

**AQUINAS INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY**

**ONCE UPON A TIME:  
UTILIZING SCENIC PREACHING WHICH PROVIDES ENGAGING AND  
MEMORABLE HOMILIES AS A VIABLE SOLUTION TO BORING HOMILIES**

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To my parents, Sylvester E. Ochigbo, KSM, and Esther C. Ochigbo, LSM,  
who taught me the centrality of preaching in the life of the Catholic priest  
even before I began elementary school

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## Glossary

**Preaching** – The interpretation of the biblical text in a way that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers.

**Narrative preaching** – Preaching that takes the form of a story.

**Homily** – Preaching that happens in the context of a Catholic liturgical celebration. It is usually an explanation of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day

**Scene** – Part of a story, taking place in one physical setting in more or less continuous time.

**Boredom** – A feeling of lack of interest due to non-involvement.

**Engaging** – That which elicits a feeling of interest and involvement.

**Memorable** – Something (a concept or message) that remains in the minds of the audience mostly because it connects to their life experiences, joys, and struggles.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **ONCE UPON A TIME: UTILIZING SCENIC PREACHING, WHICH PROVIDES ENGAGING AND MEMORABLE HOMILIES AS A VIABLE SOLUTION TO BORING HOMILIES**

Ochigbo, Emmanuel I., MA, DMin, Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2023.

There have been many complaints from parishioners regarding the boring nature of preaching at Catholic Masses. Some parishioners complain that priests and deacons are too cerebral and technical in their preaching. Some say the homilies do not address their existential concerns. Consequently, many parishioners leave the Mass without remembering the message of the homily. This thesis project is an invitation to return to how Jesus preached. He used parables to connect with his audience. His listeners remembered his message because of the parables' vivid, striking, engaging, and memorable nature. Jesus did not only preach in parables; he was a parable of God. A parable points to something beyond itself. In the same way, when Jesus became a human being, he lived among us to point us to God.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the project, its title, ministry context, the problem it sets to address, its thesis, and purpose. Chapter 2 lays the theological foundation by focusing on Jesus' Parable-Based Preaching. Chapter 3, the interdisciplinary framework, explores storytelling as a common denominator in human life. In Chapter 4, the homiletic foundation discusses the New Homiletic, emphasizing Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie's experiential approach to the New Homiletic, Scenic Preaching.

The ministerial intervention of this project comes up in Chapter 5, where I taught four preachers in the Diocese of San Diego to use Scenic Preaching in their homilies. I tested the project's hypothesis through a questionnaire to 37 listeners distributed among four parishes. The questionnaire provided qualitative and quantitative data. Chapter 5 gives the details of the intervention. In Chapter 6, the data from Chapter 5 reveals that when homilists effectively utilize Scenic Preaching, listeners are more engaged and remember the message.

## Chapter 1

### An Overview of the Project

The title of this thesis project is “Once Upon a Time: Utilizing Scenic Preaching which Provides Engaging and Memorable Homilies as a Viable Solution to Boring Homilies.” When the Word of God became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 29–30), he employed an approach to communication that was accessible to as many people as possible. On many occasions, as reported in the Gospels, when people came to ask Jesus such questions as “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25) or “How many times must I forgive my offenders?” (Matthew 18:21), he answered by painting a scene, or a story of something that happened once upon a time. The phrase or the idea of “Once Upon a Time,” is a catchy one. It invites the attention of the listeners, and it awakens their curiosity. The scenes Jesus painted in his preaching have kept his message alive in the memory of his followers to this day. The title of this thesis project is therefore an invitation to preachers to return to the methodology Jesus employed when preaching.<sup>1</sup> The next section describes the ministry setting of the project to put this thesis project in perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> At points during the public ministry of Jesus, some people considered him a teacher. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I consider Jesus’ responses to those who asked him questions as the responses of a preacher, and his method is directly applicable here.

## Ministry Context

The ministry context for this thesis project was the Sunday homily preached by one priest and three permanent deacons in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego, California. This thesis project contributes to the post-ordination homiletic formation of priests and deacons in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego.

