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Jesus' Methodology of Storytelling is an Effective Means of Communication in Our Emerging Culture

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

JESUS' METHODOLOGY OF STORYTELLING IS AN EFFECTIVE MEANS
OF COMMUNICATION IN OUR EMERGING CULTURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE

BY

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PETER ALVIN BALABAN

PRESENTED: MARCH 16, 2005

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DEDICATION

To my hero, Alvin Francis Balaban

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ABSTRACT

It is Sunday morning, and they come. They are Lutheran, either by heritage, by family choice, or because they have found their home here. Though they gather as generations before them, they are not the same. They live in a world where information is not what they seek but rather understanding of all the information that assaults them. The pastor steps forward to share a message.

Statement of Problem

What is faith storytelling like in this third millennium? How can one effectively communicate the Good News to information-tired people so that it makes a difference to them today? To address this problem, I propose the use of story as an effective communication tool in today's culture.

Chapter Summaries

By way of introduction, chapter one illustrates the problem through a narrative story. In chapter two, I present biblical materials to show that storytelling was an effective medium used by the prophets and especially by Jesus. Just as Jesus used storytelling for preaching to His culture so today preachers can communicate faith using storytelling in our emerging culture. In chapter three, I present materials to demonstrate that our culture is changing, and therefore ministry in our culture needs to change. In chapter four, I present evidence of the power of story. In chapter five, I expand on

chapter four by showing how story is used as a powerful communication tool in our culture. In chapter six, I explore my journey that resulted from this quest and share examples of stories and their impact. In the conclusion, I present the solution of the storyteller as an effective communicator of the Gospel in ways that capture the heart of today's pilgrim.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“One time I dreamed I was preaching, woke up, and discovered I was!”

“Can you hear me?” “Is the message getting through?” As Pastor Pete stepped up to the pulpit, he could not shake those thoughts. The last one hit him the hardest.

Pastor Pete had practiced his story, was confident in his delivery and was now hopeful for a good reception. The challenge lay before him as it does before every preacher today stepping up to the pulpit to deliver a message: How can I communicate the Good News of God in Christ to information-tired people?

As he stepped forward, Pastor Pete could see the rituals beginning. George was sitting on the left-hand side near the back door, and as if on cue, he looked at his watch. Al, on the other end of the same pew, stretched both arms high above his head as he yawned. Sherry began to dig into her purse, looking for those Cheerios she hoped she had remembered to pack this morning, an effort to keep little Raphael quiet if not content—neither goal was ever completely reached. Debbie was distracted by the work she still needed to finish to meet her client’s deadline. Alexis was thankful that last week’s clinic went well, that they really helped some people in their medical situations.

Continuing his sweep, Pete saw one person after another. He spotted Jonathan sitting there, already with his head slumped down—maybe this morning he would not snore. As he looked up into the balcony, he was not sure what Amanda and Bryan were doing in the back row, but he was sure it was not the upcoming message that was making

them smile and poke each other. Brent and RJ were whispering back and forth, discussing the new *Matrix* movie they had seen this weekend. Michael had taken the pencil out of the pew rack and was sketching his version of an X-Men 2 battle scene. Children here and there across the sanctuary were playing either with toys brought for them or by them or with their imaginations and anything that was within arm's reach. Rhonda was sitting in her usual spot, and as usual, she was wondering about the food she left cooking in the oven—would it be ready for the kids when they came over this afternoon? Joe kept glancing back over his shoulder, checking the clouds moving in, wondering if he would be able to get in his round of golf before the weather turned bad. Abbey sat motionless, almost emotionless, as she replayed the argument she and her parents just had before leaving for church. Moreover, how could her folks get out of the car with those fake smiles? Sitting in front of Abbey was Katie, whose friend, Ashley, came with her today because she had stayed with her overnight. George is praying that he will not be in the next group of “furloughed” employees, while also praying for his friend, Ben, who was laid off. Rebecca was worried about her marriage. Elizabeth was worried she would be the only one not to be asked to the prom. Tyler was wondering if he had saved enough money to finally get his car—after all, he was already 16 and a half!

Congregations across the USA are categorized as homogeneous groups that generally reflect the socio-economic status of the area in which they are located. Though people may belong to the same social class, everyone who comes on any given Sunday morning comes from his or her own life path and finds himself or herself sitting in a sanctuary with many different thoughts, problems, concerns, attitudes, and feelings. Each has journeyed to this place, to this sanctuary. Some have been members of their churches

for as long as they can remember. Some of the young people have grown up in church. In every church, there is a small group who has visited here for the first time for any number of reasons.

*“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.”*

Pete began in the way that for centuries, pastors have greeted the assembled before the message. Was it just the idealistic desire within him, or was it the Spirit? Pete did not know for sure, but it seemed that for just a moment—for a holy moment—everyone in the room paused (with the exception of the sleeping Jonathan), as if to silently acknowledge, “What do you have to say to me? Does God have something to say that will speak to ME?”

Can one communicate a message that speaks the Story of God to a widely diverse assembly of people who each have their own problems, issues, concerns, hopes, dreams—their own stories? How do you capture hearts in today’s culture? What is a faith storyteller like in this third millennium? How can one effectively communicate the Good News to information-overloaded people so that it makes a difference to them today?

As a pastor for more than 24 years, I have seen changes come and changes go. The challenge for each moment is to reach people with a message that communicates God and God’s love to each person’s unique and personal stories. With all the changes in worship styles, music, vestments, and practices, how do we communicate the message effectively?

As I began my Doctor of Ministry journey, I also began a journey with a group of people, and together we founded a new faith community, Lighthouse Lutheran Church. We wanted to explore authentic worship that would reach our target group, consisting of the *over-churched* and the *under-churched*. *Over-churched* are those who have been part of established congregations and were either unfulfilled or hurt by their experience. (There is an old preacher's joke that asks, "You know why people do not go to church?" Answer: "They have been!") *Under-churched* are people who have not been touched by established churches for whatever reason. While remaining Lutheran in theological orientation, we at Lighthouse Lutheran Church did not let form dictate our function. That is, we did not identify ourselves as Lutherans by the form of worship we conducted. We opened ourselves up to modern worship music, different or no liturgy, and informal settings with no robes or other vestments.

My journey has been supported by my father, a confirmed Lutheran, self-taught Luther historian, and lecturer. He prefers hymns to worship songs, liturgy to group participation, and formal to informal worship. However, it was he who gave me the focus for my dissertation in an e-mail he sent after Christmas Eve Worship in 2002. On Christmas Day, I received this warm note:

From : Alvin F. (Al) F. Balaban <balabana@juno.com>
 Sent : Wed, 25 Dec 2002 14:38:50—0600
 To : attitudeone@hotmail.com
 Subject : Revelation

Pete... On the way home last night a thought or an idea kept creeping around in my head—and in fact I went to sleep last night still pondering. During the night I woke and the idea took some form. Here is the essence of my thoughts. Last evening I went to the 6 pm Worship at Peace with June, Carl and Jen. It was a nice service, well attended, and we were warmly greeted by those we recognized (and vice-versa). Like I said, there was nothing spectacular in the

conduct of the service, in fact, it seemed to June and me (do not know about the other two guys) that even the Sermon was OK but nothing out of the ordinary. The other Balabans went home, I went to Lighthouse.

I cannot say too much about the general context of the service. It was OK but nothing unusual for Lighthouse except one (only one) thing:

The sermon: "Not One. Not A Single One." Outstanding! I was captured by everything about your message and the way you presented it. About half way through, I realized how taken I was and I glanced around to see that almost everyone I could see was focused. Sure there were the usual kids in the back poking/chirping, etc. But the adults in my vision were as captured as I was.

That is when I started feeling there was something here that I was trying to articulate but that was escaping me until very early this morning....

Why do people come anyway? They came because you are a classic preacher. It is the only common denominator in all the churches you have served. It is the only common denominator. It is not the bells and whistles, or even the operational style of the church.

This tender thought shared by my father meant a great deal to me, not just because he is my father, but also because he has been in the communication business all his life. Alvin was Director of Communications for Gulf Stream Aerospace at the time of his retirement. His comments solidified my direction for study and exploration. Hence, my thesis: Christ's methodology of storytelling is an effective communication tool for our emerging culture.

In this introductory chapter, I have introduced the problem and my proposed solution. In chapter two, I will explore the biblical use of story. First, I will explore how the prophets in the Old Testament used storytelling for effective communication. Second, I will focus on Jesus and how He chose storytelling as His preferred communication methodology. In chapter three, I will explore our changing culture and the need for changing ministry in and to the emerging culture. In chapter four, I will explore the power of story. In chapter five, I will further explore how storytelling is an

effective communication tool. Finally, I will examine what I have learned and how it can apply to ministry in my cultural situation.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLE STUDY OF STORY

The rabbi was once asked: "Why does the parable possess such great influence?"

The maggid replied: "I will explain this by a parable:

"Truth was accustomed to walk about as naked as he was born. No one allowed him to enter a home, and everyone who encountered him ran away in fright.

"Truth felt greatly embittered and could find no resting place. One day he beheld Parable attired in colorful, expensive garments.

"Parable inquired: 'Why are you so dejected, my friend?'

"Truth replied: 'I am in a bad situation. I am old, very old, and no one cares to have anything to do with me.'

"'Nay,' retorted Parable, 'it is not because of your age that you are disliked by people. Look, I am as old as you are, and the older I grow, the more do I seem to be loved. Let me disclose to you the secret of my apparent popularity. People enjoy seeing everything dressed up and somewhat disguised. Let me lend to you my garments, and you will see that people will like you as well.'

"Truth followed this counsel and dressed himself in the garments of Parable. Ever since then, Truth and Parable walk hand in hand, and men love both of them."¹

¹ Howard W. & Yaella Wonzer Polsky, *Everyday Miracles* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson Press, 1989), 47.

Jesus used many parables, vivid illustrations of spiritual truth, drawn from everyday life to capture and hold the interest of ordinary listeners. This was to proclaim His gospel and to lead listeners to see the spiritual truth.²

What comes to mind when one hears the word *gospel*? Would anyone equate gospel with storytelling? Yet, that is the origin of the gospel. The gospels are from a storytelling tradition. The word *gospel* is a shortened form of the Old English word *godspell*,⁴ in which “god” = “good” and “spell” = “tale”—therefore *gospel* means “good tale.” If one were to think of the original definition of “spell,” it was a spoken word or set of words believed to have magical power—the word carries the meaning of a tale whose telling had power.⁵

Further, the Latin word *evangelium* is a transliteration of the Greek *euangelion*. This word can also be broken into its two parts, *eu* meaning “good,” and *angelion*, which refers to “angel,” a messenger. It meant “good news.”⁶ The word *euangelion* could refer to both the message and the messenger. Thus, in the Greek tradition, an *euangelion* could also be a messenger who delivered good news.

² G.J. Wenham, et al, *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 957.

⁴ Henry Snyder Gehman, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1962), 339.

⁵ George Buttrick, Editor, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 442.

⁶ James Strong, S.T.D., *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1890), entries 2097, 2098.

A Biblical Look at “Story”

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; He did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Matthew 13:34).

When examining the use of story in the Bible, the first word one finds is the Hebrew word *לִשְׁמָה*, which means: proverb, parable, proverbial saying, aphorism, byword, similitude, poem, ethical maxim or sentences of ethical wisdom.⁸ This word is used in the following Old Testament passages.

Psalm 78:2

O my people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in *parables*,
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
what we have heard and known,
what our fathers have told us. (Emphasis added)

The prologue to the book of Proverbs that lays out its purpose and theme uses the word “parable” to mean similar things to “proverb.”

Proverbs 1:5-7

let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—
for understanding proverbs and *parables*,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (Emphasis added)

Other Old Testament scriptures use the word *לִשְׁמָה* to demonstrate the prophets’ use of parables or stories in their messages. The prophet Ezekiel always strove after a

⁸ Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, entry 4912.

concrete representation of abstract thought. By design, he spoke in parables in order to awaken the attention of the people to the real import of his message.⁹

Ezekiel 17:1-8

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a **parable**. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders. He took some of the seed of your land and put it in fertile soil. He planted it like a willow by abundant water, and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out leafy boughs. But there was another great eagle with powerful wings and full plumage. The vine now sent out its roots toward him from the plot where it was planted and stretched out its branches to him for water. It had been planted in good soil by abundant water so that it would produce branches, bear fruit and become a splendid vine.'" (Emphasis added)

This is the first part of this story from Ezekiel. Ezekiel presents the story here and then follows it with an interpretation (Ezekiel 17:11-21). In the ancient Near East, eagles were well established symbols of military strength and royal splendor. Armies were said to travel with the swiftness of eagles (Lamentations 4:19; Habakkuk 1:8). In his eulogy over Saul and Jonathan, David states that the deceased, both royals and warriors, were "swifter than eagles" (2 Samuel 1:23b). On the divine plane, God uses eagle imagery to describe how He brought Israel from the Reed Sea to Sinai (Exodus 19:4). An eagle face takes its place among those of the living creatures supporting God's heavenly throne (Ezekiel 1:10; 10:41). Eagles were associated with speed, strength and pride. Depending

⁹ Herbert Lockyer, *All The Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1963), 63-64. While the purpose here is just to introduce the usage of parable in Scripture, the parables of Ezekiel are given individual and thorough individual treatment in Lockyer's work.

on its context, eagle imagery could bear either fearsome or benevolent associations.¹⁰

A certain great eagle with strong wings, long pinions, and colorful plumage flies to Lebanon. There, the eagle plucks the topmost growth of a cedar tree and carries it to the land of Canaan. This first eagle was the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took the young king Jehoiachin and carried him off to Babylonia. The “seed of the land” was Zedekiah, who was placed upon the throne of Judah following the deportation of Jehoiachin and served as a vassal to his Babylonian overlord (“its branches turned toward him”). The second eagle, then, would have been Psammetichus II, Pharaoh of Egypt. The warning of the prophet is that a defection from the obligations to Babylon and political alliance with Egypt would only result in the destruction of the kingship in Judah (“the vine”).¹¹

A few chapters later, Ezekiel apparently struggled with the reception of his messages in the form of story. When God instructs him to share a message of divine judgment, the prophet replies, “Then I said, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! They are saying of me, ‘Isn’t he just telling parables?’” (Ezekiel 20:49, emphasis added). The thought is conveyed that the people will consider him just a good storyteller. The people probably delighted in the imaginative parables without taking them or the prophet seriously. It

¹⁰ Thomas Dozeman, Dennis Olson, and Ronald E. Clements, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume II* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1245.

¹¹ Clifton J. Allen, et al, *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1971), 279-280.

may well be that the people understood but simply refused to apply the message in any personal way to themselves.¹²

Another example of the prophet's use of parable can be seen in the parable of the boiling cauldron.

Ezekiel 24:1-5

In the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day, the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, record this date, this very date, because the king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. Tell this rebellious house a **parable** and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

"Put on the cooking pot; put it on
and pour water into it.
Put into it the pieces of meat,
all the choice pieces—the leg and the shoulder.
Fill it with the best of these bones;
take the pick of the flock.
Pile wood beneath it for the bones;
bring it to a boil
and cook the bones in it.'"

In reference to a rather self-confident proverb used among the people (see Ezekiel 11:3), the prophet states, while the proverb may be true, that it is true in a sense vastly different from what the hearer perceived. Instead of the pot providing an ironclad defense from the fire, meaning the enemy, it shall be a boiling pot set on the fire and the people just like so many pieces of meat subjected to the heat. Earlier the prophet used the image of the eagle; now he uses very common elements that would be part of the everyday life of his hearers.

Another Old Testament example of the use of common elements comes in the story of the prophet Jotham about the peoples' cry for a king to rule over the nation.

Judges 9:7-15

When Jotham was told about this, he climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and

¹² Ibid., 292-293.

shouted to them, "Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?' Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"

Jotham, the one remaining son of Gideon who had escaped the slaughter of Gideon's family, stood on Mt. Gerizim, a place tradition had associated with covenants and the proclamation of blessing (Deuteronomy 27:12; Joshua 8:33). However, Jotham proclaims not a blessing but a curse on Abimelech and the residents of Shechem for wanting a king. Standing on the mount, he and his listeners could look at the diversified foliage of the valley below as he made his point. The people possibly could even envision the trees choosing a "king." The offer to be "king" is first made to the trees that were considered valuable as produce-bearing—the olive tree, fig tree, and vine. However, they refused the offer to be "king," choosing rather to serve, producing oil, figs, and grapes, instead of ruling. Perhaps the prophet is referring here to his father Gideon and the other judges before him, who had declined to accept the power of kings when they might have had them.¹³ After the olive tree, fig tree, and vine refuse to be "king," the same offer is made to the thornbush, which accepts it with vain exultation. The worthless thornbush accepts the position and invites them to "come and take refuge

¹³ Frank E. Gaebel, et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 439.

in my shade.” Shade as protection was a frequent image associated with kings in the ancient Near East.¹⁴ Ironically, a thornbush would offer little actual shade.

