction. Five of those referred to something specific they heard in the parable, three referred to something specifically related to the sermon, and five referred to things they heard in both the parable and the sermon. Six people said hearing the sermon changed their reaction to the parable and nine said it did not. Five people commented on this question. Two said they had new insights, one identified a connection with the rich man, one reiterated a need for compassion and one said God's people will be rewarded in heaven. Eleven people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon, and six said it did not. Ten people commented on this question. Seven expressed appreciation for the storytelling saying it helped them pay attention and made it more real. Three expressed appreciation for how

the sermon connected to their lives and helped explain the parable. Sixteen people responded to the question about what Jesus was saying with the parable. Ten responded that we should see others in need, and seven said we should help others. All 18 of the respondents liked the way the parable was presented. Eleven people commented on this question: seven expressed appreciation for the storytelling and four commented on the sermon. Two people added comments at the end of the survey. Both mentioned appreciating the story and one of them said they liked the way the story connected with the sermon.

#### The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)

Pr. Tim Ehling presented the parable of The Good Samaritan on August 9, 2015. He told it as a story at Trinity.

#### **Trinity Church**

Sixty people attended worship this Sunday, and 32 surveys were returned. There were no respondents under the age of 18. One respondent was between the ages of 18 and 25, three were between the ages of 26 and 45, 11 were between the ages of 46 and 65, and 15 were over 65 years of age. Twenty-two respondents were female and nine were male. Thirty respondents were members. Seven respondents said they had been members for less than 10 years, seven said they had been members between 10 and 25 years, 14 had been members between 26 and 50 years, and three had been members for more than 50 years. Twenty-three people said this parable was very familiar to them, seven said it was somewhat familiar, and two said it was not familiar. Twenty-seven people said they were very interested when the parable was presented, and five said they were somewhat interested. Eleven people responded to the question regarding whether they heard

something new in the parable. Seven people referred to the parable, and four referred to the sermon in their answer. Three people listed the ones who passed by the man in the ditch as something new, one mentioned the Samaritan paying the innkeeper, and two said they did not remember that Jesus was talking to a lawyer. The people who referred to the sermon mentioned the idea that passing by someone who needs help is an easy thing to do, and that receiving help is also a part of the story. Thirty-one people listed words that described their reaction. Twenty-two referred to something they heard in the parable, eight to something they heard in the sermon, and one could have been referring to either the parable, the sermon, or both. Some of the most common words were “compassion,” “help,” “sad,” “guilty,” and “anger”. Thirty people responded to the question regarding what triggered their reaction. Twenty-two people referred to something they heard in the parable itself. Five responded to something they heard in the sermon. Nineteen people said hearing the sermon changed their reaction to the parable, 11 said it did not. Nineteen people added comments to this question: the most common theme being that people had not thought being a good neighbor also meant receiving help from someone else. Twenty-six people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon, and five people said it did not. Of the twenty-six people who responded positively to this question, twenty-six commented on it. Fourteen of the 26 expressed a preference for hearing the parable told as a story because it helped them relate more closely with the characters and the story itself. Several people said they were able to focus more closely on the sermon because of the way the parable was presented. Six people said the sermon helped explain the parable more clearly. Thirty people responded to the question regarding what Jesus was saying in this parable. The most common theme

was that we need to help others, but we also need to accept help from others. Thirty-one people liked the way the parable was presented, and one thought it was “OK”. Virtually all of the people who said they liked it commented that they prefer hearing the text as a story because it is either more relatable, easier to understand, or easier to maintain attention. Fourteen people added comments at the end of the survey. Eight people expressed appreciation of the sermon, two expressed appreciation for the storytelling, two expressed appreciation for the pastors, and one was a sermon critique.

### **Maynard Church**

The parable was read from the Bible on this Sunday. Fifty-five people attended worship and 29 surveys were returned. One respondent was under 18 years of age, five were between the ages of 26 and 45, 15 were between the ages of 46 and 65, and six were over the age of 65. There were no respondents between the ages of 18 and 25. Nineteen respondents were female and eight were male. Twenty-seven respondents were members and two were visitors. Five people said they had been members for less than 10 years, five others said they had been members for between 10 and 25 years, nine had been members for between 26 and 50 years, and four had been members for more than 50 years. Twenty-two people said the parable was very familiar, four said it was somewhat familiar, and three said it was not a familiar parable. Twenty people said they were very interested when the parable was presented, seven said they were somewhat interested, and two said they were somewhat disinterested. Twenty-one people responded to the question regarding whether they heard anything new in the parable. One person said no, she had heard it many times before, but then qualified the answer by saying “maybe that the Samaritan is hated.” Three people referred to the parable in their response. One said

she thought the text was a different version than she normally heard so the words were different, one said she hadn't previously heard that the Samaritan paid for the man's lodging, and one said she didn't think Jesus usually asked such an obvious question at the end of his parables. Three people referred to the sermon: one said the reasons the men didn't stop to help was new, one said helping others is helping yourself through Jesus, and one said that both the men who walked by had something to do with the church. Twenty-eight people listed words to describe their reaction to the parable. All of the responses could have been referring to the parable, the sermon, or both. Some of the words included "help," "mercy," "suffering," and "neighbor." Twenty-six responded to the question asking what triggered their reaction. Eighteen people referred to something they heard specifically in the parable, seven referred to something they heard in the sermon, and one wasn't sure. Twenty-one people said hearing the sermon changed their reaction to the parable, and four said it did not. The most common response was that it helped them understand the parable more clearly, and that it changed their perspective on needing help from others. Twelve people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon and 14 said it did not. Ten people commented on this question, but nine people commented on the sermon itself rather than the presentation of the parable. One person said she found it harder to concentrate when the parable was read rather than told. Twenty-seven people responded to the question regarding what Jesus was saying with the parable. The most common theme was helping others, followed by allowing others to help you. Twenty-four people liked the way the parable was presented, and two disliked it. Twenty-two people commented on this question, but of those 20 commented on the sermon rather than the presentation of the parable. One person

commented on the presentation saying “I like telling of the Bible better. It keeps my attention better.” Two people added comments at the end of the survey. One comment expressed appreciation for the sermon and the other said the parable was relevant to the respondent’s life and gave an example to explain why.

### The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-22)

The final parable for which surveys were distributed was the parable of The Prodigal Son, presented on August 24, 2015. I presented it as a story at Trinity.

### **Trinity Church**

Ninety people attended worship on this Sunday, and 31 surveys were returned. One respondent was under 18 years of age, five were between the ages of 26 and 45, 16 were between the ages of 46 and 65, and eight were over the age of 65. There were no respondents between the ages of 18 and 25. Twenty respondents were female, and seven were male. Twenty-nine respondents were members. Five respondents indicated they had been members for less than 10 years, 11 for between 10 and 25 years, and nine for between 26 and 50 years. There were no respondents who indicated membership for more than 50 years. Twenty-five people said the parable was very familiar, four said it was somewhat familiar, and two said it was not familiar. Twenty-six people said they were very interested when the parable was presented, four said they were somewhat interested, and one was somewhat disinterested. Twenty-one people responded to the question of whether they heard something new in the parable. Four people referred to something they heard in the parable, and four referred to something they heard in the sermon. For those who referred to the sermon, one said he didn’t know the younger son spent money on prostitutes, one related the parable to “the heavenly father and how we should celebrate

when a life has been found,” one said the parable was “told with expression,” and one said that ‘no one gave him anything,’ and “the anger of the elder son” were new. For those who referred to the sermon, one said “Jesus wants us to be connected to a community and to each other,” one said the explanation of the parable helped connect it in a new way, one said the sermon “brought home the point that we need Jesus to get through our struggles,” and one said it was “an excellent comparison of God’s grace through Jesus.” Thirty people listed words to describe their reaction to the parable. All of the responses used words that could be connected to the parable. The most common word listed was “forgiveness.” Other words listed include “compassion,” “love,” and “happy.”

Twenty-nine people responded to the question about what triggered their reaction to the parable. The major theme in their responses was the father’s forgiveness of his son. Other comments mentioned the reaction of the older son, and others said the way the parable was presented. Eleven people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable and 20 said it did not. Thirteen people added comments to this question. The majority said the sermon helped connect the parable to their lives now. Others said they were able to see themselves in one or both of the brothers. Nineteen people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon, and eleven said it did not.

Nineteen people added comments to the question. Many of them said the presentation helped them focus on the sermon better, made the parable easier to understand, and allowed them to connect the parable to their own lives. Thirty people responded to the question regarding what they thought Jesus was saying in the parable. Major themes were that God forgives us and welcomes us, and that we should love and forgive others. All thirty-one people said they liked the way the parable was presented. Twenty-six people

commented on this question, and 22 of those expressed a preference for hearing the parable as a story. Comments included phrases such as “energy was good: kept my attention,” “storytelling makes it a lot more personal,” and “telling a story is more engaging than reading a story.” Eight people added comments at the end of the survey. Some expressed appreciation for the storytelling, others for the sermon, and others for the pastor.

### **Maynard Church**

I read the parable from the Bible on this Sunday. Sixty-nine people attended worship and 16 surveys were returned. There were no respondents under the age of 18, one between the ages of 18 and 25, one between the ages of 26 and 45, 10 between the ages of 46 and 65, and three over the age of 65. Eleven respondents were female and four were male. Fourteen respondents were members, and one was a visitor. Two people said they had been members for less than 10 years, five had been members between 10 and 25 years, five had been members between 26 and 50 years, and three had been members for more than 50 years. Fourteen people said this parable was very familiar and two said it was somewhat familiar. Nine people said they were very interested when the parable was read, and seven said they were somewhat interested. Twelve people responded to the question of whether they heard anything new in the parable. Five referred directly to the parable. One person mentioned the phrase “While he was still far off” as being new saying it emphasized the father’s love, which transcended distance. One person said most of it was new since the story was unfamiliar. One said the father telling the older son everything he had belonged to him as well, and another mentioned the phrase “he was dead but now alive.” Finally, one person said the son leaving at the beginning and then

wanting to return as his father's slave was new. Fourteen people wrote words to describe their reaction to the parable. Thirteen referred to something they heard in the parable and one person referred to the sermon. The most common words listed were "forgiveness," "lost," "found," "love," and "compassion." Fourteen people responded to the question asking what in the parable triggered that reaction. Twelve people referred to the parable itself, and two referred to the sermon. The most common response was the father's love and forgiveness, and the second most common response was the son being lost, but now found. Seven people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable, and eight said it did not. Eight people commented on this question, and most said the sermon helped them see the connection between the parable and their own lives. Four people said the way the parable was presented affected the way they listened to the sermon and ten people said it did not. Four people commented on this question. Three said the sermon helped explain the parable, and one person said they would have preferred hearing the parable told as a story rather than read. Fourteen people responded to the question regarding what Jesus was saying with the parable. Six people said God is always willing to forgive us, six people said we should forgive others, and two said the parable connected to their lives. Nine people said they liked the way the parable was presented, and seven said it was "OK." Seven people commented on this question. Four said the sermon helped explain the parable and connect it to their lives. Two people said they preferred hearing the parable told as a story. One said they liked the parable "Because it affects so many families and their lives." Five people added comments at the end of the surveys. All five of them expressed appreciation for the sermon, and one also expressed appreciation for the summer series on parables.

## Conclusion

I will discuss these results more thoroughly in Chapter Six, but there are a couple of things I would like to highlight here as a result of the surveys. First, people had a difficult time separating what they heard in the sermon from what they heard in the parable. Although the majority of the questions dealt specifically with the parable most often the comments made were in reference to an idea or phrase they heard in the sermon. It seems that scripture text and sermon are so closely connected in the minds of most listeners it is hard to separate them. Second, toward the end of the research there were more and more comments on the listeners' preference for the storytelling over a simple reading of the text, confirming my suspicions that people hear and connect with a text differently through biblical storytelling.

## Interview with My Colleague

In Chapter Four I shared part of the conversation I had with my colleague about how he prepared for Sunday's biblical storytelling presentation. He also reflected on how the process impacted him as a pastor. He said as he went about other aspects of his ministry parts of the story would come back to him and he would make connections with it. It became ingrained not only in his thought process, but also in his living.

He also said in living with the story all week long he began to see things in the story he hadn't before. The text came alive for him and helped him understand what a living word is: it is connected to everything we do, not just separated into a text for a preachable moment, or a study time. This word becomes enmeshed in every moment of our lives and ministry. He also said that because the word became alive in him he then wanted to express from the scripture what he had been living all week long. When asked

if he wrote a different sermon than he would have if he had merely read and studied the scripture text, his response was

I spoke a different sermon, I lived a different sermon, I proclaimed a different sermon...the proclamation had more energy for me, more excitement, more meaning and more connection to the people and their lives, as well as mine, because of the approach to biblical storytelling.<sup>7</sup>

When asked how he thought the congregations responded to the two different approaches for presenting the text he said he felt that both churches expressed more engagement with the telling of the story rather than a simple reading of the text. He saw more eye contact and the words became more engaging for them. He was not able to tell however, if the method for presenting the parable affected the way the congregations engaged with the sermon preached afterwards. Finally, I asked him if he would continue to use biblical storytelling as a way of sermon preparation, and his response was “always.” Even if he doesn’t used biblical storytelling as the means of presentation of the text on a given Sunday, he said he will memorize the text and carry it with him internally as he works on writing and preaching his sermon.<sup>8</sup>

### **Confirmation Class Discussion**

In Chapter Four I also described how I introduced biblical storytelling to my confirmation class of seventh and eighth grade students. After Vicar Matt read the story of The Unforgiving Servant the class was asked the following questions: “Have you heard this parable before?” “What do you think Jesus was trying to say with this parable?” “Did you think the parable was interesting?” Two or three of the students had

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from an interview given on 11/10/15.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete transcript of the interview please see Appendix F.

heard the parable before, but most had not. One student said she thought Jesus was telling us through this parable that we shouldn't do to people what we don't want them to do to us. Another said Jesus was telling us to forgive others. Some thought it was kind of an interesting parable but "not really", and others said their attention wandered.

After I told the same story using biblical storytelling I asked the class if they had heard anything in the telling that they hadn't heard the first time when it was read. One student said he hadn't heard that the unforgiving servant was thrown into jail at the end. Another said she hadn't heard the different amounts of money involved in the story.

When asked which method the students preferred most said they preferred the story version but a few others preferred the reading. When asked why they preferred the reading some said because the parable seemed longer when it was told as a story, and that the adult who read was louder and easier to hear than I was. When asked about the story method students mentioned that they thought this version was more expressive when it was told, and it had more detail, such as the one servant grabbing the other by the throat. All of the students were surprised to hear that both versions were exactly the same; the only difference was that one was read and the other was told as a story. As I related in Chapter Four, after this discussion the class was split into small groups and practiced learning a scripture text for telling. They all said they enjoyed the exercise and wanted to do it again in the future.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I reported the results of the surveys, both overall and with the individual parables. I discussed my colleague's experience with preparing the text for

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<sup>9</sup> For a complete transcript of the class discussion please see Appendix F.

storytelling and the effect it had on him, and I described the response of my confirmation students regarding biblical storytelling versus hearing a parable read. In Chapter Six I will evaluate the results of my research and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EVALUATION

The question I asked at the beginning of this thesis was “Is it possible to help our listeners hear these parables with new ears so the stories once again regain the power Jesus intended them to have, and if so, how?” My research project was conducted to determine if biblical storytelling could be an effective vehicle for accomplishing that goal. In Chapter Five I reviewed the results of the surveys I distributed over the course of the summer to the two congregations I serve. I also discussed the reflections of my colleague who assisted me in this project, and the response to biblical storytelling with the confirmation students I teach. In this chapter I will evaluate the project, its strengths and weaknesses, what I learned from it, and how it might be improved for future studies.

#### **Congregational Surveys**

##### Strengths

One of the greatest strengths of this project was that I was able to compare the responses of two different churches for each method of presentation of all six parables used for the study. As explained in Chapter Four, when the parable was read at one church it would be told as a story at the other church. This allowed me to discern the differences between the two methods of presentation more clearly. As the project continued and the congregation members were able to experience biblical storytelling more often and compare it to a standard reading of the parable, more and more comments

on the surveys indicated that people preferred the biblical storytelling method of presentation. Many of the surveys stated that when the parable was told as a story it was easier to pay attention, they felt more connected to the storyteller, and they understood the parable better than they did when it was simply read. These results confirm the arguments made for the oral performance of memorized scripture texts in Chapters Three and Four: something different happens when a scripture text is embodied that doesn't happen when it is merely read aloud. My research showed this was true in both congregations.

Another strength of this project was that, with the help of my colleague, congregation members were able to compare the different methods of presentation by two different people. The surveys showed that it wasn't just that they preferred my storytelling to my reading of the text; they preferred my colleague's storytelling as well. When Pr. Tim and I read the scripture texts in worship we both try to read with as much expression as possible to help our listeners get a clear understanding of the text. Our members often tell us that they appreciate how well we read the scriptures on Sundays. As we participated in this project we did not change the way we read in order to make the distinction between reading and storytelling clearer; we read the way we always do, and still people preferred our storytelling to our reading.

When I first decided to conduct this kind of research, Trinity, the larger of the two congregations, held two worship services each Sunday: one at 8:00 and one at 11:00, and Maynard held one service at 9:30. However, during the summer the project was conducted, the Trinity Church Council decided to cut back to only one service: the one held at 8:00 which is typically the smaller of the two. Originally I had hoped for twice as

much data from Trinity, and with this change I worried I would not have enough to make my case. In the end, because six different parables were used in the research, resulting in a total of 297 completed surveys, I believe there was enough data to prove my hunch that biblical storytelling can help people hear Jesus' parables in a new way.

### Weaknesses

One of the greatest weaknesses of this project was the poor wording of some of the survey questions. Because these questions were not worded as clearly as they should have been, the responses I received were not as clear as I would have liked. The most obvious offender in this category was question #11. It was the one I used to determine which method of presentation of the parable the respondents preferred. As mentioned in Chapter Five, on the first survey the question read as follows: "Which method of presentation did you prefer: the parable being read or told?" Respondents could not answer this question because each church was only hearing one method of presentation on any given Sunday. On that first Sunday there was nothing for them to compare, making that question invalid. I changed the question for the next set of surveys to read: "What did you think about the way the parable was presented? (Circle One)." The choices given for this question were "1) I liked it," or "2) I didn't like it." After going through the results of the surveys for the next two parables I realized that the response was overwhelmingly "I liked it." As mentioned above, many people had previously commented that they appreciated hearing the way Pr. Tim and I both read scripture texts, so it isn't surprising that in June and July, when given the choice between either liking or disliking the presentation, only four out of a total of 89 responses indicated the respondents didn't like the method of presentation. It seemed obvious that the question

needed to be reworded again, since I was still not getting the information I needed. For the next three surveys in August I gave the respondents a third option: “It was OK.” While the response on these surveys again overwhelmingly indicated that they liked the method of presentation no matter how the parable was presented, more people were indicating they felt the method was “OK” when it was read. The first Sunday that option was available only one person marked it, the second Sunday two people marked it, and by the final Sunday seven people marked it. To me this indicates a growing discernment for the difference between storytelling and reading and a preference for storytelling. This preference might have been clearer if the third option had been available from the beginning.

Another question that seems to have been poorly worded was the one that asked the respondents to list two words that described their immediate reaction to the sermon. My hope with this question was to discover what kinds of feelings the listeners experienced when they heard the parable. I was hoping for responses such as sad, angry, shocked, uncomfortable, guilty, or other feeling words. Instead I got words like “true,” “rich,” “poor,” “justice,” or “oozing sores.” This might have been avoided if I had worded the question “List two words that describe how you *felt* when you heard the parable.” This question could have been further qualified by offering suggestions for feeling words such as “guilty,” “relieved,” or something similar. I chose not to do this because I didn’t want to sway people in their responses, but it may have been helpful to give examples of what I was looking for. Many people had a difficult time confining their responses to two words. Instead I would get full phrases such as “we are blessed,” or “you never know who will help you.”

