



Tell Me a Story



Today a friend wrote and asked how we were doing. In my response I mentioned that recently [I had done a Zoom call](#).

I shared some thoughts about storytelling.

One person suggested titling the talk, Teaching through Stories. I felt a better title was "Learning through Stories."

It is difficult to teach through stories because there are so many ways in which a story is "heard". But learning through stories is a great experience for that very same reason.

In storytelling the audience controls the lesson as much as the teacher does. I think this opens up opportunity for the Holy Spirit to guide and instruct.

Stories help to incarnate truth. And Incarnation is always so closely attached to Atonement. For example, Bethlehem Incarnation is 7 km from Jerusalem Atonement.

Apostle's creed says, Born of a virgin Mary, suffered under Pontious Pilot, was crucified died and buried. Incarnation accompanies Atonement.

Or from the scriptures, 2 Cor 5:19 God in Christ (incarnation), reconciling the World (atonement).

And again, Matt 1:23 They shall name him Immanuel God with us (incarnation). Matt 1:21 They shall call him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins (atonement).

Stories Incarnate the Gospel. Can a person really know who I am if they have not heard my stories. If they knew nothing of Pam and our journey through cancer and how that affects me today, do they really know me? They must hear my stories.

Paul says this to the Thessalonians:

1 Thess 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sakes.

1 Thess 2:8 We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives.

He was in Thessaloniki for 3, maybe 4 weeks (Acts 17:2) if he did not share stories about himself with them how is it that he says, "our own lives"? I am sure he explained in detail his trip to Damascus.

The early church drew their faith from the parables, from the Life of Christ. As time goes by parables created a problem. That problem is precisely what I mention above, the audience controls much of the

learning experience. Parables moved from a source of Faith to a source of ethics and faith became centered on constructed ideas held together by logical argument, theology. Paul is "followed" as the theologian and Jesus is a teller of stories. Few really look to Jesus for theological insight, except to support the teachings of Paul, with a story. This bothers me. I want to look to Jesus more.

In later years parables were viewed as simple ways to communicate truth, they are used to illustrate or support Pauline postulates. They became a frosting on the cake of theology.

Parables/stories are not a means of communicating meaning, but they actually create meaning. TS Elliot said of the poetry of Dante, "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood." Stories, Jesus' parables, affect us before we even understand them.

Parables are not a delivery system, but a house into which you are invited to look around, see, learn and know.

Stories/parables are not universal. We sometimes think they are. This is why you must have your own stories in your own context.

A couple examples:

A friend was sharing the story of Jesus, Peter and the great catch of fish. (Luke 5:1-11)

He asked, why did Peter say, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"?

One of the Thai students, without hesitation, answered, "Because he had killed all those fish."

This student's Buddhist context was not a context Peter shared, but influenced the student's interpretation.

He had no cultural understanding of Peter's world. In the application below I share my story (shared cultural context) before sharing Jesus' stories for this reason.

In The Prodigal Son he hits an all-time low eating Pig Food. Thai people have boasted to me of a dish on the table as, "We feed this to our pigs." So, they do not share the visceral offence that pig food would bring up in the heart of the Jewish audience.

In John 10, the Good Shepherd... of this my friend Gig said, "For many Thais, the only shepherd they have ever heard of is เด็กเลี้ยงแกะ - in other words, shepherd = a liar. So, the reaction I tend to get from my family members from the parable of the Good Shepherd is, "So your Jesus is the great "shepherd" - the biggest and most blatant liar of all!!" (FYI- เด็กเลี้ยงแกะ translates Child who cares for Sheep. It's equivalence in our language, the boy who cried wolf.)

And, how about, "behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." A friend, a missionary to Papua New Guinea, had a Jewish husband. He was a believer but a Jew for Jesus. They were working with a primitive tribe that highly honored and esteemed the Pig as the main source of their livelihood. They had never seen a sheep. My friend and her husband bought and shipped hundreds of Lamb stuffed animals as teaching tools. What the people learned was Jesus was a warm fuzzy toy, not the sacrificial offering. Culture made my friend and her husband feel, it has got to be a lamb, not a pig. And culture made the tribal group interpret the message improperly.

You see even Jesus' stories are not universal, they must be heard and understood in their cultural context. This is why your story is so vital.

I use an acronym for my Storytelling efforts. PIE

Passage

Illustration from my life

Example from Jesus' life/teaching

I meet a friend and share a Piece of PIE.

I will tell my story first, for 2 reasons. 1, it is cultural, contextual, and relevant. It helps them hear the "main points" in ways they can understand with confidence. 2, a true story from me of real-life occurrences pre-positions them to receive true and real content. I then follow up with a Jesus story and thus they receive it as a true story not a religious ethical fable.

I often transition with a line like, "that reminds me of a story from Jesus' life."

If you have made it this far, this is a long one, [tell me a story](#) so I might be praying for you.

May your Life be Stories of Wonder and Amazement as you walk with Jesus!