Here is one final example from the Old Testament, Nathan’s strategy for handling a crisis with King David. King David had reached the pinnacle of military and political power. In about four decades, he had risen from being an obscure teenage boy tending the sheep of his father to being recognized as the most powerful figure in the whole Mediterranean Basin.

The story to consider is recorded in 2 Samuel: “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.” (2 Samuel 11:1). The narrator gives the impression that every able bodied man in Israel goes to war, except the king, David. Leading troops into battle was expected to be the major external activity of an ancient Near Eastern ruler.¹⁵ By staying in Jerusalem, David fell prey to his temptation—he slept with Bathsheba, and when she became pregnant, he tried to cover it up by bringing her husband home from the war. Uriah refused to sleep with his wife while his fellow soldiers were still engaged in battle. So David decided to cover his sin in another way. He sent word to Joab to put Uriah in a place in the battle where he would certainly be killed. Once accomplished, Bathsheba did her period of mourning for her husband, and David took her as his wife, and she bore him a son. David had hoped and plotted for this course of events to happen. The king’s honor had been publicly preserved. David surely imagined that all was well, and the

¹⁴ Thomas Dozeman, Dennis Olson, and Ronald E. Clements, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume II*, 816.

¹⁵ Gaebelein, et al, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, 928.

matter was finished.¹⁶ It was, except “the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (2 Samuel 11:27). God sent Nathan the prophet to go to David.

Nathan knew that to confront a frightened person directly might make the matter even worse. Perhaps if Nathan had gone directly to David, denounced his guilt and pronounced his punishment, David might not have listened to him or worse. So Nathan went to David and said, “Let me tell you a story.” For him to have gone with the bald, naked approach might have simply made David angry and kept him from repentance.¹⁷

The story is recorded in 2 Samuel 12:1-4.

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

Nathan referred to a common practice of the day, that of keeping lambs as pets, often bringing them up like children and addressing them in terms of endearment. The parable had its desired effect: “David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity’” (2 Samuel 12:5-6).

¹⁶ Thomas Dozeman, Dennis Olson, and Ronald E. Clements, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume I*, 1287.

¹⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 1963), 36.

David was so moved by the story that he proclaimed a punishment more severe than the case deserved or was warranted by divine statute (Exodus 22:1). David's outburst is an exaggeration that expresses the gravity of the sin involved.¹⁸ It is interesting to note here that while David's sympathies had been deeply enlisted by the story and his indignation aroused, he was indulgent to his own sins yet most ready to condemn the errors of others.

"You are the man!" Nathan cried (2 Samuel 25:7). The story was used by Nathan to get around David's defenses, and it allowed David to actually embrace the truth about himself. It marked the beginning of a new chapter in David's spiritual journey: "Create in me a clean heart, O God!"¹⁹

Turning to the New Testament, we find *parable* (παροιμία), which means either juxtaposition or placing one thing by the side of another, as of ships in battle. Parable can also mean a metaphor, a comparison of one thing with another, a likeness, a similitude, or an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated.²⁰ A parable is a narrative (fictitious but agreeable to the laws and usages of human life) by which either the duties of men or the things of God are figuratively portrayed, particularly the nature and history of God's kingdom. Further, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, a pithy and instructive saying involving comparison and having perceptive or

¹⁸ Gaebelein, et al, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, 943.

¹⁹ Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible*, 38. Lockyer states that this experience was the seed for David's writing of Psalm 32 and Psalm 51.

²⁰ Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, entry 3850.

admonitory force.²¹ Finally, a parable is an aphorism, maxim, proverb, or an act by which one exposes himself or his possessions to danger.²³ The word *parable* is used many times in the New Testament, for example, 17 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark, and 18 times in Luke. Mostly all these refer to Jesus teaching in parables or the writer stating that He told them a parable.²⁵

Why did Jesus use parables? Jesus Himself set forth His mission:

He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²¹ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 651.

²³ John R. Kohlengerger III, Edward W. Goodrick and James A. Swanson, *The Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 579-580.

²⁵ William Gingrich and Felix Wilbur Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1957), 617.

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus had a huge task ahead of Him. He faced the task of reconciling the world back to a true understanding of the divine nature. For centuries, people had listened to the word of the serpent and let fear take root in the deepest places in their hearts.²⁶ Jesus came into a world that had operated under a false perception of God, a perception that prohibited the kind of "Godlife"²⁷ relationship that was available to all human beings.

Dr. Harvey Swiggum is the author of *The Bethel Bible Series for Adult Education*. In the lesson entitled "Fullness Of Time," Dr. Swiggum describes the conditions at the time of the coming of Jesus of Nazareth.

A DAY OF SPIRITUAL CONFUSION: PEOPLE WERE SEARCHING

The Roman Empire was literally cluttered with gods and goddesses... What the gods didn't divulge about the issues of life, the philosophical schools of the day did. And the end of it all was a spiritual and intellectual confusion that left the masses hanging on the edge of a precipice...

A DAY OF MORAL DETERIORATION: MORTALS HAD LOST THEIR WAY

All the splendor of the empire couldn't hide the moral corruption, the sensuousness, the festering despondency and despair, the waste of life and the injustice that scarred the citizenry.

A DAY FILLED WITH HUNGER FOR DECENCY, JUSTICE: HUMANKIND WAS GROPEING

²⁶ John Claypool, *Stories Jesus Still Tells* (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993), vii.

²⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). Godlife is the focus of Dr. Leonard Sweet's newest book, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery*, where he puts it quite simply: "Why did God create us? There is only one answer: for relationships."

Indeed, Rome had its patrons of conscience, well-intentioned souls who called for action to turn the tide. But the solutions which they projected for the sickness of the society were too puny to heal the deep wounds of a people sick unto death... Injustice prevailed, and all the while those who lived on a cellar level hungered for some sign of a light in the darkness.²⁸

Jesus faced the challenge of reconciling people to their Creator. How could God's light be shed on the darkness of the human soul? Jesus decided to use the communication tool of parables. It was a mark of His teaching. What proverbs are to Solomon, fables to Aesop, so parables are to Jesus.

Author John Claypool notes three distinctive features of Jesus' parables.²⁹ "First, the images that Jesus used in weaving these stories were always familiar and drawn from everyday life."³⁰ The audience for Jesus' stories could readily and personally identify with the situations, objects, and persons Jesus used as the "raw material" for His parables. Consider the subject of Jesus' stories, such as the story of the candle (Mark 4:21-22; Luke 8:16-17). With the use of candlelight being common in every household, everyone would quickly see and understand the image Jesus used. When Jesus talked about a sower (such as Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-20; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15), the role of a seed sower was an image that was part of their culture and, perhaps, personal employment or experience. The pattern goes on throughout all of His parables:

Seed growing by itself (Mark 4:26-29)
Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)
Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
Rich Man (Luke 12:13-21)

²⁸ *Fullness Of Time* Bethel Bible Series, New Testament Study One (Madison, Wisconsin: Bethel Bible Series For Adult Education, 1961), 6-7.

²⁹ Claypool, *Stories Jesus Still Tells*, xi.

³⁰ John Claypool, *The Parables* (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993), xi.

Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)
 Barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9)
 Leaven (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21)
 Treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44)
 Pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46)
 Net (Matthew 13:47-50)
 Householder (Matthew 13:52)
 Wedding feast (Luke 14:7-11)
 Great Supper (Luke 14:12-24)
 Lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7)
 Lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)
 Two Sons (Luke 15:11-32)
 Unjust steward (Luke 16:1-8)
 Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31)
 Unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8)
 Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14)
 Laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)
 Two sons (Matthew 21:28-32)
 Wicked husbandmen (Matthew 24:22-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)
 Marriage of a king's son (Matthew 22:1-14)
 Fig tree (Matthew 24:32-36; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33)
 Man taking a far journey (Mark 13:34-37)
 Ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)
 Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
 Sheep, goats (Matthew 25:31-46)
 Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21)

While the images and objects were drawn from the people's everyday life, it should be noted that these images and objects may require some work on the part of the modern-day storyteller to be sure he understands the original context and is not simply jumping 20 centuries ahead, assuming we speak the same way today. For example, the sower in Mark 4:3-9 sows so clumsily that much of the seed would seem to be wasted:

Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.

What Jesus illustrates here is the regular method of sowing. In Palestine, sowing *precedes* plowing. The sower is walking over the unplowed stubble; therefore, some of the seed would indeed fall “along the path.” The seed would be ploughed in when the sower ploughs up the path. Similarly, sowing “among thorns” would be sowing seeds where the plowing would come later. Even the “rocky ground” is easily understood, for the underlying limestone of the area barely shows above the surface until the ploughshare jars against it. What one may think is an example of bad farming is, in fact, customary farming practice of that day and time.³¹

“Second, these stories were characterized by intriguing plots.”³² When asked to define *neighbor*, Jesus begins His story, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away” (Luke 10:30). Here Jesus draws His story from what was known to happen on this road between Jerusalem and Jericho as it led through a rugged, uninhabited mountain stretch that was infested by bandits. This story is set against Jesus’ having just given the commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Another time, Jesus begins His story, “There was a rich man who had a manger, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him” (Luke 16:1-2). In a few words, Jesus places the essentials of the story before the listener: the rich man and the dishonest steward. The man’s business was extensive, and he employed a general manager who would have had full power to handle all the business affairs of his employer. The steward was crooked and got caught.

³¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 11-12.

³² Claypool, *The Parables*, xi.

"Third, perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the parables is the element of surprise."³³ Jesus' masterful use of story works in the same way the story of the ewe lamb told by Nathan drew King David in and therefore allowed for a breakthrough of understanding. A story David thought was about someone else, turned out to be about him. As evidence in Jesus' case, consider stories where the listeners react, a sign that they were drawn into the intrigue of the parable. Note how Jesus gets His listeners to answer and identify with the brothers in the Parable of Two Sons:

Matthew 21:28-32

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

There are parables that produced sharp reactions of surprise, shock, and anger, like the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen:

Luke 20:9-18

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

³³ Ibid.

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"

Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

Luke records their reaction to the story: "The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest Him immediately because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people" (Luke 20:19).

Beyond reactions of surprise, shock, or anger, in the parables of Jesus we further see the reflection of the bold love of His Good News, the future-looking nature of His message, the intensity of His call to repentance and His conflict with Pharisaism.³⁴ What is more, when we are reading the parables of Jesus, we are once again standing right before Jesus. Once we experience the story from Jesus—without looking for allegorical or hidden meanings³⁵, then we come into a unique, individual experience of the Message and the Man and walk away different than before.

³⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 9.

³⁵ Adlof Julicher, A.T. Cadoux, and C.H. Dodd, along with Joachim Jeremias, are among the scholars who have discarded the allegorical method of interpretation that long kept the simple message from speaking. They pressed for rediscovering the historical setting of the parables and restoring what Jesus intended to say at that particular moment.

Consider the parable of The Good Shepherd:

John 10

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Then note the reaction to the parable and to Jesus:

At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The listeners' failure to understand is not surprising. The failure is not primarily an intellectual failure; it is an unwillingness to respond to the challenge of the parables.

What effect did the parable have on the hearers? A new tool for this discovery is being developed by Terry O'Casey and should benefit all tellers of the biblical story.

That challenge is centered on Jesus Himself.³⁶ It all goes to the question asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?"

Conclusion

The Scriptures record a miraculous water crossing lead by Joshua as the people approached the Promised Land and the River Jordan. The Bible notes that the river is at flood stage and normal crossing would be impossible. The LORD tells Joshua to have the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant into the water. The waters stop, and the Ark stands in the middle of the River while all the people cross. "The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground" (Joshua 3:17). Joshua instructed to have twelve men picked—one from each of the twelve tribes—and as they crossed, each one was to take a stone and place the stones as a memorial. Joshua said, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (Joshua 4:6b-7). Joshua is instructing the telling of the story, not just any story but the story of God acting on behalf of His people, reminding them who they are, whose they are, and who their God is!

Stories have power. They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, challenge. They help us understand. They imprint a picture on our minds.

³⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), 393.

Consequently, stories often pack more punch than sermons. Want to make a point or raise an issue? Tell a story. Jesus did it. He called his stories 'parables.'³⁷

³⁷ Janet Litherland, *Storytelling From The Bible* (Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing, 1991), 3.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING CULTURE REQUIRES CHANGING MINISTRY

“Garbologist” is the term Max Lucado used. He was describing people who dig through and study garbage. Garbologists claim they can tell a lot about people and culture by examining what they throw away. A couple of years ago, I became my own garbologist.

When I resigned as Senior Pastor at First Lutheran, my last Sunday was to be Easter Sunday. Without a lot of time and with much to be done, by an act of grace my brother-in-law Bob came to my rescue. Bob volunteered to take time off from his job and come and pack up my office while I still worked. He started at one corner of my office and just worked around me until he had packed everything up, and we loaded the U-Haul and headed back to Oklahoma. It was in unpacking that I became my own garbologist.

I came across a box—some “old stuff”—containing an assortment of items from previous churches I had served. On top was a church pictorial directory that was only a few years old. Thumbing through the pictures, my eye caught the family photo of Amanda. She was a young teenager who was so excited that one Wednesday night when she called me over, “Pastor Pete, Pastor Pete, come here, I have something I want to show you!”

As I came closer to the group that was huddled around Amanda, she stepped forward and said, “What do you think?” as she displayed her brand new belly button ring. “Mom just took me to get it today!” Nothing in all my years of pastoring and training prepared me with something to say at that moment.

Digging further into this box, I discovered computer paper with the rolling edges still attached and printed with the block dot pattern of an early computer printer. I remembered the Sunday we had a special “Order of Blessing” for the donation of the computer, monitor, software and printer to the church office—a donation at the time of almost \$10,000.

As I continued to dig, I came across a sermon on typewriter paper that I had actually cut and pasted together to change the order. All over the pages were signs of white-out correction fluid. Further down, there were papers that I had run on a mimeograph, though the ink no longer smelled like I remembered it smelling right off the machine. I remember when our church office bought an electric stencil-cutting machine—high tech for its time. Getting near the bottom of my dig, I came across my copy of a report written with the instructions:

“PRESS FIRMLY—YOU ARE MAKING THREE COPIES.”

While carrying these “artifacts” out to the dumpster, I thought to myself that this is the world in which I grew up. This is the world in which I was trained to think and do ministry. It is the world in which I am most comfortable. But it is also a world that has come to an end in my lifetime. Much of what I learned in that world no longer works in this new world. To minister in this world, I need to get out of the box! There is the

dawning of an emerging new world. What a wonderful time to be alive. What a wonderful calling to engage in ministry for the future!



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Communication has changed. There is a new culture emerging, and the emerging culture speaks a new language. Alvin Francis Balaban, my 77-year-young father and lecturer on the Protestant Reformation, was preparing some material for a Reformation Festival we were hosting. Without live musicians, we needed CD music for the program. My father went shopping for an instrumental version of Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." He stopped at a local franchise of a national Christian book and music store. He walked up to the young clerk in the music department.

"May I help you, sir?" she asked.

"I am looking for an instrumental rendition of 'A Mighty Fortress'," Alvin answered.

"Is that the name of the group?" she further inquired.

"No." corrected Al. "It is a hymn by Dr. Martin Luther."

"I didn't know that Dr. King wrote any music," the clerk responded.

Al said, "It was written in 1525."

"Oh, no sir," the clerk assured, "I don't think Dr. King was that old!"

Al said, “Goodbye.”

Dr. Leonard Sweet has observed and written extensively about the changes going on around us. Are they small changes or radical revision? Dr. Sweet claims that we are in the middle of nothing short of a “soul tsunami”—a mountainous wave of change sweeping in from the cultural sea threatening to wash the church away. Dr. Sweet lays out our only three ways to respond: (1) deny that it is happening—and drown; (2) fight it—and lose; or (3) recognize the opportunities it presents—and chart a course of re-orientation.¹

Our culture is changing. There is no outrunning the changes that are happening, from the mind-boggling techno-culture that no generation before has ever seen, to the expanse of religious pluralism that embraces everything except religious absolutes.