Another discovery that I made revealed a weakness not necessarily in the survey questions themselves but in the process used to complete them. Over the course of the series the majority of people had a difficult time separating what they heard in the parable from what they heard in the sermon. One example of this can be found in a response to the parable of The Widow and the Unjust Judge. When asked “If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything new in it that you hadn’t heard before? If so, what?” one respondent wrote: “Why Jesus chose to say ‘widow’ instead of ‘woman’ etc.” In my sermon I claimed that Jesus was very precise in his use of words because they had important implications. Widows were particularly vulnerable and in need of protection, which made the judge’s response to her even more reprehensible. The respondent’s answer confused what was said in the sermon to what s/he heard in the parable. This happened countless times with the questions that asked for a qualitative rather than a quantitative response. This might have been avoided if I had allowed time to fill out most of the survey questions immediately after the parable was presented, rather than waiting until after the sermon was preached. When I realized this was a problem I explained at the beginning of the service when the next survey was distributed that most of the questions referred specifically to the parable itself and how it was presented, and only two questions asked about the sermon, but it doesn’t appear that the explanation made much of a difference. The confusion continued throughout the remaining surveys.

### **My Colleague’s Participation**

#### **Strengths**

I greatly appreciated my colleague’s participation in this project for a number of reasons. Congregation members were able to hear two different styles of both reading the

scriptures and storytelling. Both of us are expressive, but Tim is more animated, even boisterous in his presentation and preaching. I tend to be calmer and speak in a more soothing tone of voice when preaching. The differences in our styles allowed the listeners to hear not only the difference between the parables being read and told, but the difference between the two presenters as well. I believe this helped listeners more clearly determine their preference for the method of presentation. Despite our different styles the survey responses were similar in regard to their preference: they preferred storytelling as opposed to reading, no matter who did it or how it was done. Hearing two different presenters during the series also prevented the congregations from getting bored with the project and the number of surveys distributed throughout the summer.

Tim's reflections on his preparation for presenting the parable as story also point to the importance of biblical storytelling as a spiritual practice. He said memorizing the text, carrying it with him as he went about his pastoral duties during the week, helped him make connections between the parable and daily life that he might not have made otherwise. As stated in the previous chapter, the practice helped him write, live and proclaim a different sermon, gave him more energy and excitement and therefore helped him connect more closely with the lives of the people with whom he interacted. In other words, it helped him become a better preacher.

### Weaknesses

As I planned this research project I intended that all of the parables would be either read or told from the NRSV as a control measure. On the Sunday he presented the parable of The Good Samaritan, Tim used the NLT instead. It could be that the slightly more contemporary language contributed to making the story more relevant rather than

the storytelling having that affect, although the differences in the versions are minor, so it is difficult to say if this is the case. Otherwise I don't see any weaknesses in having had Tim participate in the project.

### **My Confirmation Class Discussion**

#### **Strengths**

I chose to include the confirmation students I teach in this project because, due to their age, they may not have had as much experience hearing the parables as the adults in either congregation have. I thought they might have a reaction that more closely matched that of the men in the recovery center mentioned in my introduction in Chapter One. Most of the students had, in fact, never heard the parable of The Unforgiving Servant before. In this setting I did not preach a sermon about the parable, which allowed us to discuss only what they heard in the parable itself, preventing the kind of confusion between the parable and the sermon discussed above. During the discussion students were surprised to find out that the parable read by the other class teacher was exactly the same the one told by me. Many of them thought that the one told was longer than the one read and had more detail in it. The general consensus was the students preferred the parable told as a story. They also enjoyed the practice of memorizing a passage and then re-telling it to their peers. They agreed that because they memorized and then re-told it they would be able to remember the story well enough to tell someone else in the future.

#### **Weaknesses**

Timing was probably the greatest weakness in this portion of the research project. Originally I had hoped that we would be able to spend two to three weeks in class talking

about biblical storytelling, giving the students the opportunity to hear at least one or two other parables to compare methods, and more time to practice storytelling themselves. There were a number of reasons we were not able to accomplish this. One was that the class schedule did not allow it. Classes are held on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. The first hour is dedicated to lessons and the last half hour is spent in a worship service. There were 41 students in the class, so all of the activities and discussions took longer than if the class was half the size and often the hour was simply not enough time to cover the material. What wasn't accomplished one week needed to be carried over into the next week thus cutting into that day's lesson plan. We fell behind quickly and couldn't get through the scheduled curriculum in as timely a manner as I had hoped. I lost precious time getting to the introductory lessons that would eventually move us into the parables and biblical storytelling. Classes began at the end of September. In October I accepted a new call and the last Wednesday in that month was the last confirmation class I taught. I needed to conduct the class on parables before I left so I was only able to do the class on parables once.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

I have already mentioned a number of things that could have been improved for this project, especially in regard to the surveys used. Among these suggestions are a more careful wording of some of the questions and allowing time immediately after the presentation of the parable in order to more clearly separate the parable from the sermon. There are other ways this research project could be improved.

In the churches where the parable was read it may have been helpful to have a layperson do the reading, rather than either my colleague or me. This could have allowed

for a clearer distinction between the text being read or told as a story, and might have given a more definitive result for the question that asked how the people liked the method of presentation for the parable. The danger is that not all laypeople read well and a poor reading could create a bias in favor of storytelling, but that problem could easily be remedied by the careful choice of reader and adequate preparation before reading the text in the worship service.

In this same vein it could be helpful to present the parables to an adult audience similar to the way the parable was presented to the confirmation students: read first by a layperson, followed by a discussion, then told as a story by the pastor followed by another discussion. This would not take place in worship, but more likely in an adult forum or bible study group. The benefit of this would be the same people hearing the reading and storytelling side by side, allowing for a better comparison. In this scenario the research would have to take place sometime between the fall and spring of the year to ensure the best chance for adequate participation since the summer months often see a drop in church attendance. The difficulty in doing this project in a smaller group setting would be getting enough people to attend in order to attain the amount of data needed to make a definitive judgment on the better method.

Since the main focus of this project is on the presentation of the parable, another option for improving it in the context of the worship service would be to forgo the sermon completely and present only the parable in one form or the other. This would avoid any confusion between the two and allow for responses that also focused only on the parable. This tactic might cause problems for some congregation members since the sermon is such an integral part of the worship service, but perhaps knowing that the

research and subsequent lack of a sermon would only be a temporary situation could ease some of that possible discontent.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have evaluated the research project's process and the tools used to answer the question "Is it possible to help our listeners hear these parables with new ears so the stories once again regain the power Jesus intended them to have, and if so, how?" I have discussed the surveys as well as the participation of my colleague and confirmation students in my research. I have also suggested ways to improve upon the project for future reference. In Chapter Seven I will give some final reflections on my experiences during this project, the lessons I have learned from it, and how it might be used for the benefit of pastors and the wider church.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### REFLECTIONS

#### **Lessons Learned**

As I reflect on my project and my desire to discover if biblical storytelling can recapture the original power of Jesus' parables for modern listeners I have learned some valuable lessons. Perhaps the most important lesson I learned is that biblical storytelling can be used to connect people with the parables in a new way. Comments on the surveys such as "It's easier to understand when it's told as a story, rather than straight out from the Bible," "Storytelling makes it a lot more personal," and "Telling a story is more engaging than reading a story" are just a few of dozens I received that have convinced me that storytelling is an important, even an essential tool for preachers. As the weeks of research progressed this became even more apparent as responses indicating the preference for storytelling became more common. Listeners expressed that hearing the parables told as a story helped them focus more and pay closer attention to the text. One comment was particularly telling: "I find I have to concentrate harder when [the text] is read than when it is told."

As preachers we want our listeners to hear God's word, believe in it, and know, without a doubt that God's message of love and forgiveness is for them. We want people to feel God's grace given to them through Jesus Christ, and to see themselves as a part of God's story of redemption. Two comments I received during my research indicated that biblical storytelling can do just that: "It was easier to become one or all of the

characters,” and “The way the parables are told rather than read remind me of my years in country school when our teacher would read a chapter or two from a book. I would be caught up in the story and become one of the characters.”

Was I successful in using biblical storytelling to elicit the same kind of visceral responses Jesus’ parables did for those who heard them for the first time—the same kind of response the men in the recovery center had when they first heard the story of The Prodigal Son? I would have to say no. At least, this research project did not indicate that was the case. It could be that this failure was due to faulty survey questions or because of a process that was poorly administered. Maybe someone else, in a different project, in a different setting and under a different set of circumstance can test the validity of this theory. Perhaps a better storyteller would have been able to evoke a stronger response from the stories, or perhaps it is impossible for those who have heard these parables before to feel the same sort of shock, surprise, and anger that many of Jesus’ original listeners felt. Even if this is the case however, biblical storytelling still has an important role to play in connecting scripture to our listeners’ lives, and giving them a fresh perspective on these stories that were so crucial to Jesus’ ministry on earth. As one listener described the difference between reading and storytelling: “presentation of being talked to vs. read. Change lives, change hearts.”

Through my research I found that for many the scripture text and the sermon are almost inextricably bound together. When asked about the parable, listeners couldn’t help but comment on the sermon, and even though, for the purposes of this project, this inability to separate the two caused some difficulty in getting the results I was hoping for, there were interesting findings in regard to storytelling and that deep connection between

the scripture text and the sermon. When the parable was *told*, there were twice as many people who indicated it affected how they listened to the sermon than those who said it did not. Listeners said they were more focused on the sermon, were eager to hear how the sermon would connect to the parable, and in general were more interested in and better able to listen to the sermon. This was not the case when the parable was read. Moreover, when the parable was *read*, a third as many people said the sermon changed their reaction to the parable than those who said it did not. Reasons given for this indicated that the sermon made the parable more clear and helped listeners connect it to their lives better. This was not the case when the parable was told. Could it be that storytelling is able to make the parable clear enough on its own without the help of the sermon? If that is the case, and I believe it is, these results have interesting implications for preachers.

### **Implications for the Wider Church**

Biblical storytelling is a helpful tool in capturing and retaining listeners' attention for the sermon. As preachers we spend countless hours preparing for that moment in the worship service when we stand in the pulpit and speak in such a way that the members of the congregation can connect the scripture to their daily lives. We read books, attend text studies, take classes, listen to other preachers, and struggle to find just the right words, just the right turn of phrase that will grab the listeners' attention and make an ancient text relevant to a modern world. How disheartening it is to look out and see nodding heads, eyes fighting to stay open, or people writing lists for the grocery shopping they will do when the service is over! We have all faced the difficulty of trying to make ourselves heard over the shuffling of bulletins as people scour the pages for announcements about upcoming events, or the restless movements of fans waiting for the service to finish so

they can watch the kick-off of the noon football game. Biblical storytelling can be the foot in the door we sometimes need in order for people to hear the Good News we have to share with them. When people become engaged with the story, they stay more engaged with the sermon.

Not only that, biblical storytelling can make us better preachers even if we don't use it as a way of presenting the scripture in worship. The practice of memorizing a text, speaking it aloud, deciding which words to emphasize, and how to emphasize them can open up nuances and new avenues in the scriptures we might not have discovered otherwise. A passage we have read hundreds of times, and preached on almost as many times can suddenly become fresh and exciting, and when the texts become exciting for us, we more easily convey that excitement to our congregation in our sermons. I have found this to be true in my own sermon preparation and my colleague Tim indicated the same thing happens for him in his sermon preparation. Learning the text, taking it into my body and mind, and living with it throughout the week becomes a spiritual practice that has deepened my engagement with scripture and helped make the intersection between text and the world more obvious.

### **Possibilities for Other Research**

As I think about possibilities for future research, a project that examines using biblical storytelling as a spiritual practice and the effect it has on writing a sermon is one possibility that immediately comes to mind. Enlisting a group of pastors who have not used this practice before, a researcher could ask the participants to journal their experiences, and contrast their normal sermon preparation with the use of biblical storytelling as a means of preaching preparation. What were their impressions? What did

they find most helpful? Did they see a marked difference in the sermons they wrote? Did they see a difference in congregational engagement and response to the sermons they wrote using this method? If someone has been preaching for a number of years it could be instructional to compare old sermons on a specific text to a new sermon written using the principles of biblical storytelling and notice if any new insights were gained.

Conducting a project similar to the one described in this paper, but with a different kind of audience is also a possibility, especially an audience of those who have no religious affiliation, no previous knowledge or familiarity with the Bible, or perhaps a group of what Tex Sample calls “hard living people.” Comparing their reactions to the parables with those who have even some familiarity with them might be a way to answer more definitively if it is possible to obtain from them a similar reaction to Jesus’ audience.

Another avenue might be using a method other than biblical storytelling to present the text, mediums such as videos, art, music, or dance, and compare that to hearing the text read in the usual way. The questions that could be asked would be which was more effective, if the age of the congregation members played a part in its efficacy, and which method had a more lasting impact over time. Or perhaps using a different genre for the research, telling some of the epistles rather than a parable would result in a different outcome. These are just a few of what could be many possibilities for future research.

### **Final Thoughts**

The reading and research that went into this project was just the beginning of my journey with biblical storytelling. I have found that it has deepened my appreciation and understanding of scripture. I plan to continue using the practices discussed here as a

spiritual practice in my own devotional life, in the preparation of sermons, and my presentation of scriptural texts in the future. I will continue to recommend it to other preachers for use in both their devotional lives and their pastoral work. It makes a difference. It makes scripture come alive, both for those doing the biblical storytelling and for those hearing it, and I am convinced it makes those old, old stories new again.

## APPENDIX A

### NEWS LETTER ARTICLE

As you know, for the past 2 years I have been working on my Doctorate of Ministry in Biblical Preaching. It has been a wonderfully enriching experience. I have been blessed by the professors who have taught my classes and the members of my cohort who are working through this program with me. I want to thank you for the support and time you have given me to pursue my studies, and your interest in my progress. I am on the home stretch. I am currently in the process of writing my thesis, and I need your help.

In the next several weeks Pastor Tim and I will be presenting and preaching on some of Jesus' parables. On those Sundays you will receive a brief questionnaire that I would like you to fill out and return that same morning. Your participation is strictly voluntary; if you receive a questionnaire but don't wish to fill it out, don't. It's as simple as that. I would like you to fill them out anonymously. The only kind of identification I am asking for is your age, your gender, whether or not you are a member, and if so, approximately how long you have been a member of the congregation. I also ask that you be completely honest in your responses; the validity of my research depends upon your truthful answers.

The advisors in my program tell me one of the most important things in writing a thesis is to get as much data as possible, so I am hoping that you will help me collect this data.

Thank you for your gracious consideration

May God's blessings be with you.

Pr. Kathy

## APPENDIX B

### CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

This survey is anonymous and completely voluntary. By completing and returning this survey you are agreeing to allow your responses to be used in this research project.

\*If you are under the age of 18 please do not fill out this survey unless and until one of your parents consents by signing  
here\_\_\_\_\_

Please complete both sides.

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Age: under 18 18-25 26-45 46-65 over 65

Circle One: Male Female

Circle One: Member Visitor

If a member, for approximately how long?\_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Parable\_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions honestly:

1. How familiar was this parable to you? (Circle One)

- 1) Very familiar: I have heard/read it many times before.
- 2) Somewhat familiar: I have heard/read it at least once before
- 3) Not familiar: I have never heard/read it before.

2. Was the parable: (Circle One)

- 1) Read from the pulpit?
- 2) Told as a story away from the pulpit?

3. Who read/told the parable? (Circle One)

- 1) Pr. Kathy
- 2) Pr. Tim

4. How interested were you when the parable was read/told? (Circle One)

- 1) Very interested: it kept my attention the whole time.

2) Somewhat interested: I listened to most of it, but my mind wandered at times.

3) Somewhat disinterested: my mind wandered most of the time but I listened to a few things.

4) Very disinterested: I didn't pay attention to any of it.

5. If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything new in it that you hadn't heard before? If so, what?

6. List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable.

7. What in the parable triggered that reaction?

8. Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?

(Circle one) Yes No If yes, please explain.

9. Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?

(Circle one) Yes No If yes, how?

10. What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable? How do you see it applying to you and your life?

11. What do you think about the way the parable was presented? (Circle One)

1) I liked it

2) I didn't like it

3) It was OK

12. Why?

13. Other comments.

Thank you for your participation in this project.

## APPENDIX C

### SERMONS

#### **Sermon #1 preached by Pr. Tim Ehling, 06-21-15**

A Parable from Luke 12: 16-21 (The Rich Fool)

How much is enough?

Let's make this clear...this parable is not about the evils of being rich. There is nothing wrong with having things. There is nothing wrong with having a lot of things. There is nothing wrong with being "well to do"...or having a nest egg to fall back on...or even wanting a lot in your savings account. My daughter Hannah reminded me that it's not always about the money...or the things...it's the way they make you feel. She feels safe...comfortable...at least a little if she has some cash on her. A few weeks ago though while visiting her boy friend in St. Peter...she discovered that even that is not a guarantee. It wasn't something she had planned for when she suddenly found herself where she least expected to be: dependent on others... her wallet was...how should we say it....misplaced for 3 weeks...only to have been found with no cash in it. Sometimes even the things we have set apart to help us feel safe and secure aren't enough. And we learn that maybe our trust is misplaced.

So how much is enough?

It seems the farmer in our parable today was not quite sure how to answer the question how much is enough. His land produced abundantly and right from the beginning we start to ask the obvious question. How did that come about? How did that happen? Well if you know anything about farming you know that it doesn't matter what YOU do...God is the one who always provides the growth. God makes the land produce abundantly. So this farmer was rich... had more than enough because of God's abundant grace upon him...he was blessed! If you think about it... so are you...whether you are a farmer or not. Whether your bank account has more money in it than ever before or it is close to zero. You are blessed because your God provides. Even when our culture and all the commercials on TV tell you that you need this or that or more of something you already have...right now...at this precise moment... you are blessed. And maybe that is the one thing that I often miss in this parable. God has blessed me. God has blessed you. We are blessed!

So ...if it is true we are blessed. How much is enough? What would it look like to have more than we already have? To be blessed even more? What would that look like for you? Would it make you feel safer or more secure? Would it give you what you are longing for in your life? For our rich farmer friend it simply meant focusing more on himself...nothing else really mattered in his life. Did you notice...he spoke to himself, thought to himself, reasoned with himself, made decisions by himself, I would imagine he relaxed, ate, drank, and made merry all by himself. I wonder...was it enough?

Perhaps our blessings are given to us...not to focus on ourselves...but to be a blessing for others. To think, question, dream, wonder, create, experience be involved in the lives of the people around us where we use our blessings to make their lives better. I wonder if that's a little of what it means to be rich toward God.

Ask the churches of Saron and Baxter, about their blessings right now and you won't hear anything about how much money they have stored away for a rainy day. You will hear the love and affection they have for their dear pastor and his beautiful little family as they prepare to leave for a new call to a church in Iowa. I was with them on Wednesday for their last worship together. It was wonderful and holy, it was filled not with I have's, I will's, I think, but with what I image being rich toward God really means. Tears of love, friendships bonded forever in the faith, blessings that will never fade away.

Ask the church in Charleston South Carolina about their blessings and I am pretty sure you won't hear anything about pulling down buildings to build larger ones to store their stuff. Or, relaxing, eating, drinking, or being merry because of all they have. They know how fragile life is and how it needs to be taken care of. You will hear about the 9 people from their church who died last week when someone was thinking only about himself...and had no regard for life and how precious it is. I wonder what their bible study was about that day. Surely it was about God and the people God loves so much. It is the stories of the lives of the people are what really matter. Our relationships with each other are really that important. And in those relationships we find what it means to be rich toward God. And we pray for those who are suffering as if we ourselves are suffering with them...as if it happened to our family...our church...our community.