I hail from Nigeria where I was ordained a Catholic priest for the Diocese of Idah in 2008. My Bishop, the Most Rev. Anthony A. Adaji, MSP, of Idah Diocese, sent me on mission to the Diocese of San Diego, California, in 2012. I am a priest in residence at Sacred Heart Church, Ocean Beach; a hospital chaplain at Scripps Mercy Hospitals, San Diego/Chula Vista; and a chaplain with the United States Navy Reserves. As a priest in residence, I preach at three weekday Masses and two weekend Masses. In addition, as frequently as once every week or two, I preach at Catholic elementary and high schools in the diocese. I celebrate the Holy Eucharist and preach to congregations of various ages, cultural backgrounds, and socio-political statuses. Also, my weekly social media homily posts on YouTube receive up to six thousand views. As a result, I receive verbal and written feedback from a diverse range of parishioners and online followers regarding what they think went well and what needs improvement in the homilies.<sup>2</sup>

The Diocese of San Diego was created in 1936 from the former Los Angeles–San Diego diocese. It encompasses Imperial and San Diego counties. It covers 8,852 square miles. The total population is 3,484,311. The Catholic population is 1,391,278. The diocese has ninety-seven parishes, fourteen missions, thirty-four preschools, forty-three

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<sup>2</sup> While this evidence is anecdotal, it has informed and shaped my preaching as well as this project's formulation.

elementary schools, six high schools, and three institutions of higher education. The priests who serve in the diocese fall into three diverse groups. The first group comprises the incardinated priests of the Diocese of San Diego. The second group comprises priests from other dioceses. The third group consists of religious order priests. There are one hundred active incardinated priests of the diocese of San Diego and fifty retired incardinated priests. Thirty-five active and fourteen retired priests in San Diego come from other dioceses. There are sixty-six active religious order priests working in the diocese and fifteen religious priests who are retired. The diocese has ninety-eight permanent deacons who contribute to the preaching ministry of the Church. Seventeen of these deacons work in other dioceses. San Diego Diocese also benefits from the ministry of nine permanent deacons from other dioceses. In retirement status, there are thirty-one permanent deacons of the diocese and one religious order permanent deacon.<sup>3</sup>

My participating preachers for this project included four homilists (one priest and three permanent deacons) in the Diocese of San Diego. These four preachers serve in four different parishes. Even though the Diocese of San Diego encompasses Imperial and San Diego Counties, the four parishes that participated in this intervention were from San Diego County. Two of the parishes (predominantly Hispanic parishes) were from the southern part of San Diego County, while the other two parishes (mainly Anglo-American parishes) were from the northern part of the county. Each of the four parishes had between seven to eleven focus group members and a facilitator for each group. The intervention included four Sundays of preaching in each parish by the participating

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<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego, "Diocesan Directory," accessed July 29, 2022, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=diocese+of+san+diego+directory>.

preachers. The following section discusses the problem at hand.

### **The Problem**

The problem this project addresses concerns Sunday liturgical preaching in the Diocese of San Diego. Some parishioners complain preaching on Sundays (homily) in their various parishes is boring. A study by the Pew Research Center in 2016 shows that when Americans choose a new church or house of worship, the first item they consider is the quality of sermons.<sup>4</sup> A more recent pew research reveals that compared to Catholics, Protestants are significantly more satisfied with their preaching and music. Eighty-two percent of United States adult Protestants who frequently attended services in person responded that they were “extremely or very satisfied” with the sermons they heard online or in person. Seventy-six percent of U.S. adult Protestants who frequently watch services on TV or online said they were very or very satisfied with the sermons. Contrarily, just 61 percent of Catholics who frequently attend church in person said they were extremely or very satisfied, a gap of 21 points from Protestants. Similarly, 57 percent of Catholics who regularly watch services on TV or online reported being extremely or very satisfied, a difference of 19 points.<sup>5</sup>

I have witnessed this in the Diocese of San Diego. In my ministry as a hospital chaplain in San Diego, I have listened to many Catholic patients who express dissatisfaction with the quality of homilies at their parishes. I learn from my interactions

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship/>.

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, November 2022, “Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, But Going in Person Remains More Popular,” June 2, 2023, [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2023/06/PF\\_2023.06.02\\_religion-online\\_REPORT.pdf](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2023/06/PF_2023.06.02_religion-online_REPORT.pdf).



with the lay faithful, how they choose the Churches/Masses they attend. According to them, their choice is based on the preachers' ability to engage listeners during the homily and on how much the preaching is memorable.