Mike Regele and Mark Shultz are co-founders of Precept, which provides demographic resources to help people and organizations engage in mission within their particular context. Along with the demographic information, Precept integrates data about the religious attitudes, preferences and behavior of the American people. They are keenly aware of the extent of the challenge facing the churches. Regele believes that the institutional church in America will look very different 25 years from now and that several denominations may no longer exist.

Having analyzed data on churchgoing trends and attitudes toward the churches held by each of the five generations alive today, Regele comes to the following sobering conclusion:

¹ Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1999), 18-22.

“At the brink of the twenty-first century, the king who knew not Joseph is the collective culture of which we are a part. The combined impact of the Information Age, postmodern thought, globalization, and racial-ethnic pluralism that has seen the demise of the grand American story also has displaced the historic role the church has played in that story. As a result, we are seeing the marginalization of the institutional church.”²

With so many churches tragically failing to see the coming “soul tsunami” and thereby neglecting to seek the spiritual discernment and vitality to meet the challenges of the emerging culture, Regele has no doubt that hundreds of local congregations will close their doors for the last time. “The forces reshaping our culture are too many and too strong. We see signs of social fragmentation and collapse everywhere.”³

George Barna reinforces the concern that Regele raises. The overall picture Barna presents in *The Second Coming of the Church*, is one of spiritual barrenness and unattractiveness of many churches to visitors. Those who have turned to Christianity and churches seeking truth and meaning have left empty-handed, confused by the apparent inability of Christians themselves to implement the principles they profess. Churches for the most part have failed to address the nagging anxieties and deep-seated fears of the people, focusing instead upon outdated or secondary issues and proposing tired or trite solutions.⁴ Regele alerts church leaders to the fact that they minister in a world out of control, characterized by stress and uncertainty.⁵ He believes that “if we do not

² Mike Regele and Mark Shultz, *The Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 182.

³ Ibid., 11.

⁴ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), 5.

⁵ Regele and Shultz, *The Death of the Church*, 15.

understand the forces of change, we will be overwhelmed by them.”⁶ Our culture is changing.

The transition from modernity to whatever is coming next represents such sweeping changes that it might result in churches becoming paralyzed in the midst of the shock waves. These changes are deep-rooted, comprehensive, complex, unpredictable, and global in their ramifications. William Easum has observed, “Established Protestantism was born into the Industrial Age, a world of slow, incremental change.”⁷ By about the middle of the twentieth century, the rate of change quickened and became increasingly complex. Today momentum has been generated to such a degree that change has become discontinuous and chaotic. Easum states,

You and I are part of something big. Our world is plunging head over heels through a remarkable period of history. The epistemological, philosophical, ontological, and metaphysical structures underlying all of our belief and values systems are coming apart and being reassembled. As a result, the way people process knowledge is undergoing a profound metamorphosis of mind and heart. Something of this magnitude happens only once or twice a millennium.⁸

Easum’s metaphor for the present transition to a new epoch of history is the “wormhole.” In science, a wormhole is thought to be a portal in space that offers rapid travel from one universe to another. With the fundamental changes we are going through in the rules of the game of life—a time of radical discontinuity—it is like passing through a wormhole to the other side of somewhere.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁷ William Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere, By Anyone* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 19.

⁸ William Easum, *Leadership on the Other Side: No Rules, Just Clues* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 46.

When the day came for the Berlin Wall separating communist East Berlin from free West Berlin to be dismantled, East Berliners found themselves traveling through a cultural “wormhole.” Nothing had prepared them for what life was like on the other side of the wall. Established churches and church leaders in the USA may find themselves in a situation similar to those East Berliners. Easum claims that all of the established rules of ministry and ministry leadership are disappearing, and the new rules are still a blur.⁹ Easum’s book, *Leadership On The Other Side*, is subtitled, “No Rules, Just Clues.”

One illustration of the changing ministry and leadership in our culture is a study done by Richard Kew and Roger White. In 1977, they published *Toward 2015: A Church Odyssey*. In their report, they cited an example using the Episcopal diocese of Ohio, which went from seven congregations being served by part-time clergy to thirty-three congregations—which is 30 percent of all its parishes—begin served by part-time clergy. These churches have bi-vocational priests or are served by part-time clergy or ministry clusters. They described today as representing “the dawn of a new apostolic age.”¹⁰ Our culture is changing, and ministry in our culture is changing.

Lyle Schaller, possibly the consultant with the longest record and widest experience with churches in North America, recognizes that unless denominational churches make some drastic changes, their future looks bleak. In his book, *Innovations*

⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰ Richard Kew and Roger White, *Toward 2015: A Church Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1997), 75.

in Ministry, he identified fifteen serious problems facing mainline denominations.¹¹ Our culture is changing, and ministry in our culture needs to change.

The Barna Group, Ltd. (TBG) is a full-service marketing research company and has been providing information and analysis regarding cultural trends and the Christian Church since 1984. According to them, the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled since 1991, from 39 million to 75 million, an astonishing 92% increase. The Barna Group's latest study shows that the percentage of *unchurched* adults has risen from 21% in 1991 to 34% today. Unchurched is a category that is defined as not having attended a Christian church service at any time in the past six months, other than for a holiday service, such as Christmas or Easter or for special events such as a wedding or funeral. One of the more surprising outcomes of their research is that while about half of the church population has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, 17% of unchurched adults have done so as well. If these 17% of unchurched adults who are born again were connected to a church, the resulting increase would be nearly 13 million new people—more than have joined the nation's churches in the past decade combined.

Some patterns and challenges in TBG's research are worth noting. They concluded that unchurched adults are notable for three unique behavioral patterns:

1. They approach life "at arms-length." They have lower levels of voter registration; they give less money and less support to non-profit organizations; and engaged in fewer community service activities.
2. They are non-committal in their nature. This can be seen in their moderate ideology and more ambiguous theological perspectives. They have a lower level of self-professed commitment to their faith of choice, and they reject the idea of having responsibility for nurturing other people's faith.
3. They are independent in nature. As mentioned, they are less likely to register to vote, but they also have a higher percentage of reluctance to align with a

¹¹ Lyle Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 65-66.

political party, less likely to marry, less likely to have children (even when married) and are less likely to be loyal to organizations and products.¹²

Because of the demographics and behavioral patterns of the present unchurched population, TBG sees several challenges for the faithful attempting to reach unchurched people in our emerging culture.

1. Unchurched people view church life as both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. The difficulty stems from the two groups, born again Christians and unchurched people, because “the two groups have such different viewpoints and lifestyles.” More than prayer and hard work, to reach the unchurched requires a lot of deep reflection to see the world and the local church from a completely different angle.
2. The unchurched are not “lazy” or simply “uninformed,” but they are wholly disinterested in church life—often passionately so. The millions of unchurched have no understanding of or interest in a church, even if it is “contemporary” in style. Worship is not even on their radar screen, more comfortable seating cannot compete with their own easy chairs or beds, and church events do not effectively compete with what the world has to offer.

Our culture is changing. Ministry and spiritual leadership must change. Gone are the days when people in our culture would ask, “Which church?” Gone are the days when churches debated which one is the “better” church. Now the culture is asking, “Why church?” Established churches need to focus on what the Church can provide that no one else can. It is the calling of the Church to provide people with a life-changing, practical encounter with the living God. Moreover, it is the calling of the Church to provide the ongoing nurturing of that relationship. Finally, it is the calling of the church to offer relationships with other people transformed by encounters with the story of God, now their story. “Millions of young adults are more interested in truth, authenticity,

¹² The Barna Group Ltd., <http://www.barna.org> (accessed 24 July 2004).

experiences, relationships, and spirituality than they are in laws, traditions, events, disciplines, institutions, and religion.”¹³

Taking the situation to a more local and tribal level, one can go to the website of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and discover ELCA congregations in any geographic area. The information provided also gives a congregation trend report for each congregation that reflects the path of that congregation over its recent history.

There are eleven ELCA congregations within 20 miles of Edmond, Oklahoma, zip code 73003. Here are the worship attendance records in those congregations for 1996, 1999 and 2003.¹⁴

Congregation	1996	1999	2003
Peace	464	547	428
Lord of Life	116	112	85
Our Lord's	227	155	112
St. Paul's	370	274	200
Prince of Peace	54	58	35
Redeemer	70	61	55
St. Mark's	130	144	104
Ascension	82	83	84
Grace	89	90	35
Resurrection	262	268	223
Trinity	112	100	102

¹³ The Barna Group Ltd., <http://www.barna.org> (accessed 24 July 2004).

¹⁴ ELCA Home Website, <http://www.ELCA.org> (accessed 27 June 2004), Congregational Trend Reports.

While many factors contribute to changes in attendance patterns, overall the reports show a 26% decrease in worship service attendance in the ELCA congregations in this geographic area. Our culture is changing, and ministry within our culture is changing, too. Yet most if not all of these congregations carry a modern view of church, of the role of the pastor, and of laity in a church. Most of the laity function as “caretakers” or perhaps “administrators,” attending endless rounds of meetings, spending vast amounts of their “church life” trying to manage and protect their church from dying. The pastors serving these congregations mostly function as chaplains, taking care of people, visiting the sick and shut-ins, serving Communion, and leading archaic rituals understood by a decreasing number of people. Make no mistake, these ministries are important, but they are not the responsibility of the pastor. These ministries are the responsibility of all the people of God. All of these ministries are secondary to the calling to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20).¹⁵

Our culture is changing. Ministry in our culture is changing, and leadership in ministry in our culture is changing. But while things are changing all around, most seminaries teach pastors to be theologians, chaplains, and managers instead of spiritual leaders.¹⁶ Dr. Leonard Sweet illustrates what is happening by comparing it to living in a foreign country. If you were born before 1962, you are an immigrant in today’s culture.

¹⁵ See also Acts 6, where the Twelve refused to allow serving ministries to take time away from God’s calling to disciple people to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ William Easum, *Leadership on the Other Side: No Rules, Just Clues*, 35.

If you were born after 1962, you are a native of present day culture.¹⁷ This “new land”

has a new culture:

New language (gigabytes, spamming, downloading)
 New customs (e-mail, websites, “e” just about everything where “e” means
 electronic)
 New sights (.com, .gov, .edu, .tv, .org)
 New rituals (networking, surfing, chat rooms)
 New technologies (CD-ROM, Zip Drives, Flash Drives, IPOD, MP3)
 New hieroglyphics (☺, (), BRB, LOL)¹⁹

Our culture is changing. Ministry in our culture is changing, and leading ministry
 in our culture is changing. Consider a few of the titles now being used by pastors who
 lead some of the emerging churches, which are reaching into this changing culture. Titles
 include:

“Cultural Architect” (Erwin Raphael McManus, Mosaic, Los Angeles,
 California);

“Cultural Environmentalist” (Mark Freier, Crossroads, South Lyon, Michigan);

“ImageSmith” (Rob Weber, Grace Community Church, Shreveport, Louisiana).

These pastors are charged with bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to people
 who are “information-tired” or “information overloaded.” The good news is that the
 Internet has brought tons of information to just about anybody. The bad news is that the
 Internet has brought tons of information to just about anybody.

There is a tendency to assume anything published on the Net must be true. This
 tendency is so widespread that it has entered the language. It is know as “The Pierre

¹⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Carpe Manana* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 21.

Salinger Syndrome.” This syndrome is defined as “the tendency for online users, especially new users, to assume any information published on the Internet is automatically true.”²⁰ This syndrome stems from an embarrassing gaffe made by journalist Pierre Salinger in 1996:

“Veteran American newsman Pierre Salinger said today he has a government document saying that Navy gunners accidentally shot down TWA Flight 800 while conducting missile tests, killing all 230 people aboard... Salinger said the document was dated August 22 and was posted on the Internet at the beginning of September.”²¹

The document, of course, was a hoax. Just because it is online does not make it true.

Coincidentally, Edwin Schlossberg, founder of ESI,²² relays a similar story on the same event. Schlossberg talks about a part of a *60 Minutes* story on the 1996 crash of the TWA flight where Leslie Stahl was interviewing a man who had posted hundreds of pages on his website about his opinions of how and why the plane exploded and crashed. Stahl interrupted the man and stated, “Excuse me, but it seems that you have made up all this information. You haven’t done any research; you don’t know if anything you say is truth or rumor or malicious speculation.” To which the man replied, “So... If people don’t want to believe it, they can go to another website.”²³ But will they? And will they

²⁰ <http://www.wordspy.com> (accessed 15 July 2004). See also Sweet, *Carpe Manana*, 39.

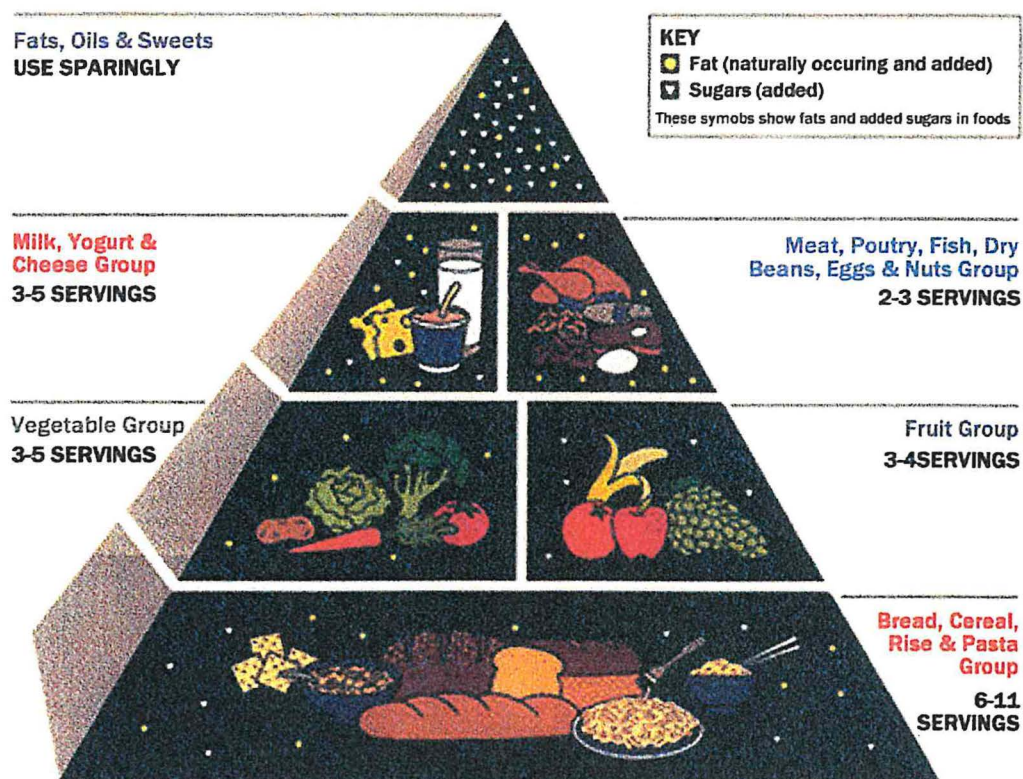
²¹ Jocelyn Noveck, “Paper On ‘Test’ Offered To FBI,” *The Associated Press*, 8 November 1996.

²² Edwin Schlossberg Incorporated—a multidisciplinary design firm that specializes in interactive design.

²³ Edwin Schlossberg, *Interactive Excellence* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 48.

discern the difference? Dr. Sweet rightly claims that with the Internet, “everyone is an author, everyone a publisher, and everyone an expert.”²⁴

Here is another example. Over a decade ago, the US Department of Agriculture came up with an icon of healthy eating—the food pyramid:

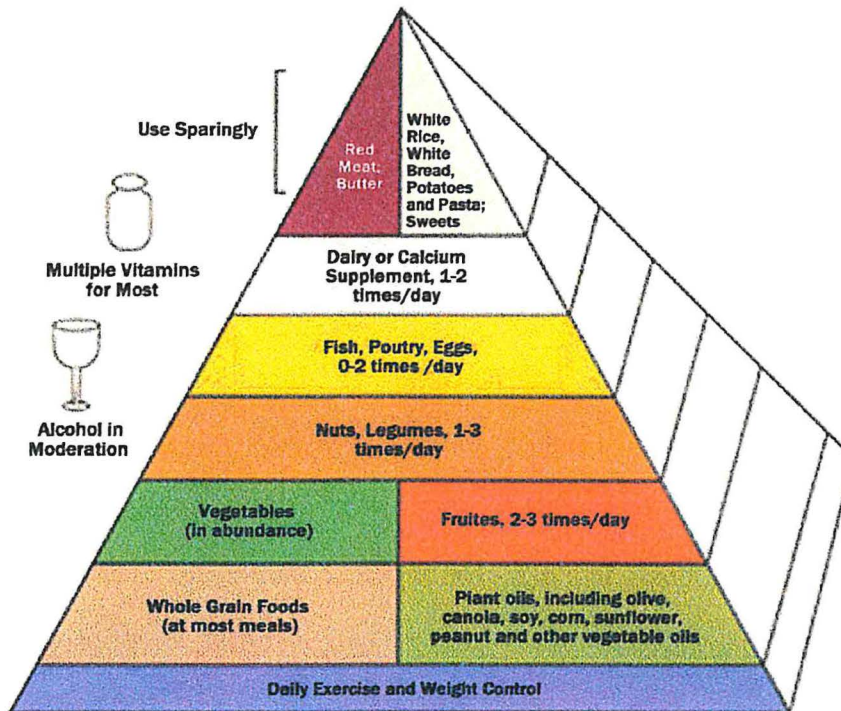


USDA and the US Department of Health and Human Services

But as our understanding of food and dietary health has advanced, along with the concern that the department for promoting US Agriculture might not give the best advice, the Harvard School of Public Health developed another food pyramid:

²⁴ Sweet, *Carpe Manana*, 39.