And in all of that God provides what we most need...and it is enough!

## **Sermon # 2 Preached by Pr. Kathryn Skoglund, 06-26-15**

### **A Parable From Luke 18:1-8 (The Widow and the Unjust Judge)**

A couple of weeks ago, when I was at Seminary for classes, I was talking with my friend Rod, one of my classmates, and he was asking me about the elective class I was taking, since he was in the other class with a different professor. My class was Feminist Perspectives on Preaching, and I was telling him about all the things we had been learning, especially when it comes to the kind of language we use. Words are so important. You may not realize it, but even the simplest words can re-shape our reality and make all the difference for us.

Rod is the pastor of an Assemblies of God church in the Twin Cities and he would be the first to tell you that theologically, his is a pretty conservative church. But, he said, since he started this program and as a result of what he has been experiencing here he is trying some new things with his congregation. Last year and this year he taught a couple of classes, one on preaching and one on theology, and there has been a young, college aged woman who has been attending these classes regularly. And when he teaches Rod has been trying to be more inclusive in his language. For instance, if he is talking in his class about the role of pastor he will switch up his pronouns. Sometimes he'll refer to the pastor as "he," and other times he'll say "she." Even though he has been using this kind of language he really didn't think too much about it until one day, this young woman came up to him and said, "Pastor Rod, I just want to say thank you for all the times you refer to the pastor as she. It means a lot. In fact, it's one of the things that has intrigued me about this church because it makes me feel so welcome."

Words are so important, and even the simplest words can re-shape our reality and make all the difference for us. Jesus uses some important words in today's parable. And you might not think they make a difference, but oh, do they!

Take for instance, the word "widow." That's a significant word. When telling this story, Jesus could have used a different word to describe this character. He could have said his character was an old man, or a young boy. He could have simply called this person a woman. "In that city there was a woman who kept coming continually to the judge to bring her complaint." It wouldn't have changed the story that much. The plot wouldn't have really changed. The point still would have been the same.

But instead of woman he uses the word widow and now we have a completely different take on this story. Now, although this isn't necessarily the situation in our day, in Jesus' day a widow was an exceptionally vulnerable person. If she was fortunate enough to have a male relative such as a father, or an uncle, a brother, or a son to take her in after her husband died it wasn't such a problem. But since there was no one accompanying this widow on her visits to the judge we can assume this wasn't the case for her.

This widow was all alone, with no one to support her, no one to protect her, no one to make sure that she was honored and respected as a human being. This widow had no one to watch over her to make sure she wasn't taken advantage of. Throughout the scriptures God reminds the Israelites, again and again how important it is for them to give special consideration to the orphans and the widows, to watch over them as carefully and

lovingly as God would. Because of their precarious circumstances, in the Bible, widows hold a special place in God's heart.

Widow; a simple word but one packed with history and meaning. With the broad stroke of just this one word to describe this woman, Jesus paints the man in this story as far more arrogant, and his indifference to her as far more callous than as if he had used a thousand adjectives to describe the judge. We don't even need to have the word "unjust" as part of his title. We already know the quality of his character by the way he treats this one widow. Jesus used this word very deliberately because words are important. They make a difference.

Justice is another significant word in this story. When the widow comes to the judge to plead her case, right away you know she is not asking for help in settling some minor disagreement. She isn't talking about some nuisance like a barking dog or a loud pool party next door. No, this is an issue that matters. This is an issue that has some weight to it, the scales of justice are stacked against her, and she has nowhere else to turn.

Now I know, justice can be a tricky matter. We all have our own ideas of what it means, and what it looks like. Some will say justice is simple: if you don't work you don't eat; we all need to pull our own weight, that's all there is to it. Others will say justice is merely a matter of what's fair: equal pay for equal work, that's only right. And still others will say justice is God's judgment; an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The death penalty for people like the Boston marathon bomber is the only way justice will be served for his victims and their families. Justice means different things to different people.

We don't know why the widow is coming to the judge. We don't know what justice looks like for this woman. But we do know what it looks like for Luke in his gospel. Justice looks like the powerful being brought down to their knees and the lowly being lifted up high. It looks like the hungry being filled with all good things and the rich being sent away empty. For Luke justice looks a long awaited savior rescuing God's people from the hands of their enemies. It looks like good news being brought to the poor, release being proclaimed to the captives, sight being given to the blind and the oppressed being at last set free.

Not only is that what justice looks like to Luke, it's what justice looks like to God. Bringing about this kind of justice is why Jesus came to earth to live among us. This is what Mary sings about after the angel Gabriel comes to tell her God has chosen her to be the mother of the redeemer of the world. This is what Zechariah prophesies about after his son John was born. This is what Jesus himself proclaims at the very beginning of his ministry. And when Jesus says, at the end of this parable, that God will grant justice to God's chosen ones, this is the kind of justice God means. Justice is one of those important words that makes a difference in the world.

As we heard earlier in Bishop Eaton's message, for far too long our black sisters and brothers have experienced injustice from the sin of racism in our land and it is time for it to end. We cannot be like the judge in today's parable and ignore the voices of those who cry out to God day and night. We have to stand up and speak out against this systemic racism that infects our society. Because there is another important word that we need to remember today. Can you guess what it is? It is the word Christian. It's the word that describes who we are called to be and what we are called to do: follow Christ and fill the world with his love, bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and

finally let the oppressed go free. If we really are who we claim to be, then the word Christian will re-shape our reality and make all the difference in the world. Amen

### Sermon #3 Preached by Pr. Kathryn Skoglund, 07-26-15

A Parable From Luke 18:9 -14 (The Pharisee and the Tax Collector)

I hate to admit it but from time to time we have had a problem with mice at our house and have had to make use of these little mouse traps. And I've learned that you have to be really careful with these things. They look innocent enough when they are in the package. You take them out and like this a child can play with them. But the minute you set them, watch out. Because they are deadly. The slightest movement and SNAP!

It's like today's parable. It seems innocent enough. Easy to understand, the moral is perfectly clear. Don't be like the Pharisee. Don't exalt yourself, you'll be brought down. Be like the tax collector. Humble, well aware of your faults and your failings, because then you'll be lifted up. Jesus even says that's what this parable is about. But be careful. Because it's a trap and one that we can all too easily be caught in, before we even know it.

But let's break this parable down a little bit to see if we can maneuver our way safely through it without getting caught in the trap. First of all, we have the Pharisee. He goes up to pray. Stands in the front row, looks up to heaven and says "Thank you God for the life you have given to me. I thank you that you have blessed me with enough that I don't have to be a thief in order to feed my family. I thank you that I have not been led into temptation, that I have been able to stay true to my marriage vows. I thank you that I am smart enough and privileged enough that I can do your work in the church and don't have to make a living by going against my principles, working for a government I despise and cheating people out of their hard earned money like this tax collector here. So I thank you. And to show my thanks, I willingly follow your all your commandments. I skip dinner 2 times every week and I put a check in the offering plate for a 10<sup>th</sup> of my income. Thank you God that I have the life I do, and I am able to be who you made me to be."

Now, according to Jesus the way the Pharisee is praying is not the way we are supposed to. But when you look at it like, when you update the language just a bit, is there really anything wrong with his prayer? After all, the Pharisee is just telling the truth. He does do good things, and he is grateful that God has blessed him, so shouldn't he give thanks for the good things in his life? Shouldn't we give thanks to God for the blessings in our lives? Shouldn't we try to do everything we can to please God and live the way God wants us to live? And let's be honest: haven't you ever looked at someone else, especially someone whose life is filled with trouble and misery, and haven't you ever said, thank God my life is the way it is? There but for the grace of God go I. I have. There are lots of people I wouldn't ever want to change places with. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with what the Pharisee says. In fact it is really similar to a common prayer rabbis of that day would often pray when they left the house of study, and that was considered a fine prayer. So if there isn't anything wrong with this prayer, then why did Jesus criticize the Pharisee and say he wasn't justified when he left the synagogue?

Well the clue to all of this is in the very first line of the scripture text I read: Jesus told the parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. The problem is, the Pharisee wasn't really focusing on God in his prayer. He was focusing on himself and how good he was, what a clean life he was leading, and how obedient he was in doing what God wanted. He was setting himself up

as the gold standard and looking down on everyone else who wasn't as good as he was. His prayer was all about him, and not really about God at all.

That's an important thing to remember. We can be thankful for the blessings God gives us. But the problem comes when we look at our lives and our blessings and start to think, well, it's because of all my hard work that I'm able to live like this. Those people who are poor, or homeless, or jobless, only have themselves to blame. If they would only work as hard as I do they'd be able to have all the good things in life too. If they would make the right choices like I do, would follow all the rules like I do, if they would hang around the right people like I do, their lives wouldn't be such a mess. We start to pat ourselves on the back for our determination and right living and then suddenly: SNAP! We've been caught. We are trusting in ourselves that we are righteous, and we are regarding others with contempt. We are exactly like the Pharisee we said we weren't supposed to be like. That's the problem with the way the Pharisee was praying.

So obviously then, Jesus is telling us we should be more like the tax collector. He knew exactly what kind of a person he was. He was all too aware of his sinfulness. He knew he didn't deserve to be there in the temple with all the good people. He knew he was so bad he didn't deserve God's love and forgiveness. In other words, he was exceedingly humble and that's exactly how we should be right? Well, not necessarily, because if we aren't careful that can lead us into another trap.

I remember one of the biggest shocks I got when I was working at Project Turnabout. When an addict gets treatment at Turnabout, either in-patient or out-patient treatment a big part of their recovery involves working through the twelve steps of AA. If they are an in-patient their goal is to work through steps 1-5 before they leave. If you're not familiar with those steps, the first one is "We admitted we were powerless over drugs and alcohol; that our lives had become unmanageable." Step 2 is "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity." Step 3 is "Made the decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him."

Then, in step 4 the person makes a searching and fearless moral inventory of themselves, looking at all the things they have done wrong, all their selfish behaviors and how they have hurt others and themselves. In order for this to work they have to be brutally honest with themselves, and write down everything they can think of. Then step 5 is where they admit to God, themselves and one other person the exact nature of their wrongs. And that's when they would come to me and tell me everything they had written in their fourth step. It's like their own, personal confession.

What would often happen to people during the work on their fourth step is that as they looked honestly at their life they'd be filled with such guilt over what they'd done that they'd sabotage their treatment. They'd think they were so horrible they didn't deserve a better life. They didn't deserve to go back to their families. They were absolutely sure that what they'd done was completely unforgiveable. And being the kind, compassionate chaplain, I would try to sympathize and reassure them of God's love and forgiveness, yadda, yadda yadda.

Then one day, during a therapy session Bruce, one of the long-time counselors, and a recovering alcoholic himself was listening to a patient go on and on about how awful he was. Bruce finally got tired of it and said, without any sympathy whatsoever, "Well, isn't this just the height of grandiosity!" And the patient looked as surprised as if Bruce had just slapped him in the face. He got very offended and said, "no it's not! I'm

being honest and humble!” But Bruce would have none of it. He replied, “Right, you are the worst sinner in the world, worse than anybody else has ever been. You are such a terrible person that not even God can forgive you. That’s not humility, that’s just plain arrogance.” And SNAP he was absolutely right. Because that’s the other trap we can get into. We can strive to be so humble and so aware of our sinfulness that once again all our focus is on ourselves, not on how great God’s love for us is, not on how God can and will forgive us, but on how bad we are, the worst sinner in the world. And Bruce was right, that’s not being humble that’s being as arrogant as the Pharisee in the parable.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less. Let me say that again in case you missed it. Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less. Whether we are thanking God for our blessings or asking for God’s mercy because of our sinfulness our focus should always be on God, and not on ourselves. Our trust should be in God and not in ourselves. Our thoughts shouldn’t be all about ourselves. They should be on God and the needs of our neighbors, God’s children every one of them. Our greatest concerns should be about God and what we can do for the sake of the world God created.

Today’s text is a tricky one, and we have to be very careful with this parable; this simple, easy to understand parable that Jesus tells today. We have to be very careful in deciding which way we will move because if we aren’t we could get caught in one or the other of these traps and trust me, you don’t want to be in either of them. Both of these traps are deadly. If I were to give you one thing to take away from today’s parable it would be this: focus always on the one who gives life, love and forgiveness to saint and sinner alike. Focus always on God and you’ll find your way through, just fine.

## **Sermon #4 Preached by Pr. Kathryn Skoglund, 08-02-15**

A Parable From Luke 16:19-31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus)

It was pretty embarrassing. A couple of weeks ago, some friends of ours called and asked me and John if we wanted to meet them down at Toppers restaurant in Montevideo. We pulled up at the restaurant just seconds after they did, but we stopped in the parking lot to visit with someone, and our friends, not realizing we were there went straight in-presumably to get a table for us. John and I chatted a bit and then went in a different door to meet them. As we walked in I saw our friends talking to someone so I started to make my way toward them when I heard someone saying something. It didn't really register and I didn't pay much attention to it but then, more insistently, I heard "Pastor Kathy!" And I turned around, and realized I had been standing right next to a table full of Maynard people. And I mean standing right there, almost touching them. I couldn't have been much closer if I'd been sitting in their laps, and I didn't even see them. And it wasn't just one or two people at the table, it was a whole crew-Winters, Asts, Bloomquists. I felt really stupid.

Part of the reason I don't see people in situations like that is because of my personality. You may not know it, but I'm really an introvert. If you don't believe me, just think: Pr. Tim, and me. Okay, you got it. I can make myself be more extroverted when I have to, but deep down I'm an introvert. So, when I am looking for something or going somewhere I only focus on that one thing. If I'm in a restaurant I'm looking for a table, or the people I'm going to meet, or following the person taking me to my seat, and that's all I'm looking at. It's like I'm wearing blinders and can't see anything else. Everyone and everything else around me is invisible. That's one of the traits of introverted people.

The other reason I might not see you, and it's connected to the first, is that when I'm in a public place with lots of people, like a restaurant, or a basketball game, I don't look around to see who all is there because it seems kind of rude to me. I feel like I'm intruding if I'm staring at everyone. So instead, once more I just focus on where I'm going and pass right by people without even noticing them. Consequently I seem even more rude than if I did take time to look at everyone carefully. I'm working on it, and getting better but still have a long way to go. So, if I walk by you without saying anything, I'm not being snobby. I'm just clueless. Sorry to say, but sometimes you are just invisible to me.

In today's parable Lazarus is invisible to the rich man, or at least as good as invisible to him. He's not completely invisible because the rich man knows who he is. He knows Lazarus' name. He knows he is there at his gate every day. He just doesn't pay any attention to him. It's as if Lazarus has become just part of gate itself he has been there so long. I can just see the rich man, as he walks out his door; he looks straight ahead not giving Lazarus a second glance. Maybe he even steps over him, careful not to trip, but doesn't say a thing to him. Perhaps Lazarus calls out for help: "have mercy on me" but he doesn't listen, doesn't stop, doesn't even slow down enough to give him a few coins or a piece of bread. And so every day Lazarus lays there, with sores oozing, and stomach growling until he dies and is carried away to Abraham where he finally receives rest and comfort.

It isn't until the rich man dies that he finally notices Lazarus, but it's really only because of who is standing next to him. He looks up from Hell and sees Lazarus, right next to Abraham, happy as can be. But still, still he doesn't see Lazarus as a fellow human being. He sees him as a servant. Someone who can be used to fulfill his needs and make his life more comfortable. "Father Abraham, send Lazarus down to take care of me. Have him give me something cool to drink, because I am really hot and thirsty down here." Pretty ironic, isn't it.

Abraham tells him he's not sending Lazarus anywhere: that Lazarus is staying put, finally getting the good things that the rich man enjoyed all through his life. But the rich man doesn't seem to get it. Abraham's words don't cause him to repent of his attitude. He isn't sorry for how he mistreated the poor man. He seems to accept this explanation for his punishment, but it doesn't change anything. He still thinks of Lazarus as someone to be ordered about. "Then, Father Abraham send him to my brothers so they won't end up here too."

Oh, certainly the rich man isn't all bad. He isn't completely hard hearted. He does care about someone other than himself, he does have some compassion, but only for his family, only for those just like him. Lazarus though, is still too far beneath him to take seriously. Lazarus is still a non-entity. Lazarus is still invisible.

It is easy, hearing this story to judge the rich man isn't it. It's easy to demonize him and say, well I'd never be like that, but I think there are people all over who are invisible to us to, or at least we make them invisible to us. Take for instance, homeless people. When was the last time you were in a big city, Minneapolis, St Paul, or somewhere else, and saw someone sitting by a building, possessions gathered all around them, asking for money? Did you look them in the eye? Did you give them anything? Or did you just walk by as if they weren't even there.

Last year an experiment was done to see if the homeless have become invisible. Five people were interviewed, and asked to talk about their family members and how important they were in their lives. Veronica talked about her sister who took care of her when she was little. Shaunya talked about how close she was to her uncle. Tom described meeting his wife of 34 years. Evan recalled dressing up in costume with his cousin and the fun they had, and Allison said she and her brother have always been a team. Then they arranged for these people to walk down the street, individually and were filmed as they walked right past these same relatives dressed as homeless people, to see if they would recognize them.

Veronika walked right past her sister. Shaunya didn't even look at her uncle, aunt and mother as they sat there on the sidewalk, and Alison did the same for her brother and uncle. Tom and Evan both slowed down and glanced, Tom at his wife and Evan at his cousin, who he had just seen a couple of weeks before, but both of them moved on without a second look. When each of these individuals was shown the video taken of them as they failed to recognize their loved ones they were in disbelief and deeply saddened by what they saw. The people they walked by, their own family members were invisible to them.

An experiment like this reminds us that there are all sorts of people who are invisible to us: people we genuinely can't see because they are not around us, and people who are around us but we simply refuse to see them like the rich man refused to see

Lazarus in today's parable. It's pretty awful when you think about it. But Jesus didn't tell this parable just to make us feel guilty. Jesus told this parable to teach us about God.

Jesus told this parable to remind us that the Lazarus' of the world are not invisible to God. No one is invisible to God. God sees them all, knows them all, and loves them all without reservation. Because they are not invisible to God, they can't be invisible to us either. Jesus told this parable as a reminder to us to look around, and see who is there. Take a good long look and see who is in need. Jesus tells this parable to remind us, to look with his eyes, and act with his heart, so that no one is ever invisible again.

## Sermon #5 Preached by Pr. Tim Ehling, 08-09-15

A Parable From Luke 10:30-37 (The Good Samaritan)

Sometimes we ask questions not because we don't know the answers, but because we do know the answers and we don't like the answers so we keep asking questions. The questions keep the answers we don't like at a distance from us...maybe deep down we are hoping the answer will change so we don't have to deal with them. I think that is what is happening in this parable. See if you agree.

In the parable Jesus tells there are a lot of questions:

Before the reading for today:

Lawyer asks Jesus what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What is written in the Law?

What do you read there?

And who is my neighbor?

Then Jesus tells this story... a story you know all too well. A man is traveling on a dangerous road... Two people come by who don't help him. Then one comes by who does. My question for you is this: What would prevent you from stopping to help someone else? (Take Time for conversation)

(My story) Driving along...see another car alongside the road hood up...drive right by...why?

David Lose in his commentary on this parable entitled "Who Is My Neighbor?" raises some thought provoking questions that help grow the neighborhoods we live in. The rest of the sermon reflects many of his thoughts on this parable that I simply love and couldn't find a better way of saying it for this Sunday. May it challenge you as it did me.

Does God not expect us not only to *care* for our neighbor...lives next door...**but to see as neighbor anyone who is in need?** Would you all agree with that? So who would that be for you? In many ways, that's the issue at hand here: the priest and Levite don't see the man in the ditch as a neighbor, but as a burden, as something that will delay them from accomplishing whatever task or duty has put them on this road in the first place. The Samaritan, however, wherever he may be going or whatever time pressures he may feel, sees this man in need as a person, as a child of God, as someone who inherently deserves his time and attention.