In the Fall of 2022, the San Diego Diocese conducted an electronic survey of the Catholic faithful of San Diego and Imperial Counties. In addition to the English version of the survey, there were also Spanish and Vietnamese versions. The survey was part of the worldwide consultation of Catholics called a synod. According to the Bishop of the Diocese, Robert Cardinal McElroy, "The goals of the synod are to promote a culture in the Church of listening to one another respectfully, of inclusiveness and participation, and of rootedness in the Eucharist and the Word of God."<sup>6</sup> The diocese published the results of the survey in March of 2023. The results show that a total of 27,670 people responded at least partially to the survey, with 22,000 completing it. That is a sizable enough sample to offer an insightful demographic overview of parishioners' perspectives and religious practices in the diocese.<sup>7</sup>

Fred Galloway and Robert Donmower, experts in designing surveys and analyzing data, were the two professors from the University of San Diego who helped the diocese in designing and analyzing this survey. They noted that "While respondents felt welcomed in their parish community and enjoyed participating in events that brought them closer to God, survey participants' responses suggest more work is needed to draw younger people into the Church."<sup>8</sup> In listing five areas respondents felt the Church

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<sup>6</sup> Aida Bustos, "Diocese Releases Results of Synod Survey," *Southern Cross: The Official Newspaper of the Diocese of San Diego*, March 2023, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

needed improvement, the first on the list was “helping to spread the faith,”<sup>9</sup> while the fourth was “better homilies.”<sup>10</sup> Question 30 of the survey says, “The Church needs to communicate the Gospel in contemporary ways to youth and young adults.”<sup>11</sup> Out of the 27,670 respondents, 22,255 answered this question, while 5,415 skipped the question. 49.34 percent (10,980 respondents) agreed, and 38.68 percent (8,606 respondents) strongly agreed with the point that the Church needs to do a better job of communicating the Gospel to youth and young adults.<sup>12</sup> This result shows that 88.02 percent (19,586) of the respondents believe the Church falls short of communicating the gospel in a way that engages the younger generation.

In a similar pattern, Question 32 of the survey from the San Diego Diocese says, “If you could change one thing in your parish, what would be the most important?”<sup>13</sup> The highest percentage was 29.85% (6617 respondents), which was “Helping to spread the faith.”<sup>14</sup> 13.59% (3013 respondents)<sup>15</sup> narrowed their answer down to liturgical preaching; they demanded “Better Homilies”<sup>16</sup> from their clergy. Other suggestions under this question included “Making our parish more welcoming: 20.5 % (4,552

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego, “Diocesan Synod Survey Report,” accessed July 17, 2023, <http://sdcatholic.org/office-for/evangelization-and-catechetical-ministry/power-of-encounter-church-to-begin-consultation-of-faithful/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

respondents);”<sup>17</sup> “Outreach to the marginalized: 23.40% (5,187);”<sup>18</sup> and “Less emphasis on money: 12.61% (2,795 respondents).”<sup>19</sup> Even though the homily was not the only concern of this diocesan survey, the result shows that improvement of liturgical preaching in a way that engages the congregation in the San Diego Diocese will improve the listeners’ experience of the gospel message and the liturgy in general.

Homiletics is a branch of practical theology.<sup>20</sup> In carrying out the tasks of practical theological interpretation, Richard R. Osmer (b. 1950), Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, proposes utilizing the answers to four questions: “What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?”<sup>21</sup> As already noted above, what is going on here is the complaint from parishioners that they need better homilies. The answer to the question of why it is going on is: there is a yawning gap between the academy and the ministry that needs bridging.<sup>22</sup> Eugene L. Lowry (b. 1933), Professor of Preaching Emeritus at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta, minces no word in saying, “There seems to be a wide disparity between ‘good preaching’ as described formally and theoretically, and what happens on Sunday morning when we leave the pulpit with that

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 12–13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 13.

certain interior knowledge that our sermon ‘was a good one.’”<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, some Catholic priests and deacons, though highly educated, have a problem connecting to the real world of their listeners while preaching. Yves Congar, OP (1904–1995), a French Dominican priest who was widely recognized in his lifetime as one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, insisted that the faithful “complain that preachers are too bookish in their expressions, [and] that they are overly concerned to use canonical formulas or to pass on passages of official documents (where they often betray a merely superficial reading).”<sup>24</sup> Congar’s critique of the preachers of such sermons is that “they talk like licensed dealers of orthodox formulas that sound impersonal and fixed.”<sup>25</sup> In some cases, these “bookish” sermons that are like lectures may, as Lowry points out, be “strong in content but weak in establishing contact with the congregation.”<sup>26</sup> Of what use is any form of communication, in this case, preaching, if the target audience does not get the message?