Healthy Eating Pyramid



There is considerable difference in eating habits being advised by these “experts.”²⁵

In a Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Service column dated July 17, 2004, a simple question was put forth, “Can you explain the concept of original sin? Does it mean we are all born sinners?” Two answers were then given, one by the Rev. Pat Rush, vicar-general of the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, the other by the Rev. Duke Tufty, pastor of Unity Temple on the Plaza, Kansas City, Missouri. In part, the Rev. Rush gives the classic Christian understanding of original sin, stating:

²⁵ Harvard School of Public Health,
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/index.html> (accessed 15 July 2004).

Original sin is not passed on through imitation. It is embedded in humanity. Original sin is the reason Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are needed by every person.

We are born starving for God's grace and into a world where the pervasiveness of evil limits our freedom to act like God's children. Each of us is flawed and, left to our own devices, adds to the heartbreak and tragedy of life... [Original sin] tells us that no one is self-sufficient; we all need God's grace and, therefore, should respond with understanding and forgiveness toward the offenses of others.

The Rev. Tufty's response is quite different. He says:

This is absurd and an incredible travesty of our divine essence, for original sin does not appear in the Bible, and the teachings of Jesus and other great spiritual masters stand in opposition to the notion.

Stating a different opinion is not enough. His response goes on to give an account of the "origin" of original sin:

I believe that at some point in time, religious leaders were sitting around bemoaning the fact that church attendance was down and something needed to be done. The idea came up to put the fear of God in the people by claiming they were sinners because of the 'stain' Adam had left on their bloodline, and, as a result, they would go to hell and be subject to tortuous punishments if they did not attend church 'religiously.' Although devious in nature, original sin is probably one of the most successful marketing techniques ever developed.²⁶

While it is one thing to disagree or hold a different position, here an historic tenet of Christian theology is simply brushed aside and dismissed as a "marketing technique."

Our culture is changing. Ministry in our culture is changing. And with all the information that assails people today, more than ever, help is needed in assessing and processing that information.

Bill Easum and Tom Bandy, founders of Easum, Bandy & Associates, hold the simple vision of "guiding Christian leaders for ancient mission in the contemporary

²⁶ Helen Gray, Religion Editor, *The Kansas City Star*, published in *The Daily Oklahoman*, 17 July 2004.

world.” They see as their mission “to prepare congregations and faith-based organizations for mission in the 21st century by training innovative leaders with a passion to grow disciples of Christ and by providing resources, services and networks to equip faithful and effective Christian ministries.”²⁷ In the opening of their book, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*, they announce:

“You are standing at the edge of the future. All the territory in front of you is an uncharted forest. The forest is extremely dense and filled with obstacles. See if you are brave enough to find a path to the twenty-first century.”²⁸

The authors lay out some of the contrasts that are already visible in our emerging world.

The left column represents the familiar, while the right column represents emerging images and concepts:

Attitudes

Pendulum Swings	Earthquakes
Ideologies	Intuitions
Ultimate Truths	Dialogical Truths
Provincial Perspectives	Global Perspectives

Metaphors

Home	Community
Central Fountain	Flood from the Fringe
Inner Warmth	Raging Fire
Evolution	Revolution
Solid	Fluid

Processes

Either-Or Choices	Both-And Choices
Deductive Analysis	Inductive Synthesis

²⁷ Vision Statement and Mission Statement are quoted from their website, <http://www.easumbandy.com> (accessed 25 July 2004).

²⁸ William Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 8.

Input
Male vs. Female Genders
Atomic Thinking

Output
Unique Personhoods
Relational Thinking

Structures

Formal Boundaries
Hierarchy
Management
Control

Changing Patterns
Organism
Entrepreneurship
Permission

Theology

Religion
Entitled Offices
Prophetic Confrontation
Ethics
The Presence of God

Spirituality
Authentic Leaders
Visionary Direction
Apocalyptic
The Touch of the Holy

Leadership

Entitled Offices
Authoritative Voices
Guardians of Truth

Authentic Leaders
Spiritual Coaches
Motivators for Mission²⁹

Many of these topics and concepts are also discussed and explored in Dr. Leonard Sweet's postmodern trilogy, *SoulTsunami*, *AquaChurch*, and *SoulSalsa*.

In looking at the changes going on around us, Dr. Eddie Gibbs, Professor of Church Growth at the Fuller Theological Seminary School of Intercultural Studies, concludes that our emerging culture no longer searches for an elusive truth, but rather it has redefined truth in terms of consensus and "whatever works for you."³⁰ When Christians speak of knowing the truth, this is seen by others as a ploy for power, where influence is exerted by disempowering those with a divergent view. Gibbs believes these

²⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

³⁰ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 24.

postmodernists celebrate diversity and regard ambiguity as providing fertile soil for continuing creativity. Dr. Gibbs states:

As our culture lurches from modernity to postmodernity, the church finds itself pushed out to the wings of the social stage. Secular society only allows the church's representatives back on stage on its own terms. They may serve as therapists, as chaplains of civil religion in the United States or as celebrants of ceremonial religion in Europe. But the secular world allows no place for the prophet or the priest. In the Romantic period the poet replaced the priest. Evangelicals need a greater appreciation for the role of the poet and the lyricist in raising the questions and providing the prologue and platform necessary for the prophet to gain a hearing in a secular society. *Our age has more regard for the artist than for the orator.*³¹ (Emphasis added)

Our culture is changing. Ministry in our culture is changing. Spiritual leadership is changing. Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer make the claim that the “post” portion of *postmodernity* means “coming through and coming after.”³² Easum and Bandy join in the proclamation that the emerging culture is more than “post-anything.” *It is a pre-Christian world!* A world, they claim, to be similar to the first century after Jesus. Look around at the population migration. See a world of systemic injustice and a world of apocalyptic longing. We are living in an emerging world of excessive materialism and a world with deep spiritual yearning. Our culture is one of deep anxiety and utter cynicism toward the religious institutions of the past.³³

Our culture is changing. Ministry in our culture is changing. Spiritual leadership for ministry in our culture is changing. The primary question for leaders charged with communicating the good news of Christ Jesus in our emerging culture is the same

³¹ Ibid., 26.

³² Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), 241.

³³ William Easum and Thomas Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 22.

question that Leonard Sweet asks as a subtitle for his book, *Carpe Manana*: “Is your church ready to seize tomorrow?” Where are the artists who will tell the message of the gospel to our emerging culture?

CHAPTER 4

THE POWER OF STORY

"You see, I don't know any stories. None of the lost boys knows any stories."

"How perfectly awful," Wendy said.

"Do you know," Peter asked "why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories. O Wendy, your mother was telling you such a lovely story."

"Which story was it?"

"About the prince who couldn't find the lady who wore the glass slipper."

"Peter," said Wendy excitedly, "that was Cinderella, and he found her, and they lived happily ever after."

Peter was so glad that he rose from the floor, where they had been sitting, and hurried to the window.

"Where are you going?" she cried with misgiving.

"To tell the other boys."

"Don't go Peter," she entreated, "I know lots of such stories."

Those were her precise words; so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him.

He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now, which ought to have alarmed her, but did not.

"Oh, the stories I could tell to the boys!" she cried, and then Peter gripped her and began to draw her toward the window.

"Let me go!" she ordered him.

"Wendy, do come with me and tell the other boys."¹

Week in and week out, people in churches hear truth. They hear how the people who first listened to the gospel were shocked and amazed. But today the gospels generate no more than a yawn. In addition, some of these truths have become so familiar to the "churched," they are no longer actually heard. However, the use of stories and parables can provide fresh insights into these truths. With the strategic use of storytelling in the context of our emerging culture, pastors and teachers can dress up these truths in new images and icons so that the listeners take more notice of them. This is the power of story.

Stories—parables, fables, anecdotes, and illustrations—help us to see the bigger picture in life. They help us to understand that there is more to life than our own limited spheres of experience. They create pictures in our minds and open up our imaginations to comprehend a greater dimension of life than we are normally used to experiencing. With stories, we can be taken to far off places or deep near places—places we have never experienced ourselves or places deep within ourselves and our experiences that we need to see differently. This is the power of story.

Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley give a vivid if not sobering example of this power.

In the aftermath of the massacres that occurred in Rwanda in the early 1990's, a woman psychologist was asked to visit one of the many refugee camps of Rwanda in Tanzania. It seemed that the women of that camp, though safe from the slaughter, were not sleeping. During her visit to the refugees, the psychologist learned that the women, who had witnessed the murder of family and friends, had been told by camp officials not to speak

¹ James M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*, <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu> (accessed 30 July 2004), E-text #16.

of such atrocities in the camp. The women followed this instruction, but the memories of the carnage haunted them, and they could not sleep.

The psychologist decided that in response to this situation she would set up a story tree: a safe place for the women to speak of their experiences. Every morning she went out to the edge of the camp and waited under the canopy of a huge shade tree. The first day no one came. On the second day one woman appeared, told her story, and left. Another showed up the following day, then another and another. Within the span of a few days, scores of women were gathering under the tree each morning to listen and to share their tales of loss, fear, and death. Finally, after weeks of listening, the psychologist knew that the story tree was working. Reports confirmed that the women in the camp were now sleeping.²

Although we may have never witnessed the horrors of civil war or lived through what these women of Rwanda experienced, we can see them gathered under the story tree sharing, remembering, and telling their stories. We may never in our lifetime experience the horrors they lived through, but we do know something about fear and sleeplessness. *Part of the power of sharing stories is that it allows us to connect.* That connection can be beyond our locale and beyond our experience. Through story, we are invited into unknown worlds. This is the power of story.

Jesus invited His disciples and the crowds that came to hear Him speak about a new way of living. Pastor and author Rob Weber said, “Jesus told stories that drew people into new ways of thinking, being, deciding, living, and forming community. This type of storytelling is an activity of a leader.”³ Jesus knew the power of story. The faith communicator of today faces the call to open people’s imagination to see and live in this new way.

² Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 3.

³ Rob Weber, *Visual Leadership: The Church Leader as ImageSmith* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 28.

The church has not kept up with current storytelling methods when it comes to telling the old gospel story in a compelling, engaging, and artful way. When paradigm shifts occur so rapidly in our current culture, this is not at all surprising. Biblical scholar and media expert Thomas E. Boomershine Sr. makes an intriguing analogy of the Church and the Polish army in September 1939 when Hitler's blitzkrieg attacked the Polish army:

Hitler sent 14 armored divisions across the Polish border. The Polish army was committed to the traditions of the cavalry and sent 12 cavalry brigades against the German tanks. In the tradition of the great cavalry divisions of the Prussian army, the Polish cavalry was molded for warfare as it had been fought in the 18th and 19th century. When the divisions of German armor came streaming across the border, therefore, the Polish generals sent wave after wave of cavalry, men mounted on horses, against the tanks. The battle lasted about three weeks. The fields of Poland were choked with the bodies of horses and brave men who had gone into battle with a strategy formed for warfare in a previous period.

Today the Church goes into the spiritual battle in an electronic culture, seeking to communicate the gospel in a new cultural environment. In a culture dominated by television, films, CDs, and computers, the Church continues to pursue its strategies that were developed for a culture in which books, journals, and rhetorical addresses were the most powerful means of mass communication.

Like the Polish cavalry, [mainline Protestant churches] are dying in this culture... empty and abandoned Protestant churches [strewn across] America's landscape like the horse and men of the Polish cavalry on the fields of Poland.⁴

Faith communicators in our emerging culture will have to sharpen their storytelling skills and use metaphors to chart the course for others to follow. The art of telling stories is one of the paramount leadership tools of the postmodern culture.⁵

Richard Stone, head of the Storywork Institute in Orlando, Florida, states, "To change an

⁴ Thomas E. Boomershine, "The Polish Cavalry and Christianity in Electronic Culture," *Journal of Theology* 95 (1995), 97-98.

⁵ Sweet, *Soul Tsunami*, 174.

remembered her actually “re-membered” her into that church’s tradition. By the time of that pastor’s farewell, a true transformation had occurred, and the people there were ready for their new pastor: “We have a woman coming to be our new preacher; it’s a great part of our tradition.”⁷ The power of story reshaped a community and prepared them for the journey ahead.

In 1981, Joseph G. Healey, a Roman Catholic missionary working in Tanzania, wrote a book titled *A Fifth Gospel: the Experience of Black Christian Values*. Years later, in response to criticism, he wrote a follow-up article in *Missiology* entitled “A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values: Our Stories as Fifth Gospels.” There he explained that he had used the term “fifth gospel” as a metaphor to describe the different kinds of faith stories that illustrate the good news.⁸

The building blocks for the body of Christ are stories. In fact, the practice of Sunday worship was born in storytelling about transforming encounters between God and ordinary people in the person of Jesus Christ. Anderson and Foley contend that the reason why stories have such power to engage us comes from the fact that human existence is structured in time and narrative. “We comprehend our lives not as disconnected actions or isolated events but in terms of a narrative.”⁹ Part of the challenge and part of the longing in the human heart is to establish a link between the human and the driving story. The faith communicator in our emerging culture must be able to invite

⁷ Tex Sample, *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 58-59.

⁸ Joseph Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), and “A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values: Our Stories as Fifth Gospels,” *Missiology* 16, No. 3, 1988, 305-20.

⁹ Anderson and Foley, 4.

people to connect their story with the divine story. When people miss this connection, they fail to see the good news that is all around us. Author Herb Brokering observed this disjunction and poetically summed it up this way:

Once there was a church
 where they couldn't find the bible
 One Sunday,
 The minister asked if anyone
 had good news from the Lord.
 No one admitted having any,
 so they all started leaving.
 One man said his wife
 had just had a baby this morning.
 The people decided that this
 wasn't a word from the Lord
 and they went home.
 The man stayed for a whole hour.
 He was sure that was good news
 from the Lord.¹⁰

Stepping outside the church community, Tom Peters, author of the business classic *In Search of Excellence* published over 20 years ago, wrote a new book, *Re-Imagine: Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age*. Listen to the advice from a business guru about effective leadership:

"As I see it, an effective leader making the rounds asks one... and only one... question: GOT ANY GOOD STORIES?"

Stories—are the red meat that animates our reasoning process
 stories—give us permission to act
 stories—are photographs of who we aspire to be
 stories—cause emotional response
 stories—connect
 stories—are us."¹¹

¹⁰ Herb Brokering, *I Openers: 80 Parables* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 54.

¹¹ Tom Peters, *Re-Imagine!* (Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 2003), 215.

Stories have power. Daniel P. McAdams is a psychologist and Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at Northwestern. He is currently researching how modern adults construct implicit life narratives to provide their lives with a sense of unity, purpose, and identity. In his book, *The Stories We Live By*, Dr. McAdams argues that we are the stories we tell. He claims: "Identity is a life story. A life story is a personal myth that an individual begins working on in late adolescence and young adulthood in order to provide his or her life with unity or purpose and in order to articulate a meaningful niche in the psychosocial world."¹² This is the power of story!

Your stories are you! You are the product of all the stories you have heard and lived—and many that you have never heard. How can one be a product of a story never heard? One day you might discover that your middle name was given to you by your parents in honor of a dear friend they had many years ago. That friend was key in your folks moving to the town where you grew up. Now discovering this as you graduate from High School and having been shaped by your school experiences and living in your hometown, you now learn that you were here because of a person you never knew but who was so important in your life that you bear their name in yours. The stories that you have heard, the stories you have lived, the stories that are a part of you yet which you have never heard—all these stories have shaped how you see yourself, the world, and your place in it. Every individual is a teller of tales. Through the way in which we arrange the episodes of our lives into stories, though often scattered and sometimes confusing, we seek to provide a sense of coherence to our existence. Everyone, without exception, should be allowed to tell his or her story. After all, even God let Adam try to

¹² Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 5.

explain. The Fall (Genesis 3:1-7) did not catch God by surprise. Instead of coming down and pronouncing His Divine judgment, God walked into the garden and asked, “Where are you?” giving Adam and Eve the chance to tell the story of what happened.