So whom do you see as neighbor...who do you overlook? Perhaps that is the real question we tend to avoid...not want to deal with. Like the priest and Levite, we tend to overlook and avoid those who are **different from us...don't we?** Why is that?

But don't you think it true God calls us to be more? God created all people in the image of God the scripture tells us. Not only that, but Christ died for all people...right. Both God's act of creation and God's act of redemption signal that at the heart of the Christian faith is the belief that *all* people have inherent worth and dignity.

But maybe there is even something more we are avoiding with all the questions. One part of this story that I keep thinking about... is the part, right at the end, where it seems like Jesus changes the focus of the conversation he's been having with this lawyer.

Notice that the lawyer asks, **"Who is my neighbor?"** That is, who counts, whom am I responsible for, who falls into the fold of God's command to care for my neighbor. And Jesus tells the infamous Good Samaritan story right...

But then Jesus goes and does something different, right at the end. He doesn't ask the lawyer who was the Samaritan's neighbor; rather, he asks, **who acted like a neighbor**. The answer, of course, is the Samaritan, the one who went out of his way to help another. But do you notice how this changes things? Suddenly the neighbor isn't simply the one in need, but rather the one who **provides for our need**, the one who takes care of us, the one who helps us out when we need help.

Which makes me wonder: who has been your neighbor by caring for YOU lately? I don't know about you but I am really bad at this... "I can do it myself" is my motto. Just ask anyone who has gone on a trip with me they will tell...he does it all. Perhaps it's my fear of not being good enough, appearing to be weak and unable to care for myself. Why is it that so many of us struggle showing our deepest needs to others?

What seems pretty clear and even humbling is that according to Jesus, being neighbor involves not only giving help, but also being willing to receive it. So perhaps the call this week isn't only to invite us to imagine those we should be helping, but those who might help us. Think about it...better yet...try living it this week. See if you can make this parable come alive in you by letting someone else help you. Don't ask any questions that may sidetrack you. Just let someone help you...and as you do....perhaps you will notice that Jesus won't be too far away.

## Sermon # 6 Preached by Pr. Kathryn Skoglund, 08-23-15

### A Parable From Luke 15:11-22 (The Prodigal Son)

This is the one. This is the parable that started it all for me. This is the one that got me thinking about Jesus' parables and how we hear them. This is the one that helped me choose my thesis topic and why you have been filling out all of these surveys this summer.

Of course you know about my work at Project Turnabout. I've talked about it many times before in sermons. Well, one of the things I did there, once a week, was to hold a service of healing and forgiveness for one of the four units in the facility. It was strictly voluntary. Anyone from that particular unit could come that wanted to. The service was a simple one consisting of a little music, some prayers, a scripture text and then time for me to pray individually with the clients if they wanted to.

On this particular Friday, the group that was attending was from the men's extended unit. These are the guys who are really in tough shape. They've been through multiple treatments, have been in and out of jail. They were the hard core addicts. For the service I decided to use this parable as the text. But I didn't want to read it out of the Bible like I usually did. I just wanted to tell the story, as close to the text as I could. I began: There was a father who had two sons...

When I was finished I asked if anyone had ever heard this story before. I expected that it would have been familiar to at least a couple of them. But I was shocked when not one of the eight to ten men there had. So I explained to them that it was a story Jesus told in the Bible. It was a story about God's love and how God is always ready and willing to welcome us home again, no matter what we've done or how long we've been gone. And then I told them that this wasn't just *a* story: it was *their* story and that's how God felt about them.

And then I noticed that this one scary looking, tattooed man had tears running down his cheeks. And he said to me in this awed whisper "That's a great story." It is a great story! Unfortunately I don't think it ever hits us like it did for that one man, maybe that whole group of men at Project Turnabout that day.

I don't know why that is. Maybe it's because we've heard it so many times we are just bored with it. When we hear the beginning couple of lines, know what's coming next so we start thinking of something else. Maybe that's the way it is with a lot of Jesus' parables. We just know them too well and they get to be no big deal for us.

Or maybe there are parts of them that we just don't understand and so they don't seem that radical to us. A couple of weeks ago Pr. Tim told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Many of the surveys I got back mentioned that they didn't realize there was such hatred between the Jews and Samaritans, they hadn't known why it was so incredible that the Samaritan would be the only one to help the man who had been attacked. We don't really get it so the story doesn't necessarily make that much difference to us.

But the thing is, Jesus told a lot of parables. In his gospel Matthew says Jesus didn't say anything *except* through parables, and he told them for a reason. It wasn't that he just liked to tell stories. Jesus was teaching his listeners something important with these stories and teaching them in a way that made it easier for them to hear what he had

to say. Jesus was teaching them something important about God, about God's love, and about the way the kingdom of heaven works. That's what makes each and every one of these stories so great, because these made up stories tell us the truth about God. And if we listen carefully to them we will be able to find ourselves in each and every one of these parables.

Take today's story for instance. The men at Project Turnabout could easily see themselves in this story. They found themselves in the younger son: this one who left behind his family, his home, everything that kept him connected to his roots. He left it all behind in order to go off and do exactly what he wanted, not thinking about the consequences, not caring who he hurt. He just wanted to go and be his own person, do his own thing, and the results were disastrous, just like their lives had become. This story hit these men hard.

I think there are quite a lot of people who can see themselves in the younger brother in this story. There are many people, many of us, who have made choices that have been hurtful, and damaging to ourselves and others, many of us who just did what we wanted without really considering the consequences, and who now feel like there is no going back. We have messed up so badly we can't possibly make things right. God has given up on us and we aren't even worthy to be called one of God's children anymore.

But this story tells us it isn't true. God reaches out to us, embraces us, and says to us Son, Daughter, I am so glad you are here with me. Let's celebrate because you are my beloved child and you are back where you belong. You were dead and are now alive-you were lost and are now found. For those of us who see ourselves as the younger son then this is not just *a* story. It is *our* story. And it is a great one for us.

But many of us don't connect with the younger son in the parable at all. Many of us see ourselves better through the eyes of the older son. We are good people. We've tried all our lives to follow all the rules, to do what we are supposed to do, to do what God wants us to do. We've worked really hard at it. We want special consideration for the good things we have done. We want some kind of recognition from God. We want what's coming to us: a special place at the table, 1<sup>st</sup> class accommodations, a room with a view when we get to heaven. That seems only right when we've been the "good kid" for so long.

It just isn't fair that we get treated the same as all those other people who have done nothing but followed their own selfish desires their whole life, who break God's laws, flaunt it in our faces, and then expect that they can waltz back in to God's good graces without any consequences, without any punishment what-so-ever. It isn't right, it isn't fair, and we just won't stand for it. We who are the older brother understand his righteous indignation and this parable just irks us to no end. We have a lot of sympathy for the older brother-we understand him completely.

So then what happens? Does God tell us "too bad" and then cut us off, give us the boot because we're being jerks about it all? No, look at what God does and listen to what God says to us. Daughter, Son, you are already here, with me. Everything I have belongs to you. I'm not taking anything away from you. I see what you've done, and I love you for it and you are already welcome in my home. You are already experiencing the blessings I have to give.

But this younger one, this one who has gone astray, this one has my love too. This one isn't just my child, this younger one is your brother, your sister, you all belong to me, I love you all and I want you all at the table together.

We who have been the obedient, responsible children may want to separate ourselves from the wayward, selfish, less deserving ones, but God will have none of it. God pleads with us to open our hearts and come in and join the celebration. For those of us who are the older brother this is not just *a* story, it is *our* story, and it is a great one.

Jesus told this parable, and all of his parables because he wanted his listeners to learn important lessons about God, God's love and how the kingdom of heaven works. My hope, my prayer through this summer series we've done on Jesus' parables, is that as we hear them, that as we learn about them, we connect with them differently than we have before, that we find ourselves somewhere in them and that our lives are changed by them. These stories of Jesus' aren't just stories. They are our stories, and they are all great ones.

## APPENDIX D

### PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**Description:** Your child is being invited to participate in a research study on Jesus' parables. During confirmation class, after hearing some of Jesus' parables either told as a story or read from the Bible your child will be asked, as part of the group discussion to respond to questions such as: Have you heard this parable before? Which did you prefer, hearing the parable told as a story or read? Why did you prefer that method? Which method kept your interest more and why? What do you think Jesus wanted to say with this parable? List two words that describe your reaction to the parable. The purpose of this study is to determine which method best helps people hear and understand Jesus' parables. As part of the group your child's responses will be audio taped for the purposes of transcribing the responses as written data in the research paper. After transcription the tapes will be immediately erased. None of the students will be identified in their responses and no personal information will be given to anyone as a part of this research.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no foreseeable risks or benefits involved in being part of this research study. Your child will not receive compensation for his/her participation in this study. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your child's participation in class.

**Time Involvement:** The discussions for this study will take place in the month of October, 2015 during the confirmation class times of 6:30-8:00 pm on Wednesday nights.

**Subject's Rights:** If you have read this form and have decided to allow your child to participate in this project, please understand your child's participation is voluntary and your child has the right to withdraw his/her consent or discontinue participation at any time. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any of the questions asked. Your child's individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from this study.

**Indicate Yes or No:**

I give consent for my child to be audiotaped during this study:

\_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

I give consent for tapes resulting from this study to be used for transcription and publication as written data:

\_\_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_\_No

---

Signature(s) of Parent(s) or Guardian

Date

---

Signature of Student

Date

## APPENDIX E

GENERAL AND PARABLE SPECIFIC STATISTICAL COMPARISON OF  
CONGREGATIONS**Total number of responses: 297****What is your age?**

Answered: 283 Skipped: 14

|          |     |     |
|----------|-----|-----|
| Under 18 | 6   | 2%  |
| 18-25    | 5   | 2%  |
| 26-45    | 33  | 12% |
| 46-65    | 139 | 49% |
| Over 65  | 100 | 35% |

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 277 Skipped: 20

|        |     |     |
|--------|-----|-----|
| Female | 192 | 69% |
| Male   | 85  | 31% |

**Are you a member or a visitor?**

Answered: 280 Skipped: 17

|         |     |     |
|---------|-----|-----|
| Member  | 267 | 95% |
| Visitor | 13  | 5%  |

**For how long?**

Answered: 248 Skipped: 49

|             |    |     |
|-------------|----|-----|
| < 10 years  | 54 | 22% |
| 10-25 years | 85 | 34% |
| 26-50 years | 83 | 33% |
| > 50 years  | 26 | 11% |

**How familiar was this parable?**

Answered: 291 Skipped: 6

|                   |     |     |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Very familiar     | 161 | 55% |
| Somewhat familiar | 88  | 30% |
| Not familiar      | 42  | 15% |

**How interested were you when the parable was read/told**

Answered: 297

|                        |     |     |
|------------------------|-----|-----|
| Very interested        | 208 | 70% |
| Somewhat interested    | 78  | 26% |
| Somewhat disinterested | 10  | 3%  |

Very disinterested 1 1%

**If this parable was familiar did you hear anything new?**

Answered: 169 Skipped or answered no: 72

Yes 169 Added comments 113

**List two words that describe your immediate reaction.**

Answered: 260 Skipped: 37

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Answered: 221 Skipped: 76

**Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Answered: 146 Skipped or answered no: 151

Yes 146 Added comments 141

**Did the way the parable was presented affect your experience of the sermon?**

Answered: 162 Skipped or answered no: 135

Yes 162 Added comments 141

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Answered: 253 Skipped: 44

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented? \***

Answered: 232 Skipped: 65

I liked it: 217 93%

I didn't like it 6 3%

It was OK 9 4%

Added comments 189

**Congregation**

Answered: 291 Skipped: 6

Trinity 175 60%

Maynard 116 40%

\* Numbers reflect that this question was not answered for the first parable (See chapter 5, pg. 63.)

## The Rich Fool

**Trinity** (read by Pr. Tim)

**Total Responses: 27**

**What is your age?**

Answered: 26 Skipped: 1

Under 18 2 8%

18-25 1 4%

26-45 1 4%

46-65 11 42%

Over 65 11 42%

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 2

Female 17 60%

Male 8 32%

**Member/Visitor?**

**Maynard** (told)

**21**

Answered: 21 Skipped: 0

0

0

2 9%

10 48%

9 43%

Answered: 19 Skipped: 2

14 74%

5 26%

Answered: 25 Skipped: 2  
 Member 24 96%  
 Visitor 1 4%

### **For how long?**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 2  
 < 10 years 4 18%  
 10-25 years 8 36.5%  
 26-50 years 8 36.5%  
 > 50 years 2 9%

### **How familiar was this parable to you?**

Answered: 26 Skipped: 1  
 Very familiar 14 54%  
 Somewhat familiar 10 38%  
 Not familiar 2 8%

### **How interested were you**

Answered: 27 Skipped: 0  
 Very interested 15 55%  
 Somewhat interested 11 41%  
 Somewhat disinterested 1 4%  
 Very disinterested 0

### **Did you hear anything new?**

Answered: 11 Skipped: 16  
 Answers referencing the parable 6 55%  
 Answers referencing the sermon 4 36%  
 Answers that were unclear 1 9%

### **Two words describing your reaction to the parable**

Answered: 23 Skipped: 4  
 Answers referencing the parable 8 35%  
 Answers referencing the sermon 14 61%  
 Answers that were unclear 1 4%

### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Answered: 17 Skipped: 10  
 Answers referencing the parable 8 47%  
 Answers referencing the sermon 5 29%  
 Answers that were unclear 4 24%

### **Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 2  
 Yes 9 36%  
 No 16 64%  
 Added comments 9

### **Did the method affect your experience of the sermon?**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 2  
 Yes 15 60%  
 No 10 40%  
 Added comments 11

### **What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?**

Answered: 21 Skipped: 0  
 18 86%  
 3 14

Answered: 17 Skipped: 4  
 2 12%  
 5 29%  
 8 47%  
 2 12%

Answered: 18 Skipped: 3  
 10 55%  
 5 28%  
 3 17%

Answered: 21 Skipped: 0  
 18 86%  
 3 14%  
 0  
 0

Answered: 3 Skipped: 18  
 1 33%  
 2 67%  
 0

Answered: 16 Skipped: 5  
 5 31%  
 9 56%  
 2 13%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 5  
 8 50%  
 8 50%  
 0

Answered: 19 Skipped: 2  
 5 26%  
 14 74%  
 4

Answered: 19 Skipped: 2  
 14 74%  
 5 26%  
 12

Answered: 23 Skipped: 4

**What did you think of the way the parable was presented?**

No data

Answered: 18 Skipped: 3

no data

**Other comments**

Answered: 3

### The Widow and the Unjust Judge

**Trinity** (Told by Pr. Kathryn)

**Total Responses: 35**

**What is your age?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 3

|          |    |     |
|----------|----|-----|
| Under 18 | 0  |     |
| 18-25    | 1  | 3%  |
| 26-45    | 3  | 9%  |
| 46-65    | 16 | 50% |
| over 65  | 12 | 38% |

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 35

|        |    |     |
|--------|----|-----|
| Female | 22 | 63% |
| Male   | 13 | 37% |

**Are you a member?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 3

|         |    |     |
|---------|----|-----|
| Member  | 31 | 97% |
| Visitor | 1  | 3%  |

**For how long?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 4

|             |    |       |
|-------------|----|-------|
| < 10 years  | 6  | 19.5% |
| 10-25 years | 13 | 42%   |
| 26-50 years | 10 | 32%   |
| > 50 years  | 2  | 6.5%  |

**How familiar was this parable to you?**

Answered: 33 Skipped: 2

|                   |    |     |
|-------------------|----|-----|
| Very Familiar     | 2  | 6%  |
| Somewhat Familiar | 14 | 40% |
| Not Familiar      | 18 | 54% |

**How interested were you?**

Answered: 35 Skipped: 0

|                        |    |     |
|------------------------|----|-----|
| Very Interested        | 18 | 51% |
| Somewhat interested    | 14 | 40% |
| Somewhat disinterested | 3  | 9%  |
| Very disinterested     | 0  |     |

**Did you hear anything new?**

Answered: 9 Skipped: 26

|                                 |   |     |
|---------------------------------|---|-----|
| Answers referencing the parable | 4 | 44% |
| Answers referencing the sermon  | 5 | 56% |

**Maynard** (read)

**13**

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 0 |     |
| 0 |     |
| 1 | 8%  |
| 4 | 31% |
| 8 | 61% |

Answered: 9 Skipped: 4

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 7 | 78% |
| 2 | 22% |

Answered: 12 Skipped: 1

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 10 | 83% |
| 2  | 17% |

Answered: 8 Skipped: 5

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| 2 | 25%   |
| 3 | 37.5% |
| 1 | 12.5% |
| 2 | 25%   |

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 2 | 15% |
| 6 | 46% |
| 5 | 39% |

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 6 | 46% |
| 4 | 31% |
| 2 | 15% |
| 1 | 8%  |

Answered: 3 Skipped: 10

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1 | 33% |
| 1 | 33% |

|   |    |     |                         |       |
|---|----|-----|-------------------------|-------|
| Answers that were unclear                                       | 1  | 33% |                         |       |
| <b>Two words describing your reaction</b>                       |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 31 Skipped: 4   |    |     | Answered: 11 Skipped: 2 |       |
| Answers referencing the parable                                 | 17 | 55% | 5                       | 46%   |
| Answers referencing the sermon                                  | 13 | 42% | 3                       | 27%   |
| Answers that were unclear                                       | 1  | 3%  | 3                       | 27%   |
| <b>What in the parable triggered that reaction?</b>             |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 23 Skipped: 12  |    |     | Answered: 6 Skipped: 7  |       |
| Answers referencing the parable                                 | 11 | 48% | 3                       | 50%   |
| Answers referencing the sermon                                  | 12 | 52% | 3                       | 50%   |
| <b>Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?</b>      |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 32 Skipped: 3   |    |     | Answered: 8 Skipped: 5  |       |
| Yes 14 44%  |    |     | 5                       | 62.5% |
| No 18 56%   |    |     | 3                       | 37.5% |
| Added comments 16   |    |     | 3                       |       |
| <b>Did the method affect your experience of the sermon</b>      |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 32 Skipped: 3   |    |     | Answered: 11 Skipped: 2 |       |
| Yes 16 50%  |    |     | 5                       | 45%   |
| No 16 50%   |    |     | 6                       | 55%   |
| Added comments 14   |    |     | 3                       |       |
| <b>What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?</b>     |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 24 Skipped: 11  |    |     | Answered: 9 Skipped: 4  |       |
| <b>What did you think of the way the parable was presented?</b> |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 33 Skipped: 2   |    |     | Answered: 10 Skipped: 3 |       |
| I liked it 31 94%   |    |     | 8                       | 80%   |
| I didn't like it 2 6%   |    |     | 2                       | 20%   |
| It was OK 0   |    |     |                         |       |
| Added comments 26   |    |     | 8                       |       |
| <b>Other comments</b>   |    |     |                         |       |
| Answered: 5 Skipped: 30   |    |     | Answered: 2 Skipped: 11 |       |

### The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

**Trinity** (read by Pr. Kathryn)

**Total Responses: 32**

**What is your age?**

Answered: 32 Skipped:

|          |    |     |
|----------|----|-----|
| Under 18 | 0  |     |
| 18 -25   | 1  | 3%  |
| 26-45    | 6  | 19% |
| 46-65    | 16 | 50% |
| over 65  | 9  | 28% |

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

|        |    |     |
|--------|----|-----|
| Female | 22 | 69% |
| Male   | 10 | 31% |

**Maynard** (told)

**19**

Answered: 18 Skipped: 1

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1 | 6%  |
| 0 |     |
| 2 | 11% |
| 9 | 50% |
| 6 | 33% |