In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis highlights the fact that many people have expressed their concerns about the preparation and delivery of homilies, and these are concerns that preachers must not ignore.<sup>27</sup> More recently, Pope

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<sup>23</sup> Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form: Expanded Edition*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xix.

<sup>24</sup> Yves Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar*, trans. and ed. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii gaudium*,” par. 135 (24 November, 2013), (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2013), accessed July 18, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

Francis expressed his concern about the length and boringness of homilies. He described such homilies as “disaster.”<sup>28</sup> The problem with some homilies may be reaching a state of emergency in the view of Pope Francis. He previously expressed similar concerns about homilies, however, his comment published on January 24, 2023, was his first usage of the word, “disaster.”<sup>29</sup> While speaking with students in a liturgy class, he advised that priests keep their homilies brief and refrain from turning them into philosophy lectures.<sup>30</sup> He also gave the following advice:

Your words should be simple. Words that everyone can understand. Don’t give long homilies. Your homilies should not be boring. Your homilies should reach people’s hearts because they come from your heart. A professor I had would say that a homily should have internal coherence: an idea, an image, and an emotional effect, so that people go home with an idea, an image and something that moved their heart.<sup>31</sup>

The poor reviews of homilies are not peculiar to this generation. Fred B. Craddock (1928–2015), Professor of Preaching and New Testament Emeritus, at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, traced the existence of such reviews to as early as the first century.<sup>32</sup> He specifically references the incidence of Paul acknowledging the complaint of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 10:9–10) that he was unimpressive in person and that his speaking amounted to nothing. Craddock noted further a good reason to take the reviews of poor preaching seriously; whether contemporary or in Paul’s era. According to

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<sup>28</sup> Rome Reports, “Pope Francis Warns Priests to Avoid Long, Boring, Homilies, ‘They are a Disaster,’” accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.romereports.com/en/2023/01/24/pope-francis-warns-priests-to-avoid-long-boring-homilies-they-are-a-disaster/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Revised and with New Sermons (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 3.

him, “Increasingly, the brows that frown upon the pulpit are not only intelligent, but often theologically informed, and quite often deeply concerned about the Christian mission. Their judgments about preaching cannot be regarded as reflections on a general disinterest in religion.... Some of these critics have themselves been preachers in the churches.”<sup>33</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969), one of the greatest American Preachers ever, accurately diagnosed the problem of boringness as one that characterizes most preaching.<sup>34</sup> He says,

There is no reason why we should not have much better preaching than we ordinarily get. One obvious trouble with the mediocre sermon, even when harmless, is that it is uninteresting. It does not matter. It could as well be left unsaid. It produces this effect of emptiness and futility largely because it establishes no connection with the real interests of the congregation.<sup>35</sup>

Wondering about the boringness of preaching, Alyce M. McKenzie (b. 1955), Professor of Preaching and Worship and Director of the Preaching Excellence at Perkins School of Theology, asks, “When life is so interesting why is preaching so boring?”<sup>36</sup>

What should be the response of preachers to the criticisms that have been leveled against their homilies over the years? Certainly, despair must not be an option. The level of criticism witnesses to the fact that the homily bears a very great and life-saving burden, and the critics seem to be very much aware of that, and so have high

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<sup>33</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3–4.

<sup>34</sup> See O. Wesley Allen, Jr., ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What is The Matter with Preaching?” *Harper’s Magazine* (July 1928), 134, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://harpers.org/archive/1928/07/what-is-the-matter-with-preaching/> (member-only website).

<sup>36</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 13.

expectations. In the words of Craddock, “Disappointment is registered only against a backdrop of expectation.”<sup>37</sup> Preachers must then take the critics seriously and leave no stone unturned in proffering a sustainable solution to the problem of homilies that fall short of the expectations of the listeners.

Thus, this project identified and sought to address the problem with homilies, which is boredom. Even though this problem is most likely universal, this project focused on liturgical preaching in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego, California.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis project was to teach a workshop to four homilists in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego on Alyce M. McKenzie’s preaching methodology, Scenic Preaching, and to test its effectiveness in responding to the problem of boring homilies. McKenzie’s process aims at delivering vivid preaching, which has four characteristics: pulse, purpose, plot, and point of view.<sup>38</sup>

### **Hypothesis**

Using Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie’s preaching methodology, Scenic Preaching, is a viable solution to the problem of boring homilies in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego. Since the homily is an intrinsic part of the liturgy,<sup>39</sup> Scenic Preaching, will help the homily do what the liturgy does well, engage the senses. McKenzie also points out that “Scene is the new story.” This assertion finds evidence in the popularity of Instagram,

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<sup>37</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 78–79.