The Gospels are full of stories of the Divine encountering the ordinary. We should be able to relate to the characters we find there: a young man unsure of what to do with his life, a government official, fishermen, woman who has suffered through too many doctors, sisters, and the list goes on. When people gather for preaching they seek sermons less for information than for inspiration and celebration.¹³ The faith communicator is charged with revealing that God is even present in the story we are currently struggling to narrate.

In a scene from the movie *Peter and Paul: Acts of the Apostles*, Anthony Hopkins, playing the role of the Apostle Paul, says to Barnabas, “Words! Words! That is all it is—WORDS! I am afraid it has all become words. It must become a movement, Barnabas, a movement!” The church moves as people see—and more than just see but touch, taste, smell, and hear—themselves as part of the divine story, the Greatest Story Ever Told!

Edwin Schlossberg, founder of Edwin Schlossberg Incorporated (ESI), has been designing interactive places for over twenty years, places like the Time Warner Lobby Experience, Pope John Paul II Cultural Center, American Family Immigration History

¹³ Evans Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 44.

Center, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and even retail environments such as Best Buy.¹⁴

He is considered possibly the best in this field.¹⁵ He describes his approach:

When I start on a project, I tell my clients that they have to choose: They can try to transfer lots of information about the ideas or products that they are interested in, or they can create an exhibit that makes the visitor smarter so that he or she can become a more active, interested, and questioning audience for the ideas or product.¹⁶

Dr. Sweet recommends Schlossberg's book as an excellent resource for faith communicators. Just substitute "sermon" in place of "project" and "exhibit," "God" or "faith" for "ideas" or "projects." When someone begins to put together a sermon, immediately there is a choice to be made: *"I can try to transfer lots of information about God and Jesus and whatever topic I have that week, or I can create a verbal-visual experience that makes the listener a more active, interested, and questioning disciple of Jesus."*

Schlossberg uses the metaphor of theater to talk about interactivity. "Someone has something to say, the theater serves as the context for it, and the audience is the listener."¹⁷ This is a solid metaphor for the church as well: the faith communicator has something to say, the sanctuary serves as the context or stage, and the gathered

¹⁴ Projects are listed and discussed on the ESI website, <http://www.esidesign.com> (accessed 7 September 2004).

¹⁵ Leonard Sweet calls Dr. Schlossberg "the Einstein of interactivity" in an interview with Worshipnotes.org accessed from his website, <http://www.leonardsweet.com> (accessed 28 July 2004).

¹⁶ Edwin Schlossberg, *Interactive Excellence* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 71-72.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

congregation is the listener. But the roles each play have shifted and changed as our culture has shifted and changed.

Schlossberg experienced an example of a shift in the audience/theater/artist paradigm while attending a performance of the shadow puppet theater known as *wayang kulit*. The story is always based on one of the Hindu classics familiar to the audience, so their interest is primarily in comparing one performance to previous performances. Schlossberg observed that the audience quietly chats about how the show is going (the performance lasts eight hours) and afterwards, about how it went. The setup for the performance begins with a large white curtain being strung across the middle of a platform. A strong lamp is hung on one side, the musicians sit on the other. The shadows of the puppets are projected from the lamplight onto the white cloth. Schlossberg noted that part of the audience sat on the musician side and watched as the shadows danced. Others moved to the other side of the stage and watched the puppeteers and the puppets. Part of the audience stepped into the illusion and watched the performance as the puppets danced. Another part of the audience chose to step into the place of the performer and observed the art of his performance. The audience's understanding, discussion, and appreciation of all facets of the play are part of the presentation. The audience plays an active role in the process.¹⁸

In this culture, there has been a shift in somewhat the same direction. Witness the paradigm shift in music concerts. In the 1970's, the rock group *Chicago* was touring. The group was on stage up front with the entire audience facing the stage; in fact, the

¹⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

seats behind the stage were blocked off and not sold. The beat was laid with drums and guitar. The lights all focused on the singers and instrumentalists on stage.

Fast forward to 2003 and to Cher—the Farewell Tour. The beat was not only laid with drums and instruments but now also with lights, and the lights were focused not only on Cher and the dancers on stage but also on the audience closer to the stage with three-quarters round seating and stage runners that put the singer “out there” among the audience. On stage, along with Cher were dancers—acrobats more accurately—as they danced, swung, dangled, floated, bounced, bounded, and tumbled with the music. Cher changed outfits with almost every song, giving the effect that the visual was as much the experience as the sound.

When “seeker services” began, they were much like the early rock concerts or even like attending a movie where the action took place “up there,” and the seeker’s experience was mostly a vicarious one.

At the next “level” are the people under the label “Worship Evangelism,” as coined by Sally Morgenthaler. This form of worship would be more like the rock concert of today. There is a higher degree of audience inclusion and participation, but the effort is still directed and controlled by the ones in charge and “up front.”

Now witness the phenomena of experiences like “Blue Man Group.” Blue Man Group is a creative organization dedicated to creating exciting and innovative work in a wide variety of media. Best known for its award-winning theatrical productions, which feature three enigmatic bald and blue characters who take the audience through a multi-sensory experience that combines theatre, percussive music, art, science, and vaudeville into a form of entertainment that is like nothing else. Our culture is looking for an

experience that they help to shape. In such a culture, we can view worship as interactive theater: part performance, part participatory where that participation can actually shape the worship. Anyone and everyone can participate, but nobody has to participate.

Tex Sample claims that the call is to ministry that is “sensitively indigenous,” that is, forms of ministry where worship is authentic to the lives of the diverse peoples of the United States—a challenge to be local but not parochial.¹⁹

An example of this shifting in our culture can be seen in the new movie theaters where sound is now being projected from all around. As one theater advertises, “Why should your eyes have all the fun?”

Author and church consultant Bill Easum states that several paradigm shifts are happening. Among the shifts he observes seeing are the following:

Spoken word	replaced by	interactive drama
Admired preacher	replaced by	credible faith-sharer
<i>Presentation</i> of the holy	replaced by	<i>experience</i> of the holy ²⁰

Most pastors, having received their education in seminaries and schools, have been trained quite literally by the book. Exegesis and analysis, information and proofs were the staple. But even more significantly, to transition truly to digital communication means to give up control of the most powerful icon of the pastor’s leadership in the modern era: the pulpit. To be digital in communicating the gospel means more than just tacking on audiovisual support after the sermon is completed. It means sharing the creative process with others and forming creative teams. These teams could help the

¹⁹ Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 11-12.

²⁰ These thoughts were from notes taken at “Convergence 2003 Conference,” from the presentation by William Easum, February 2003, Houston, Texas.

pastor with the creative process prior the worship experience and even create ways for participation during the sermon itself. The biggest leadership challenge, especially to the pastor but also to the congregation, comes in making this transition.

An example of a church attempting to develop such a creative team is Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona. At Community Church of Joy, they have changed their team designation from Performing Arts to the Creative Arts and Worship Team. The pastor still creates the topic, but from there, it becomes the work of the team along with the pastor as to how to share the story.

The Creative Arts and Worship Team of Community Church of Joy have several values that guide their creative process:

(1) Missional

They like to start with those who have never been to a church before. (Community Church of Joy sees itself as a “church for others” or a “prodigal-hugging” church).²¹

(2) Experiential

The focus is not on what did you think when you went through the service, but rather how did you feel leaving the service and later that day/week?

(3) Participatory

(4) Image-based

Using images to attract the visual nature of people today.

(5) Connective

There is a real effort to have people be in contact with each other.

(6) Play-full

There is an attempt to instill a “little child” playful faith—capturing the sense of wonder, awe, mystery and play.

(7) Grace-full

There is an emphasis on the grace of God extending to all His people.

(8) Story-driven

The team begins with the storyline and develops the worship experience from there.

²¹ Walt Kallestad, Senior Pastor of Community Church of Joy, calls it a church for others: *Turn Your Church Inside Out*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001). Tim Wright, Executive Pastor of Community Church of Joy, calls for a “scandalous” approach to mission by becoming *The Prodigal Hugging Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

(9) Incarnational

The team strives to be sure that the experience is indigenous.

(10) Sense-full

There is an effort to employ as many senses as possible in the experience.²²

Community Church of Joy states that their team begins with the storyline and works from there. Bill Easum says the preacher will be replaced by the “faith-sharer.” The faith communicator as the tribal storyteller is key to the experience. Author Evans E. Crawford states that participatory preaching, especially in the form of the congregational response, is a manifestation of the priesthood of all believers. The preacher does not hold a monopoly on the word of God, and the congregation’s responses and participation in shaping the act of proclamation emphasizes that the entire group shares the Word.²⁴ Again, the team concept is important. When the hearers are envisioned as co-creators, then sermon design and rhetoric reflect the indicative stance. Listening to God’s Word is always a corporate affair.²⁵

I remember when I first stepped out from behind the traditional pulpit to preach to my congregation. I had been a preacher who typed out a full manuscript of my message, and now I was challenged to share the message even without notes. At first, I simply attempted to memorize my sermon, envisioning an actor giving a performance. That made little difference. So I re-imaged and began to see myself as a storyteller sharing

²² Notes from the conference, “The Power of Story,” Community Church of Joy, Glendale, AZ. October 15-17, 2002. The presenter was Tim Wright, Executive Pastor and leader of the Creative Arts and Worship Team.

²⁴ Evans, 39.

²⁵ Ibid., 59.

with my friends and loved ones. The results were dramatic and noticeable. It began as a story experience—a *shared* story experience. This is the power of story.

As Thomas Boomershine concludes: “Basically, then, we tell our story for the same reason we tell the story of our great-grandfather crossing the prairies in a covered wagon—not because we want to teach a moral lesson but because it is our family story. Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, and Elijah are our ancestors through Jesus. As Paul wrote, ‘...if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise’ (Galatians 3:29). That is why I like to preface Bible stories with ‘This is the story of our people. One day...’”²⁷

²⁷ Thomas Boomershine, *Story Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988),

CHAPTER 5

STORY: AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOL

The master gave his teaching in parables and stories, which his disciples listened to with pleasure—and occasional frustration, for they longed for something deeper.

The master was unmoved. To all their objections he would say, “You have yet to understand that the shortest distance between a human being and Truth is a story.”¹

Using Christ’s method of storytelling is a most effective way to reach the culture emerging around us. Richard Stone, head of The Storywork Institute, said, “To change an organization you have to change its stories.” The Storywork Institute (SWI) exists to help organizations as they expand into global markets to ensure that the values, which helped to support their growth, are not lost in the process. The spirit and values of an organization are encoded and expressed implicitly in the stories that people share about the deeds and accomplishments of people throughout the organization. SWI contends that these hidden assets may be more important than the more apparent assets on the balance sheet. They give them a name “narrative assets.” These stories are useful in all phases of an organization: training, orientation, staff development, and marketing. Their website provides an example of this work. SWI worked with one of the country’s largest providers of healthcare services to children, Nighttime Pediatrics in Salt Lake City, which routinely sees approximately 80,000 children a year. Here is one of those stories:

¹ Anthony De Mello, SJ, *One-Minute Wisdom* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 23.

The Most Important Job in the World

as told by Susan Walker, Receptionist

When we're swamped, I feel like I'm the eye of a hurricane. The phones are ringing off the hook. Parents who call are angry when they discover we're so busy that we can't see their child for another four hours. Often I'm the lightning rod for their anxiety and hostility. Patients are backed up in the reception area, some with no place to sit. The nurses and docs are breathing down my neck, upset that I have just booked another child into an already over-packed schedule. Believe me, whoever is sitting at the front desk is not going to win a popularity contest.

One evening, when things were particularly bad, a mother called, concerned because her child had passed out. Unfortunately, I often listened to such concerns with a dose of skepticism. The cynic in me presumed she was making things sound far worse than they actually were in order to get an appointment. But I responded according to company policy. "If you're worried about your child, come right on over. You'll just have to be patient and sit in the waiting room, but we'll work you in as quickly as we can." When I hung up, I thought, "Oh man, we probably won't be seeing her." Luckily, I was mistaken. In fact, I was nearly dead wrong.

Forty-five minutes later she showed up at our door. Standing beside her was her teenage daughter with hardly an ounce of color in her face. I don't think I had ever seen anyone come into the clinic looking quite as sick.

Without hesitating, I ushered them back to the nurses station. We got a urine sample and the nurse immediately ran the test. A moment later she told me to quickly get the doctor who was seeing another patient. His preliminary diagnosis was juvenile diabetes, and he feared that she might slip into a diabetic coma at any moment. Instinctively, I ran for the wheelchair. Within seconds the doctor was running with her and her mother in tow to the emergency room just a couple hundred yards away. She was so dehydrated they had trouble even getting an IV into her. Luckily, they were able to stabilize her, then move her to Primary Children's Hospital.

Rarely do we have a chance to follow up with our patients. Even more rarely are we contacted by a parent letting us know how things are going. This mom was an exception. A few days later she called to let me know her daughter was going home. Most of all, she wanted me to know how grateful she was for all that we had done.

When I hung up, I, too, was grateful. What if I had said, "No, I'm sorry. You're going to have wait four hours." That girl would have died. I had a new-found appreciation for the principles that Nighttime had established for receptionists. They worked. Most importantly, they saved a life.

When people used to ask me what I do, I would say, almost shamefully, that I was just a receptionist. But since that fateful night, I say the same thing, thinking, "I'm so proud of that."²

Stories are a most effective way to reach people in our emerging culture. Another example of the use of story to reach people is the bestselling book, *Who Moved My Cheese*. Since its publication in 1998, it has stayed on the bestseller list, while remaining in hard-back edition, no less! The story is a simple parable with four characters. Two are mice named "Sniff" and "Scurry," and two are little people named "Hem" and Haw," who are the size of mice but look and act a lot like some people. The four characters live in a "Maze" and look for "Cheese" to nourish them and make them happy. The story shows what happens to the characters one day when the Cheese has been moved to another part of the "Maze." Some are prepared for it and do well. Others are surprised by it and have a difficult time. As you watch what they do, you may see a part of yourself.

The book was written when the author, Dr. Spencer Johnson, was having a difficult time dealing with a major change he thought was unfair, at which time he was confused and angry. He wrote the parable to help him laugh at himself, to encourage himself to change, move on and realize something better. The USA Today called Dr. Johnson "The King of Parables," as all of his books have been parables. Dr. Johnson views himself as a practical philosopher who creates simple, short, easy-to-read parables that do not give advice. They simply tell a story and let the reader take out of the story whatever they want. Dr. Johnson says his motto comes from Colby, an 18th Century

² <http://www.storywork.com> (accessed 3 November 2004). Richard Stone is also quoted in Dr. Sweet's book *AquaChurch* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing Inc., 1999), 175.

English writer, who said, “Give the reader the most information and take from him the least time.”³ What is interesting is that when Dr. Johnson published his book, it was counter to what was available for business leaders. When he began to write, business books by definition had to be big and thick, and credentials had to be impressive. Dr. Johnson decided to go another direction and give busy business people a little book that would be very easy to read, with no advice, how-to, or complicated charts but a really simple story with things they could do to dramatically increase their effectiveness as managers.

Stories are an effective means to reach our emerging culture. *Who Moved My Cheese?* has now been published in 41 languages. Dr. Johnson said in an interview, “Many times the lessons in my book are things people know already but forgot how to use.”⁴

Similarly, there is the work of Steve Denning, former Program Director of Knowledge Management at the World Bank. Denning works with organizations, including scores of Fortune 500 companies, helping them use storytelling as a powerful tool for organizational change and knowledge management. His recently published book is *Squirrel Inc: A Fable of Leadership Through Storytelling*. Denning explores the centrality of narrative to leadership and communication. While analysis is the key to good theory, precise thinking, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery, it

³ Dr. Johnson, as quoted on his website, <http://www.whomovedmycheese.com> (accessed 4 November 2004).

⁴ Quoted from an interview that is part of the book entitled *The Bestseller* by Brian Hill and Dee Power, Dearborn Financial Publishing, Inc. The quote was excerpted and posted on Dr. Johnson’s website, <http://www.whomovedmycheese.com> (accessed 4 November 2004).

can be a drawback when it comes to communicating with human beings. A story can translate dry, abstract numbers into compelling pictures and action. Stories are an effective means to reach our emerging culture.