Answered: 17 Skipped: 2

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 11 | 65% |
| 6  | 35% |

**Are you a member?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1

Yes 30 97%

No 1 3%

Answered: 17 Skipped: 2

15 88%

2 12%

**For how long?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 3

&lt; 10 years 9 31%

10-25 years 10 34%

26-50 years 8 28%

&gt; 50 years 2 7%

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

3 20%

6 40%

2 13%

4 27%

**How familiar was this parable to you?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

Very familiar 16 50%

Somewhat familiar 15 47%

Not familiar 1 3%

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0

12 16%

4 21%

3 16%

**How interested were you?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

Very interested 26 81%

Somewhat interested 6 9%

Somewhat disinterested 0

Very disinterested 0

Answered: 19 Skipped:

15 79%

4 21%

0

0

**Did you hear anything new?**

Answered: 27 Skipped: 5

Answers referencing the parable 9 33%

Answers referencing the sermon 18 67%

Answers that were unclear 0

Answered: 12 Skipped: 7

1 8%

10 84%

1 8%

**Two words that describe your reaction**

Answered: 27 Skipped: 5

Answers referencing the parable 7 26%

Answers referencing the sermon 18 67%

Answers that were unclear 2 7%

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

6 40%

8 53%

1 7%

**What in the parable triggered that reaction**

Answered: 20 Skipped: 12

Answers referencing the parable 4 20%

Answers referencing the sermon 15 75%

Answers that were unclear 1 5%

Answered: 11 Skipped: 8

2 18%

9 82%

**Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

Yes 20 62.5

No 12 37.5

Added comments 18

Answered: 16 Skipped: 3

12 75%

4 25%

10

**Did the method affect your experience of the sermon?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1

Yes 20 65%

No 11 35%

Added comments 16

Answered: 14 Skipped: 5

10 71%

4 29%

10

**What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?**

Answered: 26 Skipped: 6

Answered: 17 Skipped: 2

**What did you think of the way the parable was presented?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1

Answered: 16 Skipped: 3

I liked it 31 100%

16 100%

I didn't like it 0

It was OK 0

Added comments 24

14

(all comments referenced the sermon)

**Other comments** 10

6

(all comments referenced the sermon)

**The Rich Man and Lazarus****Trinity** (read by Pr. Kathryn)**Total Responses:18****What is your age?**

Answered: 17 Skipped: 1

Under 18 1 6%

18-25 0

26-45 2 12%

46-65 10 59%

over 65 4 23%

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Female: 12 67%

Male: 6 33%

**Are you a member?**

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Member 18 100%

Visitor 0

**For how long?**

Answered: 17 Skipped: 1

&lt; 10 years 2 12%

10-25 years 10 59%

26-50 years 4 23%

&gt; 50 years 1 6%

**How familiar was the parable to you?**

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Very familiar 7 39%

Somewhat familiar 10 55.5%

Not familiar 1 5.5%

**How interested were you?**

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Very interested 13 72%

Somewhat interested 4 22%

**Maynard** (told)**18**

Answered: 16 Skipped: 2

0

0

2 12.5%

9 56.25%

5 31.25%

Answered: 17 Skipped: 1

12 71%

5 29%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 2

16 100%

Answered: 14 Skipped: 4

7 50%

1 7%

5 36%

1 7%

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

10 56%

6 33%

2 11%

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

10 56%

8 44%

|   |    |          |    |                         |
|---|----|----------|----|-------------------------|
| Somewhat disinterested  | 1  | 6%       | 0  |                         |
| Very disinterested  | 0  |          | 0  |                         |
| <b>Did you hear anything new?</b>                               |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 14 | Skipped: | 4  | Answered: 10 Skipped: 8 |
| Answers referencing the parable                                 | 5  | 36%      | 6  | 60%                     |
| Answers referencing the sermon                                  | 9  | 64%      | 4  | 40%                     |
| Answers that were unclear                                       | 0  |          | 0  |                         |
| <b>Two words that describe your reaction</b>                    |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 17 | Skipped: | 1  | Answered: 16 Skipped: 2 |
| Answers referencing the parable                                 | 7  | 41%      | 3  | 19%                     |
| Answers referencing the sermon                                  | 9  | 53%      | 8  | 50%                     |
| Answers that were unclear                                       | 1  | 6%       | 5  | 31%                     |
| <b>What in the parable triggered that reaction?</b>             |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 15 | Skipped: | 3  | Answered: 13 Skipped: 5 |
| Answers referencing the parable                                 | 5  | 33%      | 8  | 62%                     |
| Answers referencing the sermon                                  | 9  | 60%      | 5  | 39%                     |
| Answers that were unclear                                       | 1  | 7%       | 0  |                         |
| <b>Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?</b>      |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 18 | Skipped: | 0  | Answered: 15 Skipped: 3 |
| Yes   | 11 | 61%      | 6  | 40%                     |
| No  | 7  | 39%      | 9  | 60%                     |
| Added comments  | 10 |          | 5  |                         |
| <b>Did the method affect your experience of the sermon?</b>     |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 18 | Skipped: | 0  | Answered: 17 Skipped: 1 |
| Yes   | 5  | 28%      | 11 | 65%                     |
| No  | 13 | 72%      | 6  | 35%                     |
| Added comments  | 5  |          | 10 |                         |
| <b>What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?</b>     |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 18 | Skipped: | 0  | Answered: 16 Skipped: 1 |
| <b>What did you think of the way the parable was presented?</b> |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 17 | Skipped: | 1  | Answered: 18 Skipped: 0 |
| I liked it  | 16 | 94%      | 18 | 100%                    |
| I didn't like it  | 0  |          | 0  |                         |
| It was OK   | 1  | 6%       | 0  |                         |
| Added comments  | 15 |          | 11 |                         |
| <b>Other comments</b>   |    |          |    |                         |
| Answered:   | 7  | Skipped: | 11 | Answered: 2 Skipped: 16 |

### The Good Samaritan

**Trinity** (told by Pr. Tim)

**Total Responses: 32**

**What is your age?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 2

Under 18 0

18-25 1 3%

**Maynard** (read)

**29**

Answered: 27 Skipped: 2

1 4%

0

|         |    |     |
|---------|----|-----|
| 26-45   | 3  | 10% |
| 46-65   | 11 | 37% |
| over 65 | 15 | 50% |

**What is your gender?**

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 31 | Skipped: 1 |
| Female       | 22 71%     |
| Male         | 9 29%      |

**Are you a member?**

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 30 | Skipped: 2 |
| Member       | 30 100%    |
| Visitor      | 0          |

**For how long?**

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 31 | Skipped: 1 |
| < 10 years   | 7 22.5%    |
| 10-25 years  | 7 22.5%    |
| 26-50 years  | 14 45%     |
| > 50 years   | 3 10%      |

**How familiar was this parable to you?**

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| Answered: 30      | Skipped: 2 |
| Very familiar     | 23 77%     |
| Somewhat familiar | 7 23%      |
| Not familiar      | 0          |

**How interested were you?**

|                        |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| Answered: 32           | Skipped: 0 |
| Very interested        | 27 84%     |
| Somewhat interested    | 5 16%      |
| Somewhat disinterested | 0          |
| Very disinterested     | 0          |

**Did you hear anything new?**

|                                 |             |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Answered: 11                    | Skipped: 21 |
| Answers referencing the parable | 7 63%       |
| Answers referencing the sermon  | 4 37%       |
| Answers that were unclear       | 0           |

**Two words that describe your reaction**

|                                 |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Answered: 31                    | Skipped: 1 |
| Answers referencing the parable | 22 70%     |
| Answers referencing the sermon  | 8 25%      |
| Answers that were unclear       | 1 5%       |

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

|                                 |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Answered: 30                    | Skipped: 2 |
| Answers referencing the parable | 23 77%     |
| Answers referencing the sermon  | 5 16%      |
| Answers that were unclear       | 2 7%       |

**Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 30 | Skipped: 2 |
| Yes          | 19 63%     |

|    |       |
|----|-------|
| 5  | 18.5% |
| 15 | 55.5% |
| 6  | 22%   |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 27 | Skipped: 2 |
| 19           | 70%        |
| 8            | 30%        |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 29 | Skipped: 0 |
| 27           | 93%        |
| 2            | 7%         |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 23 | Skipped: 6 |
| 5            | 22%        |
| 5            | 22%        |
| 9            | 39%        |
| 4            | 17%        |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 29 | Skipped: 0 |
| 22           | 76%        |
| 4            | 14%        |
| 3            | 10%        |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 29 | Skipped: 0 |
| 20           | 69%        |
| 7            | 24%        |
| 2            | 7%         |

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| Answered: 6 | Skipped: 23 |
| 3           | 50%         |
| 3           | 50%         |
| 0           |             |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 28 | Skipped: 1 |
| 11           | 39%        |
| 7            | 25%        |
| 10           | 36%        |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 26 | Skipped: 3 |
| 18           | 69%        |
| 7            | 27%        |
| 1            | 4%         |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Answered: 25 | Skipped: 4 |
| 21           | 84%        |

No 11 37%

Added comments 19

**Did the method affect your experience of the sermon?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1

Yes 26 84%

No 5 16%

Added comments 26

**What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 2

**What did you think of the way the parable was presented?**

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0

I liked it 31 97%

I didn't like it 0

It was OK 1 3%

Added comments 25

**Other comments**

Answered: 14 Skipped: 18

4 16%

19

Answered: 26 Skipped: 3

12 46%

14 54%

10

Answered: 27 Skipped: 2

Answered: 26 Skipped: 3

24 92%

2 8%

0

22

Answered: 2 Skipped: 27

## The Prodigal Son

**Trinity** (told by Pr. Kathryn)

**Total responses: 31**

**What is your age?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 1

Under 18 1 3%

18-25 0

26-45 5 17%

46-65 16 53%

Over 65 8 27%

**What is your gender?**

Answered: 27 Skipped: 4

Female: 20 74%

Male 7 26%

**Are you a member?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 2

Member 29 100%

Visitor 0

**For how long?**

Answered: 25 Skipped: 6

< 10 years 5 20%

10-25 years 11 44%

26-50 years 9 36%

> 50 years 0

**How familiar was this parable to you?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

Very familiar 25 81%

**Maynard** (read)

**16**

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1

0

1 6.5%

1 6.5%

10 67%

3 20%

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1

11 73%

4 27%

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1

14 93%

1 7%

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1

2 14%

5 33%

5 33%

3 20%

Answered: 16 Skipped: 1

14 87.5%

Somewhat familiar 4 13%  
Not familiar 2 6%

**How interested were you?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

Very interested 26 84%  
Somewhat interested 4 13%  
Somewhat disinterested 1 3%  
Very disinterested 0

**Did you hear something new?**

Answered: 8 Skipped: 23

Answers referencing the parable 4 50%  
Answers referencing the sermon 4 50%  
Answers that were unclear

**Two words describing your reaction**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 1

Answers referencing the parable 28 93%  
Answers referencing the sermon 0  
Answers that were unclear 2 7%

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Answered: 29 Skipped: 2

Answers referencing the parable 25 86%  
Answers referencing the sermon 4 14%  
Answers that were unclear 0

**Did the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

Yes 11 35%

No 20 65%

Added comments 13

**Did the method affect your experience of the sermon?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 1

Yes 19 63%

No 11 37%

Added comments 19

**What do you think Jesus was saying with the parable?**

Answered: 30 Skipped: 1

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Answered: 31 Skipped:

I liked it 31 100%

I disliked it 0

It was OK 0

Added comments 26

(22 of the 26 said they preferred storytelling method)

**Other comments**

Answered: 8 Skipped: 23

2 12.5%

0

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0

9 56%

7 44%

0

Answered: 5 Skipped: 11

5 100%

0

Answered: 14 Skipped: 2

13 93%

1 7%

0

Answered: 14 Skipped: 2

12 86%

2 14%

0

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1

7 47%

8 53%

8

Answered: 14 Skipped: 2

4 29%

10 71%

4

Answered: 14 Skipped: 2

Answered: 16 Skipped: 0

9 56%

0

7 44%

7

Answered: 5 Skipped: 11

## APPENDIX F

### CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY COMMENTS ON THE PARABLES

*Comments specifically mentioning a preference for storytelling are italicized and underlined.*

#### **The Rich Fool**

##### **Trinity (read)**

##### **If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

We are blessed; The aspect of giving-not just receiving; Life is unpredictable, fragile; Yes, that [the farmer] had enough for future years; God was not angry with the farmer, but with his attitude; It isn't only about money and possessions; His occupation as a farmer; How blessed we are; Always; We are blessed because it is God that provides-everything we have comes from God-not our own doing; The part about tearing down and building bigger was new.

##### **List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable.**

Finances, security; We're blessed; Relationships matter; We are truly blessed in so many ways; Riches, unappreciative; True, difficult; Grain, wealth; Wondering, puzzled; Greed, money; How true; Wealth and less of it; Moral, ethical; Sharing, giving; Do I understand it; Not me (I'm never feeling I need more, or need to hang on to what's mine yeah, right Ron); Nothing changes; Rich enough; Surprised, scared; Familiar, disinterested; It's ok to have things-don't worry about what you don't have; I am rich; Greed, exploitation; Selfish, blessed.

##### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Building larger storage; He will die; Grain storage building; Why he would think he had enough for the future; We have been given enough; Thought about the stinginess of the person; It's about humans and their fragility; The thought of it all ending with his death; The bible study segment; Thinking about my past week, losing two very dear people; My faith; About needing to have more fear of losing what I have; We will always be making our daily decisions on what society says is important rather than fight for what's right; What God said; I've heard it many times before so I was uninterested in it; Live the life you have with no worries; The farmer wanted to have more and more crops to store to be the richest.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Relationships with others; I used to think of it in terms of giving, but now I realize it also teaches about serving; Relationships matter more than money; I never thought of it being about our being blessed; Saying it was OK to have; what is enough?; I need constant reminders that what I have comes from God; It made me remember to place God first; God has blessed us with his gifts, but how much is enough?

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

The parable brought my attention to the sermon; Pr. Tim explained it so well-so today as a culture; I like the preview of the sermon and the anticipation of what I might learn; More attentive; Partly because I knew I was completing this survey; More aware of content, less anxiety about missing something; It's how you use what you have; Emotions; I needed to hear it again, in its entirety with a new or different priority; I wanted to hear what the pastor would teach me regarding how I should think/feel; I wanted to hear how God's blessings are to be kept or given.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

How much is enough, what are we going to do with all of what we have stored up?; We need to give to and serve our neighbors and friends; Pay attention to others and not focus on yourself so much; We are blessed to be a blessing, God provides enough; Jesus is more important than worldly treasures such as money; Be thankful for what we have, he gives us what we need; You are blessed; We need Jesus, our everything is from him; Focus on relationships, how are we rich with God?; It's not about material things but rather relationships and what we do for others; We need to be generous with what God has given us; Share the love, spread the wealth. I (we) love to help people in all ways possible. We were always giving things away at our house growing up-my father was such a kind and generous man; to believe each day for the best in it; Give as you can, anything anyway is okay as long as you share; Be happy with what you have, you never know what the next day will bring; He loves us rich or poor; I, you have been blessed by God, go and bless others with kindness, consideration, helping monetarily etc.; Place God first in all of my life; Be happy with what you have; Stop being concerned with "stuff" so much, Be thankful for what you have; So called Christians justify greed and exploitation as being their gifts from God; Accept God's gifts and spread them to others, God gives us what we need and it is enough.

**Other comments**

A favorite parable of mine; It helps to bring the parable down to me in usable, everyday actions, not just broad philosophies; Interesting to have me listen more.

**Maynard (told)**

**If this parable was familiar to you did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

God is enough; *Same story but better to listen to when told;*

About selfishness; Be thankful for the blessings we have, they are all gifts from God.

**List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable.**

Not a sin to be rich but what you do with what you have; Blessings; Glad and lucky for what I have and knowing what's more important than money and stuff; Rich, rebuild;

Self-worth; Modern day; Interested, involved; People matter; To be satisfied with what God gives, think of others; God does provide; Makes me think; Greed; Blessed God provides; Relationships, be thankful; Interest, guilt; Blessed; Rich, poor.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Not enough-build bigger, rich toward God; Count your blessings; Hearing the word foolish, sometimes we are all a little foolish to think the more we have will complete us; The farmer was going to rebuild; To focus on more spiritual stuff; It was all about “me”; The relation to farming, and we want to always have more than what we have; My reaction to having more; Money isn’t everything; Not to think of how much; We always have enough; Instead of any other idea the farmer wanted to build a bigger barn; The farmer keeping, storing grain that could have been sold, shared with others; God blesses and provides for us everyday; The ending of the parable; Relationship to the real world, farming, riches, people; Not focusing on self but praising God for what I do have.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Need to remember how God provides daily and knows our needs; That what we have is enough and what we have is to be shared; More about people than riches; I had an awareness of how I need to be reminded from where my blessings come.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

To complete the surveys; I was interested in hearing more about it; Always new to hear; *Easier to relate to the sermon; Story is better than preaching*; We had to listen carefully to answer all of these questions; With an open mind; I had never heard this one before so I wanted to hear the interpretation; *It was a great introduction to the sermon; Story kept attention rather than Bible reading*; It made me focus on what the real treasures are; He told it like he was talking personally to me.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Recognize your blessings and be thankful, be a blessing toward others; Count your blessings; It’s okay to accumulate stuff but remember everything we have comes from God; Be happy and content with what you have; That maybe he should share his wealth; Blessings are to be shared. Try to include others, not just yourself in everyday giving, prayers, etc.; Things don’t make us rich, our relationship with God and others do; God provides all we need, I don’t need anything I think I want; Be happy with what I have; Possessions shouldn’t count the most in our lives. Soul, and health and family should have higher priority; God provides and will care for us. Not me but thee Lord; Be thankful for the things that matter most, our health, not material things; We are all blessed, but part of being blessed is to share. Once you have enough, share. Stockpiling, well, we might find something better to do with our stuff than keeping it for the sake of keeping it; Made me think about what I have and how I share/use it to glorify God; We forget that God is in charge of our lives everyday and provides for us daily; It is ok to have/want material things, but what we have/given is from Jesus; The blessed aren’t blessed by riches. It’s about relationships; Think of others and use what we have been blessed with for others; I need to appreciate what I have, share it with others and be glad.

### **Other comments**

This parable resonates with life today as we are always wanting more, the next big thing, that we forget about what is important in life; Thank you, this was a new one for me; great sermon, relative to real life; Thanks for good sermons every Sunday.

## **The Widow and the Unjust Judge**

### **Trinity (told)**

#### **If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

Justice; The focus on specific words; Why Jesus chose to say "widow" instead of "woman"; Reshapes, widow, history, meaning; Hadn't heard it taught before; Widow, justice, Christian; Not very familiar with the way the parable was told; It all seemed new to me; Words can change the whole meaning of what was said; The need to be especially considerate of widows, orphans and children;

#### **List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable.**

Hope, belief; Confused what?; Unjust judge; Words do matter; True, sad; Confused, unsure; Justice, judge; Puzzled, uninterested; Actor, play; Scales, justice; Confused, interested; Thought provoking; New, interesting; Church asking something of the government; Justice; Angry, frustrated; Unconditional love; How true; Justice, Christian; Unjust, widow; Jesus, judge; God's justice; Arrogant, helpless; Interested, questions; Justice; Unheard before; Justice, racism; Christian, widow; Justice; Anger, admiration; Words, justice.

#### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

It didn't seem like a typical parable, hard to understand. However, it was my first time hearing it; The reaction of the unjust judge; Changing one word changes the meaning; Current events; Wasn't clear where this was going; Is this justice to the law or God's kingdom. Are we judges? No-God!; The hand play; Judgment, justice, ignore voices, speak out; What was the justice she wanted?; The top 10 of racism introduced as injustice; The judge and his decision; Justice is a morality-people's, government's, God's. People escape earth's will they escape God's?; Careful thought is the issue; Failure of the judge (who seems self-serving) to listen to lesser people; The recent tragedies and the widow in the parable; Made me curious to find out more; The parable reminded me that we need to strive for God's justice, not society's justice. The world's people rely too much on what society determines as fair and correct; When the judge just seemed to dismiss the widow; Why the judge responded like he did; The judge's attributes; Nothing until I heard the sermon; Jesus will be just; The way the pastor told the parable-tone of voice, everyday language.

#### **Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Pr. Kathy explained it so well, especially with the key words; To think about the specific words; I liked the adding of what it means to be Christian. It makes me think about what it truly means to follow Christ; Understood it; Talking about word choice gave a new insight; The widow was alone, no one to take care of her, special place in God's heart, the

deliberate use of this word; Powerful to their knees, the lowly lifted high; Excellent to relate racism to this parable; Because of the information, story told in addition to the text makes it nice to understand better; words from the sermon made it more realistic and easier to understand; God's message remains clear and consistent-help and protect those who truly need help in life; God favors widows, and they are very important; Justice means different things; Made it clearer, highlighted key words in the parable; Made me think of how I react to other races, and do I show Christ's love through my interactions; Made things clearer; Meaning of words.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

Understanding; Explanation; It made me think about how to follow Christ; *There is something about scripture that is presented by memorization; I really like being talked to-it's a knack; I listened more carefully than if it had been read;* My mind wandered a little to my own thoughts on racial prejudice as well as racial preference; Guilt of not doing my part or praying; I listened better when I was asked to fill out this survey; While hearing the parable story I was not totally clear on the message. Hearing the sermon helped clarify the message; It was presented well and the parable was a completion of the parable; Caught and held my attention to the end and brought to mind what in my life and interaction with others needs to change; Understood better after the sermon; *Good to hear it spoken, not read.*

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Belief, hope; There are always unjust things happening, Jesus is the true measure of justice, we need to live in a Christian manner; There are unjust things happening in the world and as Christians and through Jesus we are able to find justice; It matters how we treat people-the way God would or not; Being a Christian I need to work on how I treat others; Be a Christian-a way of life; We shouldn't be judgmental; Christians giving/providing justice to the world. Me-justice to myself, wife, children, community, world; Think about what I say and how; This is the first time I actually related this parable to racism; Be kind, fair, just; Treat everyone the same; How do I make it Jesus' glory?; Our perception of others needs is not for us to judge; Love always, hope to not sweat the small stuff so much, helps to remember what is most important in life-love; Everyone deserves the same treatment; Jesus wants to recognize and help in the world and around us those who truly need help, not the loud, verbal rich; We need to choose to follow only him and be concerned only with receiving justice from him; He felt for the widow-God is always with you; What we do as Christians affects justice for all, we have God's ear; For me as a Christian to seek to help in anyway I can to seek justice for those who are down-trodden; Love equally; That Christians need to take care of widows and witness to injustice; If we really claim to be Christians we really need to be showing it in our lives, especially toward others.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Truth; *It felt like a conversation between friends; Told in a story-like fashion, as it would have been told originally; It makes the parable much more clear;* What it means to be Christian; Gave me a lot to think about; It was to the point; Easy to understand; Great flow and connection to the sermon and its relevance to our Christian lives; Why not

preach on today's everyday happenings? Why do we keep hearing about what happened over 2000 years ago?; Too much hand play. It took away from the words; Good job; *Catches our attention better than reading by a lay person*; A sermon is certainly a good place to introduce or instruct, but there is no dialogue or questions or comments. Another time for that I guess; My mind drifts; *Easy to understand*; *Great story*; *Easy to understand*; As long as there was a sermon to clarify the message-I wouldn't have liked it if the sermon didn't follow; I liked how Pastor Kathy tied the tragedies in the world right now to the parable and the sermon; Interesting and a new message; Made me wonder why justice isn't really justice; Taught me, didn't just preach at me; Made me think about what I say and the words I use; Understand it better now; *More of a story*.

### **Other comments**

As always, excellent presentation, gestures, vocalization; I love your sermons; I like the comparisons to the goings on in the world today; Good sermon, easy to listen to and understand; Pastor, your gift of bringing words of the scripture into "layman's" understanding make it a joy to hear.

### **Maynard (read)**

#### **If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

I think we hear something new every time; justice makes a difference; I still became disgusted with the judge that he didn't listen to her right away.

#### **List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Justice, responsibility; Ask-answer, widow-justice; Justice, injustice; Unfair, justice; Clarity; Equality, justice; Widow, justice; How it pertains to us; Perseverance, justice; Words, important.

#### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

The woman coming back repeatedly; It clearly explained what the parable was about; The way it was presented; The need for justice; The widow had to keep coming; Personal story.

#### **Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

I wasn't sure what the parable was truly saying-Pr. Kathy did an excellent job of breaking it down and explaining; Parable more about justice; Christians can learn from the judge-listen and do.

#### **Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

I paid very close attention to the sermon; Exploring the depth of what the parable was saying; Something new each time.

#### **What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

The need to be fair; We need to accept all people for who they are and where they come from; It's Christ's justice that is important and we are responsible for carrying that out in our own lives; To be just to all, love all to be a good Christian, We as Christians will be

judged fairly; He was talking about justice for everyone regardless of race or gender; Reach out with justice; Listen, then react; Use words to fulfill another's needs.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Kind of dull, pretty slow, needs some fire; It made it clear how we as Christians are to live-an awareness of widows' and orphans' vulnerability; Presented in a way that reflects our lives today; Made it easier to understand; Made it clearer when broken apart; Always good to be reminded; I like the way the pastor reads-with distinctive pronunciation; Too many words, I'm a sermon person-the Bible lingo is hard for me to decipher.

**Other comments**

Words are powerful, I think we do need to consider how words create our attitudes and attitudes create our actions; Need more comparison to our daily lives.

### **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

**Trinity (read)**

**If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

Yes, about the traps in it; Not really, only that the pastor may have paraphrased the scripture. I have heard reading similar, but with different words; Focus on God alone; I liked the scripture version-good to hear it different ways; arrogance in being humble; They are wonderful people-always understand; focus always on God and you'll manage your way through just fine; It pertains to me; yes, you can have too much humility; yes, be humble; the piece on focusing on God, not yourself; Don't focus on ourselves when we pray-nobody is perfect or better than anyone else-we are all sinners; Accept yourself for what you are, no more & no less; The Pharisee's prayer was not so bad if done in a different context; The idea that I'm thankful for my life when I see other's struggles; Yes, that humility is really thinking about myself less, not thinking less about myself; Not as clear as it seems; The parable is a trap-a tax collector can become a Pharisee turning the focus on ourselves; That it has a trap in its teaching; Expecting to have blessings-although we give thanks we feel righteous we need to know that we are sinners and be ready to accept help; It felt unfinished-I know there is more to it; Yes, it didn't make sense before.

**List two words to describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Real life; God focused; Pharisee not justified-deserved to have these blessings; Ouch!; Text can become a trap; self-examination-humbleness but needing forgiveness-do I have these attributes; judgmental, D Trump; didn't pay attention until the sermon; very caring, very understandable; Stay humble, love yourself; Very good; Humility and trespassing; Enlightening; Self-righteous, humble; One of amazement; Arrogant, humble; Contemplative, self aware; Wow; Surprise; Maintain focus; Humility, arrogance; Humility, honesty; humble-focus on ourselves-humble isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less; Trap, pride; Honest, humble.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

So many times I have been humbled when I've placed myself on a pedestal; We need to be more like the tax collector; Traps that came in both characters; Even the tax collector in his humility may not have been focusing on God; Don't forget to give thanks to God for what I have in life, be it physical or spiritual; I've heard it approximately a million times; Looking down on the tax collector; They are caring; The part about almost (?) arrogant; That we can get caught in a trap and have too much humility; The Pharisee's prayer was all about himself, the tax collector prayed with humbleness; Think of my daily life and how I can incorporate it into that; Not thinking less of yourself-thinking of yourself less; How both were not praying in a good way; Gave the story about her experience at Project Turnabout; How the Pharisee and the tax collector concentrated on themselves; The explanation of how we can become arrogant; I am really not that different than the Pharisee if I don't focus on God and not on myself; Too much on ourselves; The Pharisee.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

The Pharisee was focused on himself; Focus on God, not characters; An excellent lesson on how to give God thanks for treating saint and sinner equally; So many traps; Somewhat- the Pharisee isn't all that different than us; I understand it better; They are all good sermons, well served; It made me understand it better and really get the message of what it was really trying to teach us; Neither the tax collector or the Pharisee are correct in their thoughts; Looking at it from the other side-was opposite of the way I perceived it before; That no matter who I identify with (saint or sinner) my prayers should put God first; Forced me to think more deeply; Looking at how I pray; I didn't realize how easy it is to think I'm being humble when I really may be thinking less of myself; Over-rating yourself and under-rating yourself are both arrogance; God vs. ourselves-trust; that we can get caught in the trap of focusing on ourselves instead of God and what he has done in our lives; In the past I couldn't figure out why a tax collector would be humble. The title threw me off, not the prayer.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

It reminded me of how to behave in my life. Helped me to listen with more clarity; excellent using mouse traps; we as people are both Pharisee and tax collector at times; mouse traps/traps with behavior; was wonderful; it was a great story; I was very engaged and didn't find myself drifting off to other thoughts; I liked the way it was presented (traps!) Very good imagery; Pr. Kathy is very clear and easy to follow/understand. Does a great job of communicating the message; It really helped that she used the Project Turnabout story; I wanted to hear the examples to make it clearer; it was a constant part of the sermon; it made me aware of how I often don't focus on God's blessings; focus always on God; waiting for the next trap to be sprung; mice are not humble and get caught frequently. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Focus on God/less on me; Be thankful for your life and never forget it is all provided by God, be thankful above all, be humble; Be humble bring my shortcomings before God thinking less of yourself; Trust me alone-helpful for heading to the mountains; Always look to God for guidance; Don't be so self-centered; You can be too humble?; the

humility piece is great=humility thinking of yourself less. Focus on God you'll be just fine; Treat people with respect, no negative thoughts, always be happy, it's a new day; Stay humble, love your neighbor; Be honest; We should be humble; Be humble; Our focus should always be on God, be humble but be careful not to focus too much on ourselves; Think more of what I can help and focus on God; Be humble, not so humble you become arrogant about your unworthiness; To always have our eyes on God, to pray with an open heart; We need to be very self-aware and admit and understand our faults and sins; Looking more at God than self; Keep my focus on God; God and his forgiveness are the center; Stay humble, focus; Focus on one who gives life to saint and sinner alike; It's not hard to misinterpret the meaning of God; Focus on the one who gives us all; Focus on God, not on ourselves we are all sinners

### **What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Because I could see how even way back in Jesus' day people behaved the same as us now, it seemed to apply to current living; Examples/explaining; Good correlation between the word of God and LIFE; Made me think; Was given so people can relate; Very well presented, easy for me to interpret new and different things to apply things to my life; It was fine. That's standard practice; The sermon kept my interest with the traps and the Project Turnabout story; Love the analogy; It related to life; Mouse traps caught my attention; It spoke to me and came at a time I really needed to hear that message; traps and stories kept my interest; The trap caught my attention, and I really related to the trap we can get in; Interesting to hear; Pr. Kathy is an excellent preacher; kept my interest the whole time; It clarified the meaning; Understandable, conversational tone; Lead Me Guide Me-my favorite, easy prayer; It brought out how easily we can fall into traps by how we look at ourselves and others; gave me insight, more depth; mouse trap; Entertaining (mouse traps) not steady words that can sometimes be soothing to the point of drifting.

### **Other comments**

I liked the analogy to the mousetraps-watch out how you behave, you might get caught! I also like the definition of humility. It helps make it more understanding for me; Thanks good pastor; Excellent sermon by the "Good Pastor"; Like the definition of humility; Really liked the explanation of humility-not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less; The comment Bruce made about being too great a sinner for even God to forgive you. I need to remember that one. Thank you; I always look forward to the sermons of both of our pastors; Perfect song after that parable; Good use of props; Interesting regarding Project Turnabout and the steps explained.

### **Maynard (told)**

#### **If this parable was familiar did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

The Pharisee's prayer was all about himself; The use of humility and its definition; I've never thought about the tax collector possibly being too proud; The high degree of arrogance, amplified by the presentation; We can be too humble; If you are humble and only thinking of your wrongs and not putting Jesus first you are like the Pharisee; What it means to be humble-don't be deceived by my own thinking; That the Pharisee was really thanking God; Focus on God and what he has done for us; If we humble ourselves to

Jesus we will be forgiven of our sins-that's the way I learned it. Today the word was exalted; You can overdo humbleness.

**List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Humility, arrogance; Humble, exalted; Familiar, contrast; Nervousness, happiness; New thoughts; Self-reflecting, interesting; Focus, humility; Relevant, relatable; Peace, humble; Relieved; Humble, exalt; Don't think you are better than others, be sincere in your prayers; Enlightening; Be humble, not self-righteous; Balance, humble.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

The need to focus on God and not ourselves; last line; Nervous-be careful, don't be like the Pharisee-happy: humility will be rewarded; To humbly pray to God but to focus only on him; It made me self-reflect if I am arrogant or humble; Personal experience; Giving thanks in all things gives us peace; Pastor Kathy's explanation of how either can be a trap; The Pharisee's prayer; Humility is not thinking less of yourself-it's thinking of yourself less; The tax collector was right.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

A better understanding of it; Humility can be arrogance if not careful; Amplified by the story of arrogance (alcoholic in counseling); I'd never heard it broken down and explained before; It made me think about not focusing on myself but on God; Without Jesus first we can fall into a trap; The need for remembering from whom blessings come; Made me more mindful of God; Our determination was to elevate ourselves, felt self-righteous, not humble like the tax collector, and admit our failures-focus always on the one who always gives and forgives-focus on God; It brought it closer to home-it isn't just the Pharisee that needs to be humble-we all do.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

*Made the sermon easier to follow; Telling the story had me awake and interested;* Left/right staging/contrast to represent the two individuals; Be humble-walk in another's shoes once in a while; It was a nice introduction and anticipation to the sermon; *Easier to listen to and understand; It was so well presented that my attention stayed 100%;* Presented very well, using a trap was a good way to explain; *kept my attention; Told as a story is better than reading.*

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Focus on God; It's not all about us individually-just like we're trying to do-get to know and understand those around us; Keep God as your focus-less on yourself; Those who are humble will be raised up-true humility is the key; Humility is more difficult, more challenging, and important than it appears; There is a balance of being too humble and too arrogant; To focus on God and not be arrogant-not to focus on yourself; Focus on God, not yourself; How to praise God with humility; Jesus first, others second, you last; Walk in Jesus footsteps; I need to focus on God, not me; All are sinners-thinking of myself less-focus on God; Focus on God; Keep your focus on God who is our strength and helps us stay on track; I guess we all get big heads once in a while; Live for God.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Made it personable; Was presented so we understood better; Don't think less of yourself, think of yourself less. I agree that it is easy to go to far in either direction. If you think you are too good or too bad, the motivation is the same-you're too focused on you; Contrast on left/right staging to clarify the difference between the speaking moments of Pharisee and tax collector; *It kept my attention, it was fun to watch*; Different thoughts about it; It made me think about my own life; compared it to today's reality; story of Gospel and mouse traps; Stories allow me to apply God's message into my daily life; opened my eyes; It was thought provoking; always a new slant on a parable; It made it very clear.

**The Rich Man and Lazarus**

**Trinity (read)**

**If this parable was familiar to you did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

New was the last line-that family members wouldn't listen even if someone as raised from the dead; Lazarus' are the people you know, don't see; How we all ignore those (probably willingly) around us who need our love and attention; Rich man asking for his brothers to be told; Be more compassionate, aware; Being invisible; Calling them invisible people really got me to think about how many people I am passing by; Yes, I am the rich man who doesn't pay close enough attention to the needy around me; I never really related it to real life before-you made it apply to present day situations; The different perspective of the rich man-non-repentant; The rich man wanted to be served-even in Hades.

**List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Disgust, happiness; Introspective, sad; rich, poor; poor and rich; sadness, attention; self-examination-where have I been neglectful to others; awareness, steadfast; Scary, Hades; Not surprised; Invisible, awareness; Comforting, fairness; Familiar; I'm guilty; Why didn't he forgive the rich man right away?; Shock, life; Ashamed, hopeful.

**What in the parable caused that reaction?**

Disgust at the rich man, happiness that Lazarus found happiness; Introspective because I wonder how I react to some, sad because it was so clear the family members would not listen; One went to heaven, one went to the devil; The rich man finally really noticed Lazarus and when he was in dire straights Lazarus was still not important; The rich man in life ignoring Lazarus, in death the rich man ignored Lazarus' happiness and demanded his attention to his own ills; How the rich man and Lazarus are treated after death; Scary-there are all kinds of people at our "gates"-Hades-this is real/heaven and hell; People are generally self-centered and have a sense of entitlement until our eyes are opened by a significant event in our lives; Knowing how God knows all about us, and cares so much for us and wants the best for us; When pastor talked about being an introvert; It made me realize I have ignored a lot of people and problems around me; We are always asked to forgive; We often do that-walk by people because of their dress; Made me think about how I would act-gives me hope for the Lazarus' of this world for a better life someday.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

When the story was explained Pr. Kathy made sure we didn't hate the rich man; "seeing" the invisible; Rich man does not repent or change his attitude-are these people invisible?; Makes me believe that I need to open my eyes or dedicate more attention to people that need help; I need to be more observant of others or more compassionate; I never brought myself into it as being non-seeing of people in need or hurting-I pray it makes me more aware of my surroundings; It made clear how the parable relates to the present and our community; The rich man never asked for forgiveness, he expected Lazarus to help-God sees us all; I will try to see more around me.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

I thought Pr. Kathy's lead in was a great way to present the story and brought attention to the meaning of the parable; Made me think about how I react to the poor; Your delivery, gestures and eye contact made it personal; Sometimes we are in such a hurry we just don't take the time-we need to slow down and pay attention.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Jesus was saying we should not ignore anyone or make them invisible. We must look for those in need. It will help me get out of my head and into the world; Jesus wants us to see, help and be with the invisible people in the world; I act and live as a Pharisee (rich man); Often times easier to acknowledge people in your comfort zone; You should not just pass by things that are happening in your life; Making me think about who I see or don't see; Be perceptive to the world and the people in it and their needs; We need to be aware of people in need; See everyone; See and love all people-we have a responsibility to help; I think that Jesus was telling me I don't need a dramatic event in my life to change the way I treat people. It is already written, just do it; Be more cognizant; Care for others. I feel very blessed in my life and I need to be more compassionate to the less fortunate; We need to show our love and concern for all of God's people; A Christian cannot ignore the needy, whether the need is spiritual or physical; God sees me, I am not invisible, nor is anyone else; help when at all possible; Open our eyes, tend to those in need.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

It was told like a story, not an archaic bible verse from an ancient book. Also Pr. Kathy related it to our life; It is always good to look past ourselves, be reminded of others next door and around the world who are our neighbors and may need our concern/help; To ask God to help me see others and not being what may be seen as stuck up, and talk about the bible and ask Lazarus through the gate; A great reminder that we are all God's children and start at the same place and encounter opportunities and choices that affect our lives. In the end we are all children of God and should have the goal to live Godly lives and help each other; It was clear enough to understand; Again the sermon was easily understood; Kept my attention-food for thought; Good reminder; Great explanation of the parable, great connection between it and our daily lives and how it shows us the way of Christ; Brings me yet another reminder of the path I need to take; It was OK-pretty traditional; Pr. Kathy does a great job of preaching-gets me thinking and makes me

aware; Your approach made me listen more carefully; I was interested; Brought the story into a context that was more contemporary.