So if stories are an effective means of reaching people in our emerging culture, what more effective way to communicate faith than by sharing the greatest story every told? People who share each other's stories become friends. When we are part of the same story, we are bound together in special ways. Our ongoing, unfinished stories are ones framed by God but ones in which we are invited to have a hand in coloring. The Bible is God's storybook—it is history or HIS-STORY. When asked about creation, we do not talk about the teachings of Adam and Eve; rather, we talk about the story of Adam and Eve. Stories cannot be reduced to something else. The story means what it says. It does not *have* a point; it *is* the point.⁵

Robert Dickson, founder of FirstVoice, gave a good definition of what a story is: "*A story is a fact wrapped in an emotion that can compel us to take action and so transform the world around us.*"⁶ Jerome Bruner, the father of cognitive psychology, believes that storytelling is hardwired into our psyches. Bruner has observed that, from an early age, children tell stories. First are the stories of completion. By means of gesture and facial expression, the young child says, "All gone," when the bottle is empty. The child says, "Uh oh," when she feels she has made a mistake and "Ohh!" when surprised or pleased.

⁵ Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture*, 57.

⁶ Robert Dickman, "The Four Elements of Every Successful Story," *MIT Reflections*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), 51.

These stories are short but complete. They meet the definition of story. For example, take “all gone.” The fact is that the bottle is finished. This fact is wrapped in an emotion, either satisfaction or desire for more. Depending on which emotion it is, an adult is compelled to take an action, either to burp the baby and settle her down or to get another bottle. Either way, the baby’s world is transformed for the better. Bruner asserts that infants develop meaning through narrative, and that the need to create stories precedes language. He suggests that infants are motivated to learn to speak precisely because they already have stories inside them that they want to share with others.⁷

In his latest book, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery*, Dr. Sweet says that our choice of companion stories—those are the stories we choose to live with—are some of the most important choices we make.⁸ It is through these companion stories that we have our best answers to the perennial questions of life: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? And these stories go beyond the personal questions to ones of community and relationship. Storytelling creates community. To say, “Let me tell you a story...” is to invite someone into a relationship. The shared community stories do more than define a culture. They shape and move it, making it a living thing. These stories answer the questions: Who are we? Where are we heading? What happens to us when we die?

⁷ Jerome Bruner, “Entry into Meaning,” in *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 67-98.

⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2004), 77.

Author Daniel Quinn has said, “The carrier of culture is the story we tell ourselves over and over.”⁹ For example, consider Germany after the end of World War I. Germans were frightened, and their day-to-day existence was brutal. Adolph Hitler wrapped that fact in the powerful emotions of paranoia and anti-Semitism. Watching the surviving films of his speeches, one does not even have to understand German to see the powerful way Hitler conveyed those emotions. The story he told—that the Jews were responsible—compelled the German people to take actions that transformed the world into a living hell.

Not all examples are on a national or world scale. The same is true of the stories told to individuals from one generation to the next. Suppose one grows up with a father who tells his children that the reason the people in the Bible are only mentioned by their first names is that EVERYONE in the Bible shared THEIR last name. Adam and Eve were Adam and Eve Balaban. And there was Noah Balaban, Moses Balaban, Sarah Balaban, Joshua Balaban, Ruth Balaban, David Balaban, Mary Balaban, and so on throughout the Scriptures. The story that child receives is a story that they are a part of this family and a part of salvation history! Imagine a child sitting there in a Sunday School class and hearing a story about one of the great heroes of the faith and thinking, “That’s MY family!”¹⁰

⁹ Daniel Quinn, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

¹⁰ This is a story my father used to tell me as I was growing up. Interestingly enough, I shared this story in an e-mail conversation with Dr. Daniel Taylor and he commented: “I like your story about your father—it was wise to give you the feeling that you belonged to a family—and to a story—that stretches back to creation. And there’s no better feeling than that of knowing one’s story has ultimate meaning.”

Father Robert Waznak, S.S., describes the early Christians “as a community of storytellers.”¹¹ It used to be that if one was accused of “telling stories,” it meant one was lying. Yet in the emerging culture, story is crucial in communication. For years and years, little boys and girls brought bathrobes from home and dressed up as wise men or shepherds or townsfolk, innkeeper, Mary or Joseph for the church Christmas program. Sunday School teachers and Vacation Bible School leaders might have used a flannel graph or cut out figures to retell the stories of the great people of faith. It is how people learned the stories of God and of His people—the story of US! Stories are an effective way to communicate faith to our emerging culture.

Gather a group of Lutherans together, and one can start an evening full of stories by asking one question: What was it like when you went through Confirmation? Many will share stories of tough classes and stern examinations, some will recall standing in front of the whole congregation with the pastor asking questions. Generations of Lutherans memorized various parts of Luther’s Small Catechism: The Lord’s Prayer, The Ten Commandments, The Apostles’ Creed, and The Sacraments, all under great pressure to get it right. Some classes were even required to memorize the biblical proof passages that support the meanings. While there is value in such learning, a faith without joy is a faith that knows ABOUT the Savior but has yet to MEET Him.

There is an old preacher’s story about a traveling orator. Stopping in one town, he awed the audience with his skill and delivery. Near the end of his appearance, he was asked to read the 23rd Psalm. With great skill and passion, he delivered the psalm without a single slip or missed word. At the end, the audience thundered their applause. When

¹¹ Robert Waznak, *Sunday after Sunday: Preaching the Homily as Story* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 27.

the applause died down, the retired preacher of the town took the podium and simply, even softly, spoke the psalm. When the preacher finished, there was no applause. In fact, there was not a sound. Leaning to his host for the evening, the orator asked, "What was the difference?" His host said, "You know the psalm, he knows the Shepherd." Storytelling is an effective communication tool for sharing faith in our emerging culture. To spend a portion of the Confirmation Journey by telling the stories of faith, we are inviting people to join in the experience of Jesus.

Martin Buber loved to tell a story of his grandfather, who was asked to talk about his great teacher, the famous and holy Baal Shem Tov. The paralyzed grandfather replied by telling how the holy man used to jump up and down and dance when he was praying. Being swept up in the fervor of the narrative, the grandfather himself stood up and began to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. At that moment, the grandfather was completely healed of his paralysis. Buber went on to say, "That's the way to tell a story."¹² To teach and know the stories are to become part of the stories. To become part of the story is to go beyond the mode of "think and analyze" or "solve and remember." It is to actually experience God through Jesus and His ministry. Dr. Sweet says, "When you tell the story of Jesus' forgiving his enemies, you become someone who forgives his or her enemies. When you tell the story of Jesus' crossing the street to help an outcast, you cross the street to help the nearest outcast.

¹² Martin Buber. Dr. Sweet references this story in his book, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery*, p. 84, and cites the quote from the preface to Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters*, trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), v-vi.

Christians live the story of Jesus. Christians don't just tell the story of Jesus."¹³

It is through our involvement in the sacred story that we experience the presence, love and grace of God. Without such experience, our faith is diminished. Without the power of the story, our faith becomes simply words about God instead of experiences of the Word of God. When Confirmation students know the stories, then as they learn the Catechism, they learn them from a perspective of the story behind them. They have entered the story, and then they take something home with them. Storytelling is a most effective means to communicate faith in our emerging culture.

¹³ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery* (Colorado Spring, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2004), 84.

CHAPTER 6

MULLING OVER THE JOURNEY

I was the middle of three boys. Growing up, we were like any other boys—mischievous. One day, Dad took the three of us shopping for Mother’s Day gifts. One brother said something that started our scuffle. It was probably nothing, but then we never needed anything to start our horseplay. Our rough-housing abruptly ended at the precise time the glass globe ornament crashed on the floor. Our world stopped. The salesperson looked at us, then looked at the sign above the cash register: “You break, You buy.” We had no money. The salesperson had no mercy. My father stepped between the salesperson and us. “How much do we owe?” he asked. He didn’t owe anything. Yet he paid for our predicament.

So it is with those who love Jesus.¹

This dissertation has been more than just an intellectual exercise. While spending hours reading and researching storytelling as an effective communication tool for sharing faith to the emerging culture, the journey also ventured into the real-life world of storytelling and storytellers. This world exists at many different levels. At the University of Missouri, Professor John Miles Foley is the Director of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition. This presents a wonderful source of further exploration. At least one

¹ This is an original parable from my personal experience. As I began the challenge of writing this dissertation, my proofreader and first editor (as well as my loving step-mom) June Balaban challenged me to begin composing parables. This is the first one.

university, East Tennessee State University, offers a Masters in Storytelling Degree.

During the course of this journey, I have read and communicated with authors who have written about story and how stories influence our journey. Their journey is changing, and my journey is changing, not just through reading about theirs but also through the e-mail interaction and finding out more about them. Author Daniel Taylor sent a word of encouragement that arrived at just the right moment when I felt discouraged about my progress and even about the topic. Dr. Dan P. McAdams also opened up an entirely different view of religious stories and how they affect our lives. Whereas a professional church worker might only see religious stories as foundations of faith, Dr. McAdams sees religious stories as comfort and community:

I would say my faith is less simple than it used to be. Part of me is still the little kid who loves Jesus. But part of me thinks the whole thing is a little ridiculous. Actually, I am more positively inclined toward religion and religious traditions than I am to spirituality and faith, as it were. I think that churches, synagogues, and so on often provide people with wonderful communities, and they motivate and organize pro-social behavior, social action, and the like. This is mainly why I continue to attend (Lutheran) -- and for the music and occasional inspiration. But the kind of one-on-one, me-and-Jesus faith (and related approaches that emphasize personal spirituality) leaves me a bit cold. Too individualistic, but of course very American, which is a point I make in *THE REDEMPTIVE SELF*.
Best,
Dan McA.²

One of the storytelling sources on the Internet is "The Storytelling Ring."³ This is a collection of sites throughout the World Wide Web featuring storytelling resources, organizations, events, and the tellers themselves, all dedicated, at least in part, to the vocal art of telling stories. Traveling this ring, one can meet some fascinating people,

² Quoted from an e-mail exchange with Dr. Dan McAdams.

³ The Storytelling Ring website, <http://www.pjtss.net/ring/> (accessed 3 November 2004).

read some wonderful stories, and learn more about storytelling and stories from all around our globe.

There are also storyteller festivals hosted yearly in different parts of our country; there is one held annually in my own metro area. At a typical festival, one can meet and hear some wonderful professional storytellers. The festivals most often also offer workshops and/or seminars about storytelling. They provide yet further opportunities for further growth and development.

With conferences as part of this program's requirements, I had the opportunity to meet and visit with professional storytellers to gain some insights as well as encouragement from them. Two of them in particular shared and guided part of this journey. One is Don Doyle, a nationally recognized storyteller and actor from Mesa, Arizona, where he is a Professor Emeritus of Theatre and Storytelling at Arizona State University. The other is Tracy Radosevic. Tracy is a dynamic, energetic, internationally acclaimed storyteller, educator, and retreat facilitator. She has traveled all over the United States and several foreign countries. Tracy has served on the board of the Network of Biblical Storytellers and is currently the editor of their bimonthly newsletter. Tracy led several workshops and made presentations at "*The Ancient-Future Church: Unlocking the Power of Story*" conference. During the conference, she also posed for an interview. Further help and information has been gained from e-mail contact. Tracy's first love is biblical storytelling. She shared with me her methodology for telling a biblical story.

Many of our churches—here I am speaking from the experience of more than 24 years of serving in Lutheran churches and with other pastors, Lutheran and otherwise—

would awaken people to the richness of Scripture by simply paying more attention to the reading or telling of the biblical story on Sunday mornings. The role of the Scripture reader, whether it is the pastor or others, can enhance and carry a message by the way the Scripture is shared. Rather than read a passage with a monotone rendering, simply pick up on key words or phrases and provide them with emphasis: this would send a better message to the hearers. The beginnings of bible storytelling could be birthed in local congregations.

Tracy teaches a technique called “MULLing the Biblical Text.” It builds off the letters M-U-L-L. First is to master the text. Tracy does not encourage memorizing the text so much as embodying it. The goal is to repeat and repeat the story over and over until one can recall the story at about 75% word accuracy.

The second step is to understand the text. In this, the storyteller attempts to learn as much as possible about the historical context of the story or stories. How would the first audiences have heard them? What cultural references would that audience have picked up on that might slip right by us today because we live in a different time and culture? What other cultural, political, social or religious things were happening at that time? What about the relationship between the characters in the story? Tracy says the storytellers aim is for about 95% content accuracy.

Third, the first “L” stands for “Living with the story.” It is here that the average pastor would have to make a significant shift in preparing for telling the biblical story. Most pastors would claim some mastery of the text, and most would have experience understanding the text through study and biblical exegesis. Tracy says to live with the story means to be intentionally disciplined during the learning stage to tell the story X

number of times, Y number of days. The values of X and Y would vary from person to person. Tracy's experience teaches her that most beginners need at least a month, maybe even 6 weeks. Tracy's suggests meditating on the story. Break the story into chunks—a phrase, sentence, at most a small paragraph—and slowly tell the story, chunk by chunk. Each time, listen for how each section of the story is speaking to you, the storyteller, how it is connecting with you. Especially pay close attention to any emotions that surface. The next step in living with the story is to tell the story to another person. This is not so much a performance, but the storyteller is looking for feedback that gives insight into why certain chunks of the story are told in certain ways and what those ways communicate to the listener. The final step is to pray the story. This is different from meditating on the story in that you tell it straight through. When you pray the story, you are more in a giving posture; you are offering the story and yourself to God.

The final “L” stands for “Link personally with the story.” This can happen at any time in the mulling process. Tracy recommends paying attention to the emotions that arise due to certain characters and/or situations in the story. She teaches another three-step process for this. First, name the emotion(s). Second, ask yourself why that particular emotion is elicited by the story. She made a quick note to say that this may not be an easy question to answer! Third, determine what you are going to do with this information. Tracy states that if one puts forth this kind of effort by taking a deep dive into the story, then one will be richly blessed, because now the story resides deep within the storyteller and will in essence become his or her story.⁴

⁴ “MULLing the Biblical Text” notes from a workshop presented by storyteller and author Tracy Radosevic, and from notes from a follow-up conversation while attending the conference “The Ancient-Future Church: Unlocking the Power of Story.”

Another valuable process gleaned from these storytellers is to examine the performance process. This is broken down into three sections: the story launch, the story middle, and the story finale.

The story launch is where many storytellers experience most of their nervousness and anxiety. Pastors—and for that matter, anyone preparing to tell a story—should give some thought as to how one approaches a presentation. With nerves running high and anxiety attacking, some begin telling their story even before they get out of their seat and are deep into the story by the time they face their audience and make eye contact. The role of preparing or “getting into storytelling position” (a term used by the storytellers) will have a powerful effect on the audience. As one steps forward to tell a story, the majority of the people present begin or continue their process of sizing up the storyteller.

The first thing to be aware of is what is going on in the storyteller’s own mind. What is she feeling? Is he confident? Does she believe she has something wonderful to share? Does he feel that he is going to do well? What is on the storyteller’s mind will likely be reflected in her face, posture, and motions. One should walk slowly and confidently to the front and center of the room. The professional storytellers commented that a genuine smile is acceptable but never a fake smile and never a giggle.

Once standing front and center, the storyteller is still not ready to begin. The professional storytellers say that the audience has not yet completed the task of sizing you up. It is important, then, to PAUSE. As they are looking you over, take the opportunity to do the same, but be sure that your facial expression reflects a positive outlook, no matter how you feel or what you see. This pause comes only AFTER you have arrived at

your telling spot on the stage. While it may seem like a lifetime, the pause should be at least five seconds while you are looking at your audience. Sweep the audience with your eyes imagining that you are saying a polite “hello” to each person. They said that any audience needs this time to get a visual fix on you and to signal their ears to begin listening. They were insistent about this pause. Always wait until your audience is ready to listen before uttering your first words!

Then, your first words are not the beginning of a story but rather an introduction of Self. It should be short, and if there is an introduction by someone else, it can be as simple as a greeting, stating your name, and one or two interesting facts, for example, “Howdy, my name is Peter Balaban, and do I ever have a story to tell you!” The storytellers related this to going to a movie. The opening film footage usually involves some of the plot, and the character might flash on the screen while the movie title, cast, credits, etc. appear at predetermined intervals. This goes on for several minutes before the plot really begins to unravel.