**Other comments.**

Recognize other; Great message Pr. Kathy; It's funny. I pray everyday to God for direction in my life-this scripture says a lot to answer my prayers-now I need to hear it; I feel blessed to have wonderful pastors; Thanks for sharing your introverted personality. I do not see that in you but it made me identify with you and realize I have the power to become less introverted and more of a Christian witness; We were just in Vegas and saw many homeless and poor people. It made me think we should have helped some. We also had a young man ask for money and a ride, my husband said not but I said we should have helped-different opinion; Well done.

**Maynard (told)**

**If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

To be aware of those around you; That we can all be invisible, and we can make others invisible to us; Sending Lazarus to his (rich man's) family; That the rich man only thought of himself, even after death; Even in heaven, Lazarus was thought of by the rich man as a servant; The chasm between heaven and sorrow.

**List two words that describe your reaction to the parable.**

Help, time; Pay attention, know your surroundings; Share and see; Humbled, sad; Pay attention; Money doesn't buy your way into heaven; Poor, rich; Look, repent; Nothing, ignored; Justice; Be aware; Sorry; Importance of caring and reaching out; Invisible, compassion, responsibility; Sad, compassion; Oozing sores.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

We have only so much time to repent and be right with God and share his love; Familiar; We need to see people in need and share our gifts, not be selfish as the rich man; My life; Rich guy looking up and begging to go to heaven; Be aware of unfortunate people in the world; He could not go back and warn people to repent, when you have the opportunity to help, HELP; How the poor man was ignored; All the homeless people we saw on a bus trip; Felt sorry for both-one for being full of sores, one for being inattentive to him; Sad for both-Lazarus had such a miserable life, but the rich man would spend so much time in agony; Rich man and real life test; Lazarus' pain and hunger, knowing there are so many suffering today.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Never thought so much about ignoring; Never thought about it being about people being invisible to us; The need to be compassionate and not judgmental; I'm probably more like the rich man than I ever realized; That God's people will have rewards in heaven.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

*I love hearing it as a story-then I can transform it into my living life; Listened more intently; Story form is easy to follow; I like it when parables are told rather than read-it helps me focus on the sermon better; It made it more real; I'm sure I'm overlooking*

people in need; We are blessed and need to share our blessings when we can-just the recognition of the other is so important; Real life association; Makes it easier to pay attention with the expressions being told rather than read; She did a good job telling the story-I get distracted by my kids so it's hard to keep attention.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

We have only so much time to repent and be right with God and to share his love; Notice others more; That we need to love our fellow men-start seeing others; Pay attention to others-open my eyes to what's going on around me; We need to make a conscious effort to see those around us-especially those in need; Be kind to all; Be thankful for my blessings and share them with those who are less fortunate; See those people around you who are hurting; That we are all God's children; Take care of everyone; We are to see others with the eyes of Jesus; Share-we are all children of God; Be more observant of those in need; That we need to help all his people-I need to be open to who God wants me to help; Stop and look around; Change your view.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

Always something new to call to our attention; It helps to apply it to our daily lives; It moved right along and kept your attention; I like the story form; To remind me-be compassionate; Easy to understand; I listened better; She tells it with such feeling and expression; Kept our attention-made us realize how important everyone is; I focused-it was awesome; Kept my attention.

**Other comments**

The skit went along well with the sermon; Very effective when not read.

## **The Good Samaritan**

**Trinity (told)**

**If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

That the Levite was a servant of the temple; Yes-letting someone help me; The people who didn't help the affected person; That a lawyer asked the question; I hadn't thought of it as a receiving experience; The description of the passersby could be anyone, not just the two proposed in the Bible; I liked the words he chose to use-it gave it a 21<sup>st</sup> century feel; Jesus is never far away; I didn't remember that he paid the innkeeper to take care of the Jew, also had forgotten that Jesus was talking to a lawyer; I know it so well the story wasn't new-the telling of it was.

**List two words that describe your reaction to the parable**

Anger, relief; Help, love; Help everyone; Interesting, familiar; Kindness, compassion; Helpful, needy; Disgust, helpful; Ah yes; You never know who will help you; Kindness, selfish; Familiarity, motivation; Anger, unfairness; Compassion, anger; Timely, important; Self-convicting, eternal; Dismayed, saddened; Do enough; Familiar, compassion; Love disguised; Compassion, friendship; Interesting, sad; Good lesson; Sorrow, kindness; Am I a good neighbor; Neighbor, aided; Pleased, guilty; Mercy, compassion; Good neighbor; Convicted; Pity, sad.

### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Anger at those who beat the man, Relief (maybe gratitude) that someone did stop to help him, anger at how someone, in the first place, could do this to another; It makes you feel convicted or questioning of your own life; Be kind; Saving him, helping him on the side of the road; The actions of the Samaritan; Sadness; Thought of how I should present myself as a non-judgmental Christian to all those outside the church to let them know I am a Christian; The man alongside the road needed help, many did not stop but one man did; Disgust with the so-called pious ones, helpful with the Samaritan; The fact that I knew what was coming from Pr. Tim's opening prayer; How the priest and Levite walked on by; That the man who helped him didn't even know him; The kindness of the Samaritan; The violence of the attack; Anger at the ones that didn't stop to help, compassion for the injured man; The man who wasn't considered Godly was the only one who acted as God commanded; So old, and yet it applies to today's society; The title; Pity, help, react, do; Stranger helping stranger; The person who was least expected to help did so, love knows no boundaries; How considerate for helping the man; Sad for the man; What each person did; Do I react to my neighbor's needs only if convenient?; The way Pr. Tim told the story; Those we expected to help didn't, the one we didn't expect did; Soothed his wounds; Circumstances of the week-something I should have done; People not willing to help.

### **Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Do we get to choose the ones we want to help? We shouldn't but we do; It seemed odd that the interpretation turned back to us; More thought provoking; Think of who is represented by the men, the men who showed what was important to them, the Samaritan was non-judgmental, the sermon about protecting oneself or not; Do not fear helping someone or allowing someone to help you; I didn't realize we should be more willing to accept help; I never thought of the neighbor as being someone trying to help me; that we should accept help as well as give it; Made me realize I need to be more helpful and open up to allow myself to be helped; Letting someone help me; Explaining why the first men walked by; I listened more carefully; Live it, Jesus not very far away, giving, willing to receive; Recognizing I need a neighbor too-it's not a weakness; I never thought of it as letting your neighbor or loved one help you-it's okay to be vulnerable; Made me look at it differently; Didn't think of someone helping me; I never would have seen how often I refuse help from my neighbor; To do more of what I can do; Who is a good neighbor to me; I still feel convicted!

### **Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

The way Jesus was brought into the sermon-he stands ready to help us always; *It made me think about it deeper; It made the sermon more clear; It was told with present day scenes so it was easier to relate to; It was told more as a story than a sermon;* Made us realize we all have a fear of being vulnerable; *Made it more real; I was more attentive during the sermon; I felt drawn into the truth of the parable;* The way of human nature were emphasized in the explanation; *Piques interest; Wanted to hear/learn more; It was more meaningful for me;* I loved the sermon-great job; *More aware of what was said;* Yes, made me more aware of who I should consider my neighbor; *Was more aware of the message in the parable;* Never thought of being on the receiving end of the Samaritan; *It*

helped me totally focus on the story; Always thought about helping others-must be willing to receive; Helped to focus; Already felt emotionally involved with the people.

### **What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Do not be afraid to be in need, that others may offer their gifts; I think Jesus was saying a neighbor is evidenced by what they do, not by circumstances (ethnicity, etc.); We all need help, we all need to help others; Be kind and helpful to all; He is here for us, let him help us; Help all in need-I need to be aware of those in need; We need to stop and help someone who needs help as he would; Be more helpful but also willing to accept help; To not set ourselves apart; Let me help you-I don't need to do everything on my own-what it means to be the body of Christ; Be willing to give and also receive help; Treat everyone as your neighbor-step up and help those around you; A Christian helps others-do I?; The person in need of help may be you sometime. I would want to be helped; Help, rethink neighbor in need; Be willing to give and receive from hymn # 659 "Pray that I may have the grace to let me be your servant too"; Love, give, accept, we need to see past the differences of our one neighbor-even though she isn't very accepting-even on a good day; I need to be more helpful to my neighbor, the human race, no matter who they are; Be a better person, help others, let others help you; Try to receive help with thanks; We are all his children, we are here together and we help each other; We as Christians need to be more aware of the needs around us and also accept the help we need; Be aware of helping; Be there for others and be accepting of help from others; Who is neighborly to me-it is a giving and receiving experience; Let someone else help you; I like the vulnerability thoughts-so true for me. I'll try to reflect on this and act; We can't always choose who we want to help-we all need help sometimes-just need to let others help.

### **What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

It felt one on one; Was is my language; It made me think of the kindness I have shown and received; easy to relate; Brought the parable to light, it applied to me; I like it when we interact more and aren't just preached at; Made it more personal; It was like a conversation; Story form; It was easy to apply to each person's life; It made me listen; It pertained to our existence today; More interest, attention; Easier to understand-it grabs my attention; Able to relate to it; It made the sermon more meaningful; Made me think about myself; It seemed clearer; It made me think about how I see others needs and it also made me want to change the way I give and receive help; I will have to find relative verses elsewhere in the Bible; It kept my attention of who is the neighbor; Easier to understand-new twist on it; I like storytelling better than being read to; Tim took a common parable-one I've heard a thousand of times and helped me think about it differently; Stories are relatable and invoke feelings.

### **Other comments**

These sermons, actually all of them, show me there is room in me for improvement; I know the story is familiar, but I think that many do not know that Samaritans were enemies and that the temple officials were afraid of being unclean. Our kinds of fears were highlighted, but I think it would have been good to cross connect these with the fears in the story; Samaritans are good the parable says, we should be as one; I loved the story-how it was presented on a personal level; The idea of letting someone be a

Samaritan to me was a new way of thinking; Thanks for being the Good Pastor-I wonder if we could make a parable about that?; All need to be aware of our neighbors needs-identifying ourselves as the needy neighbor was new; Neighbor may be anyone; Christian faith are worth and dignity; Best wishes Pr. Kathy; Well done; I really enjoy Pr. Tim-he does a wonderful job; *It increased my focus*; Thanks.

**Maynard (read)**

**If this parable was familiar to you, did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

I think in a lot of parables Jesus doesn't ask such an obvious question at the end; Paying for the man's lodging; Didn't stop because of fear of someone being a burden to you, too busy, lack of compassion for the troubled man, hoped someone else would stop to help, wouldn't know what to do, who is my neighbor?; Helping them is helping yourself through Jesus; Both of the men that walked by had something to do with the church; Different Bible translation so individual words were different.

**List two words that describe your reaction to the parable**

Neighbor, help; Go serve; Ok, what was Jesus saying?; Wonder, sadness; Good neighbor, Help suffering; What kind of neighbor am I?; Helpful, caring; Self doubt; Sympathy, generosity; Familiar; Mercy, neighbor; Mercy; Help, compassion; Stopped by and showed mercy to a stranger; Help and trust; Helping others; Help, kindness; Have mercy on all, help; Familiar, valid; Curiosity, happiness; Mercy, do; Familiar, reminder; Should do; Do good; Neighbor, helper; Helping, good man.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

The man's need for help and the people that didn't; The Samaritan was not afraid to step out and help someone he didn't know; The fact that it was an out of the blue reading and what led up to it; The two who walked by; Help your neighbor; The man willing to help the suffering; Some ignoring the man on the road; It is our duty as a Christian to be a good neighbor to anyone in need, not just those we know; I wonder if I act like the Jewish priest and the temple helper; The need to think of others, not just our friends and family; Not sure, but we need to help others less fortunate; On the side of the road; Heard it before; The one who took the time to help; When the Samaritan, a questionable person helped the sick man; Jesus tells us to go and do the same-be like the Samaritan, help when needed; One that dispensed help; God expects this of us-do unto others; Stranger showed mercy; The ending; I don't know; The last sentence; I recognized it right away, but it is a good reminder to treat others kindly; Doing good, caring for others needs transcends individual or particular social teachings; The one who didn't fit the bill to help was the neighbor; The good Samaritan helped him.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

If everyone is my neighbor, then everyone is worth taking the risk to help; made something more clear, like defining who my neighbors might be; got the forward and it helped explain the story better; Let someone help when you need help; Made me think I should be willing to accept help when I need it and not always think I have to do it; It made me more aware of why I hesitate to do things; I need to let others be a good neighbor to me as well as me being a good one to others; I'm not alone in not helping my

neighbor and accepting help; We all need help; Be open to letting people help me; Do I overlook or help my neighbor?; Give people a chance to help you; You should help others; We should be willing to accept help also; Perspective of the one needing help; He put a whole new perspective on it; Relates it to our time; Pastor turned it on its head or extended it; We usually hear this parable and it encourages us to stretch beyond our negatives and think of others as ourselves, here he suggested we also consider accepting help from someone, maybe someone unexpected. Let your neighbor help you; Sometimes we're the one that needs a helping neighbor-it's a two way deal.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

The sermon explained the parable and then it made sense; Thinking about people outside of my zone; It got to the heart of the matter at hand; *I find I have to concentrate harder when it is read than when it is told*; It is okay to have help from someone else; Who helped me when I needed it?; Helped me understand better the need to help; I was looking for instruction-how to do; Making a sermon ask yourself questions helps make you thirst for the Word-go back to scripture.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

To trust God and take the risk to stop and help in anyway you can; We need to reach out to others and see, feel, and hear their needs-also not be afraid to accept help from others; Neighbors are those in need and those you need to become better people; Look at strangers more like neighbors; Love and help your neighbor; Help others but be willing to accept help; Check your heart; Be compassionate and help, but let others do so too; Be open to help and help when I can, even if it's uncomfortable; We should not only help others but we should be open to receiving help; There are always people who could use our help; It is about others helping me, not that I don't need help; You need me, you need others; Make yourself available to help or be helpful; We need to help others-will try to be a better neighbor; Show compassion-afraid of being vulnerable; No matter how bad things are, nothing is too bad to help; By helping others and also accepting help; Help those in need; Be aware of the two way perspective on need; Kindness and humility are what we all should offer; That we should try to be less fearful of those different from me, help everyone; We should help everyone who needs it even if they are not people we know or are considered undesirable. Maybe I should be more willing to help others even if it makes me uncomfortable; Everyone is our neighbor; It's easier to give assistance than accept it. We are Scandinavian, Western Minnesotans after all; Jesus wants us to help those in need, if we love Jesus we will for his sake; That one should attempt to help if one can.

**What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

*I like the telling of the Bible better. It keeps my attention better*; Anger until explanation; I understood it better; Great examples; Easy to understand; Seeing or being made aware of both sides of being a neighbor; Pr. Tim related the parable to us, in today's word/circumstances; It related to my life; Not sure, never sure where help will come from, but it will come; Words that I can relate to; Traditional, like the story; It's a familiar story; Helped to see how we approach everyone (neighbor); Putting yourself in the person's shoes who needs help-what would you want them to do; Helped me

understand; Gave me a different perspective; Message reframed today; Tim got me thinking about this story in a whole new light; It was good to hear the flip side of this story-all good stories have two sides; I appreciate when a pastor uses a sermon to challenge us, stretch us beyond a comfortable, predictable retelling of the same old tales; Taking a new look at it; It told us we need to help if we can.

### **Other comments**

Since this parable is so familiar it was probably easier to understand. There was a time when we needed help, and it was hard to ask for but many came to our aid and were there for us. This is a great community; The sermon served the purpose of explaining the parable and I liked it.

## **The Prodigal Son**

### **Trinity (told)**

#### **If this parable was familiar to you did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

Didn't know he bough prostitutes; Jesus wants us to be a connected community to each other; The explanation helps connect in a new way; Related the father to the heavenly father, how we should celebrate when a life has been found; *It was told with expression*; Brought home the point that we need Jesus to get through our struggles; An excellent comparison of God's grace through Jesus; No one gave him anything-the anger of the older son.

#### **List two words that describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Compassion, celebration; Forgiveness, joy; Excitement, jealousy; Forgiveness, fairness; Familiar, brother; I felt sorry for the brother that was at home, happy for the father at the return of his younger son; Powerful, forgiveness; Forgiveness always available; Forgiveness, humility; Forgiveness, judgment; Emotional, thankfulness; Compassion, family; Love, forgiveness; Celebration, forgiveness; Forgiveness, understanding; Happy, yet disappointed; Forgiveness, rejoicing; God, forgiveness; Forgiveness; Forgiveness, happiness; Sad, happy; Thankfulness for a father's forgiveness, joyfulness of being forgiven; Unfair, loving; How selfish feelings can tear a family apart; Forgiveness, love; Love, father; Forgiveness, gladness; Pure love; *Expressive, intense*; Love, forgiveness.

#### **What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Pr. Kathy hesitated and emphasized those words; Happiness of a father whose son returned; The father's excitement, the son's jealousy; I have brothers and land; The memory of it; We don't know how we will act; How the father forgave his son; the father's reaction to the younger son; The father's forgiveness, the son being humble; Father was waiting for his son's return; *Partly the emotion and drama with which it was presented, warmth, gestures*; The return, welcome, love you all; Welcoming the son; the detail of the celebration, visualization of the father running to his son; The father; The father's happiness, the older sons disappointment; When the son realized he wanted to come home; Father's reaction; Father had a party, he was lost, now is found; The father was so happy the 1 son returned, sad the other brother couldn't see the blessings he already had; Knowing full well I could go home. In my younger years, I remember one of

our parents would always be awake until all their children were safe at home each night; The younger kid who worked all the time felt slighted, the father was loving (right!); Then anger in his words to his father; The reaction of the father; the response of the father to both sons; The father's reaction; The father showed love to his lost son, no matter what; The part when the excitement rose up from the anger of the son who was pleased for wrong doings; When the father ran to his son without judgment and accepted him back home and showed his love for him and his forgiveness.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

I realized that I identify with the older son. I've felt guilty about that, but now I realize it is also my story; We are all a prodigal son in a way; applied to my life; It seemed more real and put the parable in today's context; your story, great; Not really, but a great reminder, all parables relate to all no matter where one is in one's faith journey; Taught me acceptance-God loves us, whatever; More compassion for the younger son; I love this one-very comforting; We can also compare ourselves to the older son, we very easily become judgmental of others; This is the first time I thought of myself as the older brother; I would say it was enhanced, for sure; When it was compared to today's life, I think it put more of an impact on all of us.

**Did the way the parable was presented affect how you experienced the sermon?**

It was read well; I paid better attention to the sermon; *More story-like, then explained well through the sermon;* We need to forgive, as God forgives us; Easy to follow and listen to; *Hearing the story told instead of read was meaningful;* Set the tone for the sermon; Pr. Kathy spoke from her heart; Teach God's love, kingdom of God; Makes you want to listen to how it is approached; *I understood better the thoughts of the older brother;* *Easier to understand;* I liked how Pr. Kathy related the parable to her work at Project Turnabout, also the explanation of the younger brother and the older brother; *More expression-made it more interesting;* *It became more personal, I could see and feel myself as the characters;* Made me look into my life and made me aware of how I am like those in the parable; More connected to my life; There was a way of connecting the parable and making sense of it with the explanation of the sermon; I thought the sermon would focus on the younger son, but I liked how Pr. Kathy also explained better the reaction from the older son.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

Celebrate those that come back to the family of Christ, however be careful not to take for granted those who have always been there; All God's children, sinners and all always welcome; God is always with us and gets excited when someone turns to him; Even though we sometimes stray we are always welcome back in God's family; Everyone falls away from God, but that doesn't matter, God still loves us and always welcomes us back; We need to forgive as God forgives us; That it doesn't matter how much you mess up, you are forgiven; It doesn't matter what brother you are, we are all accepted by God; No matter what we do, God's love and forgiveness will be there for us if we ask; Not to judge others; Be willing to share our good lives with others; Worthy? Yes, reach out beloved child; Sinners lost are welcomed back by God; He wants everyone-all are welcome; Sins forgiven; Forgiveness; Jesus is always there with us, even if we make bad

choices, it is never too late, he will welcome us back; God always welcomes us back no matter how far we stray, and it's easy to stray; Second chances and forgiveness; We are sinners, no matter how bad, he will welcome us into his kingdom, That Jesus will help you find your way back, even on your darkest days; The message of salvation is for everyone equally; I have been there; When I hear about someone doing something bad, I will hope I don't judge them as being unworthy of forgiveness; We are all beloved no matter what; Cost of loving another, acceptance, no judgment, extravagant love, makes me want to be a better father; Acceptance and forgiveness are important; Love always, forgive; To change lives and change the hearts of others; Forgiveness is very important.