It is here that the story may be introduced. The title, the story credits, and maybe a lead-in sentence can be used to help form the mindset of the audience. Then comes another PAUSE. Take another five seconds, make another sweep of the audience with your eyes while they let your initial remarks sink in and begin to anticipate your story. Then the story begins. One teller suggested taking a small step forward to make the launch of the story.

The beginning of the story should be SLOW. The first few sentences should be delivered much more slowly than a normal speaking rate. This helps the audience as they

form their initial visual images of your story. Once they have established this, the speaking pace can be picked up as desired or dictated by the story.

With the story successfully launched, several things are important to consider as the story continues. The most important things to consider are the vast array of oral communication skills. The areas to focus on are the voice, the body, and the words.

The voice is perhaps the most important tool for a storyteller. The voice needs to be powerful and effective. Here are some things to consider.

- **Vocal Rate**—The rate of speaking might vary for different words, sentences, or story parts. Pauses can be used deliberately to allow your audience to linger at a certain point. Consider how a choir director takes time to make sure the singers breathe at the right moments; this is also true for storytellers. Breathing needs to be controlled, to add to and not detract from the flow of the story.
- **Vocal Volume**—The tellers said that stage fright causes many storytellers to speak at a lower volume and at a faster rate than desired. The technique is to learn to speak so that the listeners farthest away can hear clearly and distinctly. A good practice they suggested was to arrive early and check out the facility. They said to not be afraid to use a microphone, for it can save your voice from unnecessary strain and can allow the teller to use whispers and still be heard. They also suggested that if you have a friend, ask them to sit in the back during the performance and signal if it becomes hard to hear.
- **Special Sound Effects**—What deviations from the normal conversational speech might add to the story's effectiveness? Maybe it is a voice change for

different characters; maybe a loud thump or knock is necessary. Would using a scream, a cough, a sneeze or a whisper produce a desired reaction? The tellers cautioned here to be sure that the effect added to the story and did not detract from it.

Hand in hand with the voice comes the body. With so much of communication being nonverbal, there are several things to consider in how one uses the body in storytelling.

- **Body Positioning**—Some tellers choose to sit. Some choose to stand. Neither position is either right or wrong, though the tellers pointed out that sitting not only can restrict the listener's view of the teller, but also it restricts some of the teller's other movement.
- **Eye Contact**—Professional storytellers contended that this might be the most important physical factor in a story's delivery. They said that unless looking away fits the story content, the teller should look into the eyes of the members of the audience at all times. Moving from person to person, sweeping the entire audience assists in making the story a two-way communication. It also communicates to the listener that they are important to the teller.
- **Facial Expressions**—One's facial expression should not look frozen into one position or set in concrete. The 15 facial muscles can combine to produce a huge number of facial expressions. The tellers suggest practicing in front of a mirror and making note of the effectiveness and naturalness of one's expressions.

- **Gestures**—These must be natural and must fit the story. Arm and hand movements should not be the focal point of the story. Experiment, but experiment during practice sessions, not while in front of an audience.
- **Posture**—Poor posture can signal a poor story. Slouchy shoulders convey a lack of concern. Again, the tellers suggest practicing in front of a full length mirror.
- **Feet**—Feet can alter the reaction one gets. The tellers simply advise that the feet naturally follow what the body dictates, being mindful that pacing can be a distracting nervous movement.

The last area they talked about in the Story Middle was the words. Here are the most important items to consider.

- **Grammar or Dialect Choices**—Some grammar or dialect decisions invite controversy. The tellers warned that using a different dialect should only follow a very careful study and practice of that dialect. They warned that users of a dialect group could be insulted with a poor imitation.
- **Verbal “Tics”**—Here the tellers talk about repetitious verbal mannerisms that can come across as annoying to listeners. Some are quite common: *you know, uh, kinda, sorta, so, well, ok, right, now then*. Other “tics” are what tellers have labeled *fillers*, with words like “this” and “little,” for example, “This little person got into this little car and drove over to this little house.” Many times, *fillers* are used because the speaker is uncomfortable with silence. The tellers suggested taping a five-minute portion of one’s unrehearsed conversation, then playing it back and listening closely for verbal “tics.”

- **Word and Sentence Delivery**—This area comes through rehearsal and helps one tell a story with poise and confidence. Many stories contain sentences or descriptions that might be difficult to say clearly without practice. A line of one story they referenced was “*the stoop-shouldered elf suddenly faced a decaying, abandoned cottage.*” Only by practicing it repeatedly will one assure that appropriate words and sentences are used. Practice also helps to eliminate excessive wordiness.

At last, there is the Story Finale. The story, even the best story, must come to an end. The professional storytellers offered a few keys to effectively ending the story. As one comes to the end, the last few sentences are delivered with a slow and deliberate pace. This change of pace signals to the audience that the story is about to end. An exception to this rule might be a ghost story or a story with a surprise ending. With the story now complete, the storyteller should take a step back if possible and honor the audience with a bow or a nod. Some storytellers simply say “The End.” Some say “Thank You,” while others repeat the title of the story. The actions here are to communicate to the audience that you appreciate their listening. Another point the storytellers emphasized is that the storyteller should not rush off the stage. One should pause, making final eye contact sweeping across the audience and then walk slowly and confidently back to your seat, grateful that you once again had the opportunity to share something you love.⁵

⁵ “Story Launch, Story Middle and Story Finale” is the condensation of notes and insights from different workshops and conversations with the two storytellers at the “Unlocking the Power of Story” conference, hosted at Community Church of Joy, Glendale, Arizona, 3-5 February 2003. The two professional storytellers were Tracy Radosevic and Dr. Don Doyle. Further information was gleaned from the Internet library

Walter Wangerin Jr., an English teacher and author at Valparaiso University, claims that there are two very simple rules to effective storytelling.

First, the story you are telling must be of profound importance to you. This not only adds passion to your telling, but also helps you find your own voice and method of storytelling unique to you.

The second rule is like the first. If you truly love the audience to whom you speak, you will speak to them as treasured parts of your own heart.⁶

The Great Commandment is to love God and to love others. This is the same foundation for faith storytelling. In passing on the Greatest Story Ever Told to the emerging culture, we must use our oral tradition, for this has been the most effective means by which one generation passed the faith along to the next.

book by Geisler and Harlynn, *Storytelling Professionally: The Nuts and Bolts of a Working Performer* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1997), <http://www.netlibrary.com> (accessed 1 December 2004).

⁶ Walt Wangerin, "Making Disciples By Sacred Story," *Christianity Today* (February 2004, Vol. 48, No. 2), 86.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

*I believe there is a place
Where people live in perfect peace
Where there is food on every plate
Where work is rewarded and rest is sweet
Where the color of your skin
Won't get you in or keep you out
Where justice reigns and truth finally wins
Its hard fought war against fear and doubt*

*And everyone I know wants to go there too
But when I ask them how to do it they seem so confused
Do I turn to the left?
Do I turn to the right?
When I turn to the world they gave me this advice*

*They said boy you just follow your heart
But my heart just led me into my chest
They said follow your nose
But the direction changed every time I went and turned my head
And they said boy you just follow your dreams
But my dreams were only misty notions
But the Father of hearts and the Maker of noses
And the Giver of dreams He's the one I have chosen
And I will follow Him*

*I believe there'll come a time
Lord, I pray it's not too far off
There'll be no poverty or crime
There'll be no greed and we will learn how to love
And children will be safe in their homes
And there'll be no violence out on the streets
The old will not be left alone
And the strong will learn how to care for the weak*

*And everyone I know hopes it comes real soon
But when I ask 'em where I'd find it they seem so confused
Do I find it in the day?*

*Do I find it in the night?
When I finally ask the world they give me this advice*

*Well they said boy you just follow your heart
But my heart just led me into my chest
They said follow your nose
But the direction changed every time I went and turned my head
And they said boy you just follow your dreams
But my dreams were only misty notions
But the Father of hearts and the Maker of noses
And the Giver of dreams He's the one I have chosen*

*And oh, I hear the voice of a million dreams
Then I wake in the world that I'm partly made of
And the world that is partly my homemaking
And oh, I hear the song of a heart set free
That will not be kept down
By the fury and sound
Of a world that is wasting away but keeps saying*

*Saying boy you just follow your heart
But my heart just led me into my chest
They said follow your nose
The direction changed every time I go and turn my head
They said boy you just follow your dreams
But my dreams were only misty notions
But the Father of hearts and the Maker of noses
And the Giver of dreams He's the one I have chosen
And I will follow Him¹*

In a culture that is saturated with information, to what voice do people listen?

From the perspective of the pastor, how does one communicate faith in such a way as to help people follow “The Maker of noses”? Dr. Larry Shelton of George Fox Evangelical Seminary kindly shared this story of his holiness evangelist father, R.S. Shelton.

The Senior Shelton, penniless, was journeying through the American South in peach season during the Great Depression. At one stop, a boy got on the train with a basket of beautiful, fragrant, perfectly ripened peaches. The road-weary pastor feels his

¹ Rich Mullins, *The World As Best as I remember It*, Vol. 2, (1992).

mouth water for the tasty treat. He tries to distract himself by looking out the window, but all he sees are acres and acres of peach trees. Walking down the aisle, the boy attempts to sell his peaches to the travelers but to no avail. Apparently, they are locals, not sufficiently impressed with the basketful of fruit they might have found in their own back yards. The senior Shelton stands up, hot, thirsty, and hungry, yet having no money with which to buy a peach. Calling the boy over, Shelton, whispers in his ear, "Boy, you give me one of those peaches, and I'll sell the whole basket for you!" The boy agrees, and Shelton takes the boy behind him as he saunters down that same train aisle, peach juice dripping down the corner of his mouth, over his chin, past his fingers, and trickling tiny rivulets along the floor. He slurps politely, his lips pursed allowing only the faintest sound, "Mmmmm." By the time the old preacher and the boy reach the end of the car, every peach is gone from the basket.

*"How 'dja do that?" the boy asks. "Son," says the seasoned preacher, "I just helped 'em realize how bad they wanted peaches."*²

If we understand Jesus and faith as the peaches in the story, then we are living in a time and culture where people do not realize how bad they want peaches. The pastor has the task of creating a climate for the Gospel message, to "fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" as Paul put it in 2 Timothy 1:6. When Paul proclaims that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Romans 10:13), he then wonders, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). This is the problem that I addressed in

² Dr. Larry Shelton shared this story with me, 28 December 2004 via email.

chapter one: How can I communicate the Good News of God in Christ to people who are information-tired? How do I speak to heavy hearts in today's culture? What communication tool can share the Good News so that it makes a difference today? My claim has been that using Christ's chosen methodology of storytelling is an effective means to share faith in our emerging culture.

Chapter two explored the Biblical use of story. I first showed that the Old Testament prophets used story as an effective means to communicate God's message to God's people. Moving to the New Testament, I looked specifically at Jesus and His ministry. Jesus had all the choices in how to communicate His message. He chose story.

In chapter three, I explored our changing culture and how ministry to this emerging culture must resonate to them. When Jesus was standing in the region known as Caesarea Philippi, He was standing among the many altars and markers to many deities (Matthew 16). It was here that He first asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Then He asked them directly, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Whether one wants to argue that our culture is "Post-Christian" or "Pre-Christian," the truth is still the same: our present methods of reaching and teaching people are not as effective in today's arising culture as they once were. With all the voices claiming and clamoring for people's lives and loyalties, it is story that allows people to discover who Jesus is.

Chapter four explored the power of story. Looking at the role story plays in our lives individually and collectively, I demonstrated the power of story. Chapter five continued this theme as I explored using story as an effective communication tool in reaching the culture coming forth today.

Chapter six allowed me to bring together some of the various parts of this doctoral journey especially concerning the use of story and the development of story presentation. In the appendices, I am blessed to share some examples of powerful stories from some who have sojourned with me.

The journey has led me to a powerful solution to the ministry communication problem—the art of storytelling. That is, as a minister shares stories and engages others in the story, God’s story intersects with each individual’s life story. Story is a tool, a powerful communication tool. Moreover, story is an effective communication tool to share faith in the emerging culture.

In the short term, the use of story techniques can be immediately applied in any congregation if they were to be used in the reading of Scripture during worship. While I have been an effective preacher who tells stories, my plan now is to become a storyteller. Anyone can tell a story by reading it off a page, like reading a children’s book to a library group. In contrast, being a true storyteller means involvement, entering into the story itself. This would affect not only my pastoral ministry in the community I serve but could also open up doors to new opportunities to share stories to other groups and communities.

John the Baptist was imprisoned. While there, he heard of what Jesus was doing. He started to have doubts about what was happening, so he sent some of his disciples to check out things. “Are You the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus responds, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:2-4). Jesus said, “Is

John worried about things he has heard? Tell him what is happening!” That is our call today: tell them the story of who Jesus is and what Jesus is doing. This is the response to the preacher facing the challenge, “Sir, we want to see Jesus” (John 12:21). Tell them the story!

“...[P]eople are merging their stories with the changeless-yet-ever-changing Story of God. That Story goes on forever, weaving its way through countless human lives, countless human stories. We are all part of that great narrative, as we join our stories to His. And we expand that narrative as we call others to join their stories to His.”³

The story continues, and I am excited about the next chapter.

SOLO DEO GLORIA!

³ Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story: Rediscovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 179.

CHAPTER 8

ENTRODUCTION

In 1993, Sony Pictures released a movie entitled *The Big Fish*. It received four Golden Globe nominations and an Academy Award nomination. It is the story of Edward Bloom and his son. Bloom has always been a teller of tall-tales about his oversized life as a young man and his mythic exploits. With his larger-than-life stories, Bloom charms almost everyone he encounters, except for his estranged son Will. Much of the storyline of the movie is Will's attempt to separate fact from fiction as he comes to terms with his father's great feats and failings.

It is Will's voice over that opens the movie:

"In telling the story of my father's life, it is impossible to separate the fact from the fiction, the man from the myth. The best I can do is to tell it the way he told me. It doesn't always make sense, but that's what kind of story this is."

The movie opens with Edward Bloom telling the story of the day his son was born while he was out trying to catch an "uncatchable" fish. The story is told once but sequenced throughout his life so that it is a story that Will has heard and resented for all his growing years.

Near the end of the film, Edward Bloom is in the hospital dying. At his bedside are his son Will and the old family doctor, Dr. Bennett.

After checking on Edward, Dr. Bennett turns to Will, "Did your father ever tell you about the day you were born?"

Will responds, "Yeah, a thousand times he caught an uncatchable fish."

"Not that, the real story." Dr. Bennett says, "Did he ever tell you that?"

"No."

Dr. Bennett shares, "Your mother came in, about three in the afternoon. A neighbor drove her, on account that your father was away on business in Wichita. You were born a week early, but there were no complications. It was a perfect delivery. Your father was sorry not to be there. But it wasn't the custom in that day for men to be in the delivery room, so I can't see how it would have been much different if he had been there."

"And that is the real story of how you were born. Not very exciting, is it? I suppose if I had to choose between the true version and an elaborate one involving fish and a wedding ring, I would choose the fancy version. But, then, that's just me."

There is a moment's pause. Will says, "I kinda like your version."

As I am typing this, I just heard over the radio that Barna research, summarizing the past year (2004), states that people attended more movies this past year than they did religious services. The thought came to me, "Maybe they are looking for better stories."

After September 11, 2001, I remember hearing that Sunday attendance at churches marked a record high in our culture. Then I heard that the following Sunday was a record low. Why? People went to church to find something. They came, they looked, and they left untouched. They did not hear the story that would help them make sense out of the senselessness around them.

We discussed the power of story in our cohort journey and wondered why there seemed to be a lack of stories in our churches today. Preaching and teaching in the modern church has leaned toward steps for living and the alliteration of principles that should be meaningful. The mind is fed; all the while, the spirit suffers from malnutrition.

When the church went to Rome, Philosophy won the day. If the church had stayed rooted in the ethics of the book of James, Relationships would have won over propositions. Honest stories do not adequately prove propositions. Yet stories are authentic, and authenticity is what people want. Stories are what people know from their

own experience. Someone once said, "God created man because He loves stories."

Perhaps if God loves stories, maybe we should too!

The function of leadership is to tell stories. Stories are the circulatory system of the body of Christ. When stories are circulating, there is health. When stories are not circulating, body parts go to sleep, die, and get gangrene. A lot of time, leaders know the stories but do not circulate them in the body. It all stops in the head.¹

The biggest lesson I have learned in this journey is that I have not come to "The End." All biblical stories are "The Unending Story." Our lives are to continue telling the stories and provide new chapters. Even eternity is not "The End."

The story continues.

¹ This concept was introduced and discussed by Dr. Leonard Sweet as part of the D.Min. online class discussion on 22 March 2004.

APPENDIX A

A huge part of this journey for me has been the role of my traveling companions. All of them have contributed to my journey; some of them have changed my life forever. As the dissertation year rolled on, I invited all of those on this journey to consider sharing a story with me that I might add to this journey. A few souls took time away from their schedules and shared some stories with me. Not only do I have their permission to share these stories, I am humbled and honored to include them in this part of my journey.

Terry O'Casey is the husband of Carol and the father of Elizabeth, Michael, and Isaac. He also pastors Seaside Christian Church in Warrenton, Oregon. Terry shared with me a couple of wonderful stories. The first story illumines Paul's encouragement to young Timothy about his ministry and brings that encouragement to all who labor in God's vineyard.

The passage is from 2 Timothy 4:5-8:

But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The story he entitled "The Keiger Mustang."

In the rugged Steen Mountains of South Eastern Oregon is a rift of a range soaring to over 9,000 cloud haloed feet. In the glaciated bowls carved out below the ridges, one occasionally catches a glimpse of the magnificent wild mustang horses of the West. These sleek animals called Keigers have never felt a bit in their mouth, a saddle on

their back or a whip to their rump. They run with the speed of a summer lightening bolt and can soar over range fences like golden eagles on wings.

They are so successful in the wild, they occasionally have to be "thinned," and so are caught and domesticated. Now, a horse without a rider, finds it difficult to get used to such a burden. In one of Oregon's old west towns is the annual Pendleton Round Up. There in the arena with thousands of spectators, these powerful animals experience their first saddle on their back and cinch strap around their belly and spurs in their side.

Now, O preacher, imagine you are the rider, and the horse is a ministry in a difficult area. You watch rider after rider get on these Keigers of the wild—up they fly—not the horse, but the rider. Down they are flung—not the mustang, but the head-over-heels victims. Over the steel rail they go—not the galloping steed, but the broken cowboy. Beaten, bruised, bloodied, all the wranglers take their spectator places along the ringside seats. Then, O preacher, it is your turn.

The gate is opened, the majestic mare leaps over the moon—and you still are on her. She throws her rump hard to the right and then up, up, up, but you are still on her. She fleet-footed runs like a falcon flies and then STOPS to throw you...and you are still clutching the reins with your bowed, shaking legs dug in hard around her panting sides.

Then you hear it:

"Give it up, she is going to buck you back into time."

"Better bail before you are bounced against the rafters."

You, O preacher, begin to believe the defeated voices. Yes: It is true, no one has ridden this thing before.

"Jump, before you get thumped!"

Monday morning doubts fill your mind from defeated quarterbacks as you glance through lists of other churches open.

O Preacher, look at those who are giving you advice. They are "The Thrown." They are those who quit and mounted the bleachers to bellow their advice. Some of them went to college for a few years to find out how to ride better...and never did! You almost listened to them. You, too, almost gave up and took your seat next to them, boisterously telling to any new bronco rider foolish enough to rely on God. You, O preacher, are jerked around, bent and bruised, but you are still a ridin'. Most importantly, that magnificent Mare is a calmin'. She is learning to trust your voice as you speak to her, leaning into the pull of the reins as you guide her. You trust her footing as she walks over rocky times.

You, O Preacher, are riding a Keiger Mustang! She is yours. You are hers. You stayed in the saddle. You stayed at your post despite what former riders and ministers said. You didn't conquer her. You won her over, and she you. Together in a wonderful rhythm, you ride... off into the sunset until retirement. You stayed in the saddle of the Lord's Call.

To whom are you listening?

Don't sit in the bleachers when you can sit in the saddle!

The other story Terry shared is a story that he used to open a teaching session on

1 Corinthians 13, that he entitled "True Love."

Jack had hit a wall, in reality he was thinking of jumping from one, a tall one. The story of his 40 plus years read like a fragmented Hitchcock or Spielberg horror book. He blew chapter one's "Once upon a time" in his youth through bad choices. He botched chapter two through his dishonorable discharge as well as dropping out of college. Chapters 3,4,5 and 6 were all about different Cinderella's marriages that failed him. Life hurt. He tried to numb the pain by drinking—he only ended up hating himself.

"Everybody I try to love leaves. Love never seems to last for me," he lamented. The gun was on his bed stand next to the bottle of sleeping pills. He loathed himself further night after night for lacking the courage to choose one or the other to make his exit.

This night was different than all others. Ignoring the ringing phone, Jack finally reached for the pistol. As he did, the answering machine kicked on. It was Jack's 30-year old son. "Dad, I know you have been down for along time. Just wanted to let you know Rachael is in labor. Your first grandson is about to make his great entrance into this world. Could you come down to the hospital?" Click. As Jack was about to make a stage left, a glimmer of light shown through the darkness. Jack put the gun down and wept in the night.

When Jack arrived an hour later. His son met him in the hospital hall with a warming blanket bundle of "cooing" joy. He set the little guy in grandpa's arms. "What do I call him? How do I greet him?" Jack asked. "Well, dad, say something like this, 'I am Grandpa Jack, I am pleased to meet you little Jack.'" His dad looked up, tears streaming down his face. *"You named this beautiful little boy after ME?" Big Jack held little Jack in his arms. Now he could write a new story, a new "Once upon a time." Maybe this time he could end the final chapter by saying, "And they lived happily ever after." Then Jack looked into the eyes of this God-sent gift speaking words that infused meaning and hope back into his life: I love you, little Jack! O, how I love you!¹*

I thank Terry for sharing these stories with me, and I thank Terry for sharing Terry with me on this journey.

One of the most touching responses I received came across differently than I expected. When asking for stories, I expected that responders would simply take a story from a message or class they had taught and share it with me. Not so with my brother Rob Robinson (I affectionately call him "R2"). Rob breathed a deep sense of community into our journey, and I was quickly caught by his loving spirit and open heart. He has been a deep inspiration for me, especially as he and his lovely wife, Linda, opened their

¹ Terry O'Casey shared these stories with me, 4 November 2004.

home to me and another cohort member to break bread together while we awaited a trip to the airport. R2 actually sent me a short paper telling the story of his journey and gave a glimpse of his work and the thrust of his dissertation. Though not what I had in mind with my request, I love him too much to ask anything more or to not include his contribution. He entitled it: *“Paradigm Shifter: A Short Story for Inclusion in Balaban Dissertation.”* His full offering is Appendix B. It is a marvelous story of part of his journey, and I am honored to include it as part of my dissertation. R2 has made a lasting impact on my life, and my heart will never be the same having loved and been loved by Rob Robinson. I thank him for taking time from working on his own dissertation and look forward to hearing the rest of his story.

The first person of the cohort that I met when we first traveled to campus for orientation was Earl Pierce. Little did I know at that time what a wonderful friendship began with that first meeting. Earl is a brother Lutheran and serves as District Director for Mission and Evangelism for the Iowa District West of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He shared with me a piece of his journey, which he called *“SEX AND FOOD—brought us back to church.”* I have placed his story in Appendix C. Earl is one of the youngest members of our cohort, not in chronological age but in zeal, faith, passion, and courage. Thank you Earl for sharing in this journey together.

Eric Brown is one of the chronologically youngest members of our cohort but definitely not the youngest spiritually. During the course of the journey, I found myself wanting to see Eric as a “Timothy,” a younger believer to be mentored by my experience as Paul mentored Timothy. Often I found myself looking to Eric as a “Paul,” helping, guiding, and mentoring me as his “Timothy.” Eric sent me a story he used to open a

message about the risk that Zaccheaus took when he invited Jesus into his house. While it was Jesus who looked up and said that He would be staying with Zaccheaus, it was Zaccheaus who said, “Yes.” Eric shared about his grandmother:

One of the faith-risks that we take, a risk which I believe is essential to salvation, is that of welcoming people into our home. The risk is that, when they come into our homes, they discover who we actually are. They discover that we don't clean our corners, that we drink red wine, and that we read trashy romance novels. It is risky, dangerous, to invite people into our homes. But, it is in our homes that we discover true fellowship. It is in our homes that we find genuine welcome.

The most genuine welcome I can ever remember is the welcome of my grandma's house. Gramps and Gramma lived in a rather run-down place in Coburg, OR. They had a huge yard and a great big garden out back. They owned a double-lot and the second lot was vacant. It was exactly the right size to play football and tag. Grandkids, neighborhood kids and people we did not even know gathered in the yard; everyone was welcome in their yard.

The house, as I said, was rather run-down. The wrap-around porch was always creaky and there were boards missing. The handrails on the front steps hung at a rather odd angle. Inside the house, the carpet was avocado green. The storm windows had a little moss on the inside. There was the smell of stale smoke (Gramma smoked cigarettes for years) and Gramma did not like to clean. There was generally a coating of dust on the top of the TV and the tops of the dressers. But, the floor was always vacuumed and the kitchen always spotless. The house was not much to look at.

Gramma always had a coffee pot on. Gramma always had cookies in the cookie jar. And, there was always room at Gramma's table. Grandkids were always welcome to bring friends, girlfriends and spouses to Gramps and Gramma's house. There were no strangers at Gramma's table. As we grew up with various styles of dress, colors of hair, tattoos, piercings and friends (some of which were really not good for us), Gramma never judged. She had plenty of opinions, but when it came to people, all were welcome.

This is what genuine welcome feels like. When you are able to welcome as Gramma did, you are on the road to salvation. When all are welcome at your table, when you no longer worry whether or not the top of the TV is dusted, when the coffee pot is always on, when people's hair color and tattoos do not concern you, then you are on the path to salvation. When you are able to extend genuine welcome, you are moving toward living as God desires you to live.²

There are those who shared stories all along the journey whose work is not cited here but whose part in the journey is certainly reflected here. The journey and the story continue.

² Eric Brown shared this story with me, 7 December 2004.

APPENDIX B

*Paradigm Shifter*¹

By Rob Robinson

I have no memory of ever not attending church. All my life I have participated in the life and ministry of various congregations, which have included Foursquare, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Evangelical, and Baptist churches. I learned the stories of Scripture from numerous Sunday school teachers who took serious their responsibility to nurture me in the truths of Gods Word. Our family life generally revolved around socials and events, Sunday Worship, and other communal activities provided by the local congregation we identified as our church home. Most of my growing up occurred within the confines of the Portland Christian and Missionary Alliance church, which included summer times involv[ing] Youth and Family Camps. At these camps we would be exposed [to] a wide variety of well known evangelists within our tribe distinctive. I recall listening to A.W. Tozer as an adolescent [on numerous] occasion[s], and even remember him watching us play volleyball on a sunny summer afternoon. These memories and heritage that [accompany it are a] rich source of blessing and encouragement.

Since adulthood, my association with the Church has been something of a love/hate relationship. I love the relational connectivity, traditions and orthodoxy the church offers but have been disappointed in the orthopraxis. Much of my personal

¹ Rob Robinson shared this story with me, 11 November 2004.

exposure to congregational life has been of watching dear people say one thing and in most cases do quite the opposite. To the world, this comes across as hypocritical, hurting the church and the kingdom of God.

For years there has been deep in my spirit the sense that the issue is systemic in nature. In other words, the way we perceive and do church at the core is flawed and at the heart of problem. This condition has not occurred overnight but is the result of nearly seventeen centuries of an institutional structure called Christendom. This longtime relational conundrum has produced in embryonic form a search for something that would bring correction at the systemic level by the joining of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, providing a threshold to a paradigm providing authentic Christian community to an emerging culture. From my perspective, this paradigm is organic.

My baptism into this organic paradigm was initiated when our Doctor of Ministry cohort gathered with Dr. Leonard Sweet for the first time in August of 2002 at Camp Tillicum. Dr. Sweet stated, “I only have one requirement for you all to do well in this cohort—get ready for your next ministry.” At the time, I was leading a traditional congregation in Portland, Oregon, fairly confident I would retire there. Within a few short months, God initiated a transition commencing a pilgrimage as a church planter of simple organic congregations (house churches). This has been a paradigm shift from an organizational/institutional church structure to a more fluid organic model. This experience of cohort participant and church planter energized a re-examination of the essential nature of the church. In investigating the metaphorical language of the New Testament, I began to see the Church in a new light. No longer was I able to regard it in institutional or organizational terms. In doing some digging into the Scriptures, I became

convinced that the essence and nature of God's church is basically organic. This organic feature of the church was no longer limited to one of a multitude of elements, but it was clearly its essence.

"The church in its most fundamental essence is nothing less than *a life-pulsating people who are animated by the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ.*"² A host of biblical images point to Christ's indwelling presence. In the New Testament, the church is described as the household of God, the people of God, the bride of Christ, and a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Ninety-six word pictures of the church have been identified in the New Testament. Yet [these are images that permeate] the New Testament understanding of the church and serve organizational structure or polity.

Howard Snyder in *Liberating the Church* suggests that the North American Church is in need of a fundamental paradigm shift in its self-understanding, one that would allow us to understand the church in God's economy. He states:

Where the model is the institutional-technical-hierarchical model of contemporary pop Christianity, a whole set of assumptions follows which make it difficult to really grasp the New Testament picture of the Church. But where the model is that of the body of Christ, the household of God and the community of God's people, the door is opened to understand the economy and ecology of God and to see the church as charismatic organism which, united to and dependent on Christ, is at the center of God's plan for the reconciliation of all things."³

This paradigm shift has required the issuance of new prescription lenses in order to see more clearly the landscape before me. To be used, lenses have to be set in frames. The frames for this new pair of organic lenses is the Word of God. In looking through

² Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 41.

³ Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church & Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 69.

organic lenses, my purpose is [to] accomplish both clear perception and a peripheral dimension of the landscape of the North American church context. I'm looking forward to the adventure of wearing these lenses and discovering all the potential of this new landscape.

APPENDIX C

SEX AND FOOD—brought us back to church

By Earl Pierce

I dropped out of church in junior high, attending up to that time with my mother. Then I got involved in stock car racing on Saturday nights with my dad—who wants to get up on Sunday mornings after that? My wife dropped out in high school in a rebellious stage. We met in college, both former Methodists, both uninterested in returning to church. We married in our senior year, finished graduate school, and found work. I returned to carpentry and my wife found a job at a toy store (you should see her Madame Alexander doll collection—she got a 50% discount). Her boss was an elder at the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation in town, and he began to invite us to home Bible studies. As we were expecting our first child (that's where the sex comes in), we remembered something about baptism from our childhood, and that, combined with the invitation, was enough to begin our road back to Christ and His church. Had we begun by visiting the worship, we probably would not have gone back, but since our introduction to the Lutheran tribe came in a home setting with friends, adjusting to the liturgy was a little easier.

We moved in the summers following the construction trades. This led to us becoming church shoppers. It was on one of these summer sojourns that we discovered the Plymouth Brethren. The meeting hall was about a block away from our apartment, so one Sunday night we walked down for services having seen the times from their sign.

Food is how Sue and I got in the Plymouth Brethren. They invited us out for pizza with them the very first time we attended. That was the first place we really saw incarnational living. They made no effort to get people to join—it is a “believers only” church—so they didn't worry about membership. For the two years the topic was never broached—rather—they had home bible studies—one dear saint was the head scientist at Carnation Milk—he had a bible study every day at lunch at work, he said they had about 15 to 20 regularly. The women had home studies—Sue went to one for a while. In the church, there were acknowledged elders—organizationally—they knew other congregations like them—but no formal network.

Of course, the women did remain silent in church—at the midweek bible study—if a wife had a question she would whisper in his ear—then he would ask the group. Sue didn't know any better, so she asked. They didn't say there was anything wrong with it—they answered and went on, after all, we were just the new kids. The home studies were neighborhood focused—they just invited people from their neighborhoods. We left them because there was not one where we moved next—and the infant baptism thing.

We tried another Missouri Synod church on the next move, but it was rather cold with very few young families, so we found another Plymouth Brethren for the next few years until we moved to Missouri to go into general contracting. We visited a number of neighborhood churches, Baptist, Assembly of God among them. We attended a Baptist church for a while because of their preschool program and their Wednesday night programming. Again, food was at the center. Starting a new business in a new town with three children under five made the \$1 per adult Wednesday dinners look pretty good. Again, we got involved in a home Bible study. While we were fully participating in the

life of the congregation, we had not gone down front, wanting to know more about their teachings. We shared our concerns with the home group, especially about baptism. One of the members of the home study who was the pastor's secretary talked to him about it, and she brought his answer: "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you go down front!"

Again, the issue became infant baptism, so we found a new mission LCMS and got back on board again. The pastor that finally confirmed us and baptized our last two daughters preached for my ordination. That turned out to be a first for him: the first one under his pastoring went into the ministry.

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