### **What do you think about the way the parable was presented?**

It wasn't read as scripture but told as a story; *Telling a story is more engaging than reading a story*; *It was presented well*; Familiar; *Easy to understand*; It made it easy to apply the teachings to today's world; Told as a story; It was direct and attention grabbing; *Presentation of being talked to vs. read-change lives, change hearts*; *Seemed more personal*; *More informal, stories are more interesting when told in own words, not just read*; Pr. Kathy put lots of feeling into it; *Easy to understand*; *The enthusiasm and the way it was presented*; More expression and the example of the people from Turnabout was easy to relate to; *I like storytelling*; Pr. Kathy is an eloquent speaker; *It was easier to become one or all of the characters*; Simple; Made me look at how I see and judge others; *Storytelling makes it a lot more personal*; *Storytelling-more engaging, said with feeling*; *Energy was good-kept my attention*; *Dynamic storytelling*; I could relate to it because of the example in the sermon about the boys in Turnabout, as my cousin is in there now, because of her wrong doings; *It's easier to understand when it's told as a story rather than straight out from the Bible.*

### **Other comments**

I liked this; I just read a story about the prodigal son by Danielle Steele; Thank you Kathy; Excellent delivery; *The way the stories are told rather than read remind me of my years in country school when our teacher would read a chapter or two from a book, I would get caught up in the stories and become one of the characters*; I wonder if the church sees us as the wayward son when we leave; I found it very interesting about the Turnabout story; I thought she did a wonderful job with today's sermon-I like it when there are connections to today's world that we can relate to to understand better.

### **Maynard (read)**

#### **If this parable was familiar to you did you hear anything in it you hadn't before?**

"While he was still far off"- this line, in reference to the father noticing the son returning, was a new line that I noticed. This, though a small line helps put emphasis on the father's love. The father's love transcends distance and reached out to the son. It's a metaphor for our Father in heaven's far reaching love; Most of the story was not familiar to me, so most of it was new; Told 1<sup>st</sup> son that he was with him always and all he had belonged to him; the fact that he was dead but is now alive; Reading started with the son's leaving, and then his demeaning slave-like service after he had lost his fortune.

**List two words to describe your immediate reaction to the parable**

Familiar, interesting; Lost, found; Relief, hope; 2 sons; Treat fair; Forgiveness (father), selfishness (son); Lost but now found; Father's love; Love, forgiveness; Reflective, thankful; Lost, now found; Heartfelt father's love; Forgiveness and love; The lost sheep was found.

**What in the parable triggered that reaction?**

Relating it to the Turnabout men-we have all sinned and get welcomed back; That he was lost; Relief and hope are given by the message of the father's far reaching love. No matter what happens in life, God has open arms to those who stray. No matter how dark and dreary times get, God, the father, welcomes us home with open arms; One was different than the other; Having a big party for the son who left and spent everything; The father gave the son what he wanted and he selfishly squandered it away. Then the father, like most loving parents forgave him and welcomed him home; Everyone was happy for the son's return except the fatted calf; The oldest son's reaction; The father's welcoming the son on his return; Thankful that I have a good relationship with my parents, and Jesus always being there for us; The son was lost in life, but now was found; Deep love of the father no matter what the sons did; The fact that the father threw a celebration; The ending.

**Did hearing the sermon change your reaction to the parable?**

Meant more with the Turnabout men; The parallel to Project Turnabout brought the spiritual value of Jesus' parable to life. We take those life-giving words for granted. This gave me the revelation that the Word of God shouldn't be acknowledged as a TV re-run, but each time we hear them we should listen and put ourselves into the story; We could be both sons; That Jesus was telling a story not about something that happened but about the things I do. Jesus was talking about each one of us in all his parables; It made me reflect more on the younger and older brother, and I have been both in my life; Perhaps a better understanding of the lost or younger son; As one of my favorite parables it is great to know I can always come home and be welcomed; Bringing about the point that the parables are made up stories, our stories, about God so we can know God better.

**Did the way the parable was present affect how you experienced the sermon?**

*In the sermon yes, it was brought to life by the Turnabout allusion. But as it was read, maybe hearing it told as it was presented to the Turnabout men could have been beneficial;* It made me think about forgiveness and God and Jesus being a part of my life; made me more aware; It keeps my attention to hear about the men at Turnabout and how it affected them, then to hear it from the younger brother's and older brother's perspectives was great.

**What do you think Jesus was saying with this parable?**

It was so true for our family; Jesus is stating about how he saves us. We were lost, we spit in the face of our Lord. I've strayed from the church frequently, even after pursuing a religious degree but God the father welcomes me and others back because of Jesus' sacrifice. The story presents unconditional love from the father; Everyone's life is different. I am a lot different from my siblings; forgive and forget; We need to accept

others as they are and forgive them. Struggling with this as it pertains to a family member of ours; We all fall short and make bad choices but we are welcomed back by God; It doesn't matter what we've done as long as we repent we will be saved; always love each other; No matter what we do wrong, we can always come back to God and he will welcome us; Being compassionate and realizing Jesus and God will always be there to show us the right path; Try to accept everyone into God's kingdom no matter how long one has been faithful; Accept all your children no matter what-equally. Assure them of your love; That no matter what I've done his arms are always open for me; Important thing is that people who have been home shouldn't be jealous. God's love is infinite-always room to celebrate one who returns.

**What do you think of the way the parable was presented?**

Because it affects so many family and their lives; The sermon-the explanation made it hit home. The Turnabout men's reaction, of those who haven't heard this, explained the grace we have been given and should be grateful for; *I like the telling better; I like it told as a story better*; Probable explained better to reflect the lost son, always felt sympathetic to the 1<sup>st</sup> son; It became personal; Stories make it easier for me to understand the meaning.

**Other comments**

Connecting it to the congregation's life is great. Too often pastors get high and lofty. You brought it down to a common, level ground-that is, absolutely marvelous; I have never looked at this story from the older brother's side-that is an important lesson too; Good delivery; This was my second favorite parable. The Good Samaritan was my favorite. Thanks for a wonderful summer of parables; Interesting that pastor didn't just teach about the parable but also said all parables are important lessons/stories to know God.

## APPENDIX G

### TRANSCRIPTS

#### **Pr. Tim Ehling's interview**

**Me:** When you started, ah, doing the biblical storytelling, first of all, did, as you were working on that, what was your practice, how did you start working on the story for biblical storytelling, your parables?

**Tim:** So first of all I would ask you which story we were doing, then I would take it and I would live it, I would walk with it, and um, memorize each part, and kind of carry it with me, and repeat it throughout the day. And so I would often begin as a spiritual practice in the mornings, then carry it out through the day with remembering it and going back to it when I forgot. So it became for me a great way to um, practice hearing the story over and over and over again, and getting it, in kind of some ways inside of me, and um, what I found is that as I did my other types of ministry throughout the day, little parts of the story would come back to me, and I would start repeating it, I would start saying it, whether it was in my head or out loud in the car, or you know, when I was doing a visit, I would say a part of the scripture text because it was so, it was starting to become so ingrained, in, in my thought process, as well as my living, but really with dwelling with the word, living with the word, which was really refreshing to me.

**Me:** Now have you preached on those parables before? I think you did the rich fool and...

**Tim:** I preached on all the parables before.

**Me:** The Good Samaritan.

**Tim:** Yeah

**Me:** And did you find that your sermon you preached...how, how did doing that affect the sermon that you wrote and preached? How did the biblical storytelling affect that?

**Tim:** Well, it was the telling of the story, for me, that affected the preaching, it was living with it all week long, and so I started to see things in the story that I haven't before, because it was so much a part of my thought process. It wasn't just I'm going to sit down and read the scripture and think about it, it was I took it with me and lived it, and in some ways it became alive, and it helped me understand what a living word is, that it is really so connected to our everyday lives and all that we do, and not separated from a preachable moment, or a study time, but so enmeshed in what we're doing, all the time. And so it became alive for me. It was a living word, and I became alive and engaged in the sermon moment because I now wanted to express from the scripture what I had been living all week long.

**Me:** Okay. Do you think you wrote a different sermon than you would have if you hadn't lived that sermon throughout the week?

**Tim:** I spoke a different sermon, I lived a different sermon, I proclaimed a different sermon, and it was the proclamation that really mattered right? I mean, all the rest of it, it sort of culminates in the proclamation of the word. No matter what way we approach the, the scripture text, it's the proclamation, and the proclamation had more energy for me, and more excitement, more meaning and more connection to the people and to their lives, as well as mine, because of the approach to biblical storytelling.

**Me:** Okay. How do you think the approaches were different in each church or were they the same? How did you feel as they were told the story as opposed to how you read the scripture text with, with the congregations?

**Tim:** In terms of the preaching or in terms of just the reading?

**Me:** The reading

**Tim:** Um, I think that both churches um, expressed more engagement with the telling of the story than with the reading of the story. I think that they were listening more, ah, because there was more eye contact, more, more movement, and the words became more engaging for them in the telling of the story than the reading of the story. I didn't notice a difference in the churches, big church, little church with that, it was similar, that they were both more engaged with the telling of the story than with the reading of it. And maybe it was just kind of built into their DNA. Somebody starts reading a story to you, you start to drift off to sleep, because grandma, and mom and dad, and Aunt Lois would always read to us before we went to bed and we would drift off to sleep right? But when you tell a story there is this way of becoming a part of it, and you see yourself, you start to see yourself in the story, because of the energy of the teller. And even if you go back to um, you know, Native American storytellers or African American storytellers, when they start telling a story you are listening. They're not reading it to you, they're telling it, and their, their motions, their, their um, body language, makes the words more real to you. And I think that's what happened with the telling of the story, with both churches with the biblical story. Um I think it was just more than just me, active and alive, it was, they were more engaged with it.

**Me:** Do you think, or did you perceive, a difference between how they heard the sermon, and engaged with the sermon, when they had the biblical storytelling as opposed to just reading the scripture? Do you think they were more engaged, less engaged one way or the other?

**Tim:** Um, I'm not sure how to answer that question. It would have been interesting to prepare the sermon by just reading it and studying it and then prepare another one by biblical storytelling it. Um, to distinguish between, am I, do I preach differently when I tell the story and memorize it or read the story and study it. Um is it, is it like Lowrey talks about it an ordering of experiences or an ordering of ideas, which is a different way of preaching. When you order experiences it's much more engaging than when you order ideas. So, um, and I tend to work toward ordering experiences all the time, um, so I'm not sure if I saw them engage differently when I did the biblical storytelling or when I read the scripture. I, I can't nail that down. I can't define that for sure. So maybe your research can help with some of that.

**Me:** Yeah and I'll, I'll look at the uh, surveys to see, my...one of the things that I've realized as I've been going through the surveys is they, everybody had a really hard time disconnecting the scripture text from the sermon, when they talked about them. So when I asked for information about the parable, how it was presented, what they thought the

parable was saying, they constantly connected what they'd heard in the sermon, with what they were answering, so they could not separate those two.

**Tim:** Which I think may be good because the preachable moment begins not when you start preaching but when you tell the biblical story and whether you read it or tell it, that word begins the preachable time. And, you know, sometimes we've played with that, in terms of prefaced a reading or preached before the reading with the reading in the center, and it all becomes, and maybe what they, what they're naming is that's all the preachable moment for them, rather than just when the preacher stands in the pulpit or up front and starts talking it's the telling of the story that's the preachable moment and you know, and sometimes that word, maybe not, more than sometimes, often that word can just stand alone as a sermon in and of itself, that anything else we say is fluff, because the word itself is the proclamation.

**Me:** Well, and that's what one of the writers that I read said, a text well read or well presented is a sermon half preached.

**Tim:** Yeah, I agree with that, completely.

**Me:** Do you think you will be using this technique regularly or from time to time, biblical storytelling,

**Tim:** Always, yes, and you know, that's where I, that's where my passion is, and that's where my heart lies, and that's where my energy gets fueled, by the biblical storytelling, so that will always be the way that I prepare.

**Me:** Even if you don't do it on, in the worship service, do you think you will prepare that way?

**Tim:** I'm not sure...oh, yeah, yes, yes, yes, that's the way I do prepare.

**Me:** Okay, all right. Good.

### Confirmation Class Discussion

#### The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

Parable read by Vicar Matt Danielson

Following Discussion

**Me:** Okay, have any of you heard that parable before? Kory you've heard it? Anybody else? Tyler you have? Anybody else heard that? Okay, so what do you think Jesus was trying to say when he told this story? Olivia?

**Olivia:** Don't do to other people what you don't want done to you.

**Me:** Don't do to other people what you don't want done to you. Okay, could be. Yeah? I'm sorry, what?

**Student:** Forgive them?

**Me:** Forgive them, okay, anybody else? So what did you think of the story?

**Student:** It was harsh

**Me:** It was harsh? Yeah, it was kind of harsh. What was harsh about it?

**Student:** (muffled, unknown)

**Me:** The guy who was forgiven didn't forgive somebody else. That was pretty harsh wasn't it? Anybody else have anything? Did you think it was an interesting parable?

**Students:** Yeah, not really

**Me:** Not really? Kind of, maybe?

**Student:** It was interesting a little bit.

**Me:** It was interesting a little bit? Okay. Well, how many of you, and be honest, how many of you really paid attention when Vicar Matt was reading?

**Student:** (muffled, unknown)

**Me:** How many of you kind of had your attention wander, maybe a little bit.

(Some students raised their hands)

**Vicar Matt:** (Jokingly) What?! You're lying

**Me:** I noticed a few of you maybe...ah, not listening as well. Okay, so now we're going to do something just a little bit different, and I want you to listen up again, when Jesus...I think I already told you, a long time ago, when they used to tell these...when they used to talk about Jesus to people, they told stories, right? That they sat around and told stories about Jesus so people would understand him? Okay. So, I'm gonna tell, I'm gonna *tell* this parable. (told the parable)

Okay, now let me ask: did you hear anything in there that maybe you didn't hear the first time? What, what did you hear?

**Student:** They threw him in jail.

**Me:** They threw him in jail. You hadn't heard that part before. Okay, anyth...Yep? Olivia?

**Olivia:** The certain amounts of money.

**Me:** The certain amounts of money, okay because 10,000 talents is like, a talent is like a year's worth of money, so that'd be like 10,000 years worth of money. No wonder he couldn't pay. A denarii is maybe like, I don't know, a week. And so the one guy owed 10,000 years worth of money, and the other guy, maybe a hundred weeks worth of money. So that's a pretty big difference isn't it?

What else, did anybody hear anything else? Which one kept your attention better? Did one keep your attention more than the other?

**Students:** Yeah, yes, the second one.(general consensus)

**Me:** The second one? The story one? Why?

**Students:** Because you were more like...(muffled)...The first one because it was louder.

**Me:** Did anyone like the first one better? You liked it when Vicar Matt read better?

**Student:** Yeah

**Me:** Okay, Why?

**Student:** (muffled, unknown, perhaps "It wasn't so dramatic")

**Me:** Was it maybe *too* dramatic for you the second time?

**Student:** No

**Me:** No?

**Student:** (unknown)

**Me:** You were paying attention better the first time? Okay. Yep?

**Student:** There were a lot more words the second time.

**Me:** Okay, you think there were a lot more words in the second one.

**Student:** I liked the second one because you used your hands.

**Me:** In the second one I used my hands more.

**Vicar Matt:** If you would have held the Bible for me I could have used my hands too.

**Me:** Haha. Laurel, hang on, hang on, hang on, I can't hear.

**Laurel:** (unknown)

**Me:** Excuse me, one more time, just a second. I'm sorry, please, I cannot hear. Yeah? Once more.

**Laurel:** The second one had more detail.

**Me:** The second one had more detail. Like what?

**Laurel:** Well, you explained how the guy took the servant by the neck.

**Me:** Okay, okay. Anything else? Anybody else like one better than the other? Yeah?

**Student:** The second one showed more expression.

**Me:** The second one showed more expression. Derreck

**Derreck:** I liked the first one more because it was like more vocal and like longer.

**Me:** Okay, it was longer and you could hear it better? Okay. Alright. Anybody else?, so just so, a show of hands,...(tape cut out, so I couldn't get the rest of that discussion, but when asked for a show of hands for who preferred which method, the majority preferred the second method. They were surprised to hear that both stories were exactly the same, one was just read, and the other was told, but the language was the same. I then broke the students into groups to learn a passage to tell as a story: some learned Matthew 8 23-27 and others Luke 8:22-25. Students then gathered together again to discuss the activity.)

**Me:** First of all, what was that like for you guys?

**Students:** Hard!

**Me:** Okay, so it was hard.

**Students:** Exhausting. It was awesome!

**Me:** How many of you, how many of you, if you had to, even without using the exact same words, could tell this story to somebody? Even if you didn't have it exactly memorized, could you tell the story to somebody?

**Students:** yeah,...no,...(agreement by some, disagreement by others)

**Me:** Okay, who wants to just tell me right now, just kind of the basic story. Who wants to do that? Okay, Alex...Okay Ashton?

**Ashton:** I know one part. (At this point the noise level increased)

**Me:** If you can hear me, clap once, (clap) if you can hear me clap twice (clap,clap) if you can hear me clap three times. (clap, clap, clap) You are not going to have a chance tonight, because we've run out of time, to present what you've memorized. If you want to work on it this week, though, maybe next week we'll have a chance, but if somebody just wants to tell me basically what happened in the story...Okay, Olivia

**Olivia:** Ummmm, basically God went with his disciples, in a boat, they went sailing and, he fell asleep and then there was a thunderstorm and then ummm they woke him up and then he stopped it..

**Me:** Okay. That's a pretty basic telling..

**Student:** Jesus took a nap.

**Me:** Okay, Jesus took a nap. Right. Yes, Lauren

**Lauren:** They were like amazed...

**Me:** They were amazed.

**Lauren:** That he could, they said who was this who could stop the winds, the waves and the water.

**Me:** (To some boys who were being disruptive...Okay guys, move away from that because you're bumping it and it's hard to hear.)Okay so they were amazed, and they said who is this guy, who can stop the waves and the water and all of that., right? Okay, and yeah, Ashton

**Ashton:** (unknown)

**Me:** Anyone else want to add anything more to that?

**Student:** He got into a boat with his disciples.

**Me:** He got into a boat with his disciples. I am betting, that you guys will remember, you guys will remember this story, even if you don't have it down word for word, you're gonna remember this story because you worked on it. You worked on trying to remember it, you worked on trying to um, get everything the way it was, and you're gonna remember this story even if you don't get it word for word. That's what's important, is remembering the story so you can tell other people about it. So, um, I'm not sure if Pastor is here yet, I'm guessing he should be here shortly, so what I, in general, I know this probably wasn't your favorite thing to do, but what did you think of it, did you enjoy...

**Students:** Yeah, (general agreement)

**Me:** Do you want to do that again?

**Students:** Yeah! Yeah! (No!) Yeah!

**Me:** Okay. We'll see. Maybe we'll have a chance to do that again.

**Student:** No!

**Me:** But, in the meantime, I want you to quietly put your books away or get ready to take them with you, as we go to your seats, remind yourselves of your baptism...(students prepared for closing worship.

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