<sup>39</sup> See Paul VI, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium (December 4, 1963), par. 2, accessed July 18, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

TikTok, movie trailers, and YouTube short videos.<sup>40</sup> When homilists hone the art of scenic preaching, they will be connecting with this scene-fascinated generation.

### **Assumptions**

There are at least six basic assumptions that shape the hypothesis of this project. One, the project assumes that, in the Catholic diocese of San Diego, many parishioners feel that priests and deacons deliver homilies that fall short of the expectations of listeners.<sup>41</sup>

Two, the project assumes priests and deacons need and want help transitioning from the academic setting to their pastoral role as preachers.<sup>42</sup> A recent article in *America Magazine* notes, “The Catholic Church has produced preachers whose inspiring words resulted in immediate conversions. Even today, there are many excellent Catholic preachers, but this does not seem to be the norm.”<sup>43</sup>

Three, there is a reduction in the human attention span. A report from *Time* states, “Researchers in Canada surveyed 2,000 participants and studied the brain activity of 112 others using electroencephalograms (EEGs). Microsoft found that since the year 2000 (or about when the mobile revolution began) the average attention span dropped from 12 seconds to eight seconds.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 9–24.

<sup>41</sup> See The Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego, “Diocesan Synod Survey Report.”

<sup>42</sup> See Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, xix.

<sup>43</sup> *America Magazine*, “Preachers’ Progress: America Media Launches a New Effort to Deliver Better Homilies, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/02/16/preachers-progress-america-media-better-homilies-catholic-priests-244757>.

<sup>44</sup> *Time*, “You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish,” accessed July 18, 2023, <https://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/>.



As preachers, instead of blaming people for their shorter attention spans, it is better to study the pattern of human attention and craft homilies that meet people where they are. Preaching in scenes and short segments is one way to respond to the reality of shorter attention spans.<sup>45</sup>

Four, this project assumes the words “Once upon a time” are words that captivate the listeners’ attention. According to Jonathan Gottschall (b. 1972), “We come in contact with a storyteller who utters ... (for instance, ‘once upon a time’) and seizes our attention. If the storyteller is skilled, he simply invades us and takes over. There is little we can do to resist ... [even if we do], the image [from the story] will linger in our imagination.”<sup>46</sup> Even when the homilist does not begin the preaching with the phrase, “Once upon a time,” any opening that indicates the homilist is about to narrate an event usually engages the listeners.

Five, the human brain’s wiring receives and retains information best in the form of stories.<sup>47</sup> Something is intriguing about a good story well-told. Any speech that takes the form of a story immediately creates suspense, curiosity, and interest. We now understand that the neurochemical oxytocin is released in response to stories, thanks to the studies of neuroscientists like Paul Zak.<sup>48</sup> Life itself is one big story made up of many stories. “Neuroscientists have this saying that neurons that fire together, wire together.

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<sup>45</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York, NY: Marine Books, 2012), 4.

<sup>47</sup> See Peter Guber, *Tell to Win: Connect, Persuade, and Triumph with the Hidden Power of Story* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2011), 42, 45.

<sup>48</sup> See National Library of Medicine, “Why Inspiring Stories Make us React: The Neuroscience of Narrative,” accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445577/>.

So, when we're hearing a story and our brain is lighting up, you have all of these neurons that are then wiring together, which triggers us to remember more of the information we're getting."<sup>49</sup> Storytelling, therefore, falls naturally into that basic pattern of human communication.

Finally, this thesis assumes narrative preaching helps listeners take ownership of the message.<sup>50</sup> Listeners can draw their conclusions rather than feel that the preacher imposed a conclusion on them. Having discussed the assumptions behind this thesis project, the next section will provide definitions of some key terms and identify some limitations of the project.

### **Definitions and Limitations**

Some of the key terms that focus this study include: preaching, narrative preaching, homily, scene, boring, engaging, and memorable, for which I will now offer definitions.

***Preaching:*** This thesis project adopted David James Randolph's<sup>51</sup> definition of preaching as "the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers,"<sup>52</sup> as Gathered body of Christ.

***Narrative preaching:*** Narrative preaching takes the form of a story. It usually

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<sup>49</sup> Content Marketing Institute, "The Neuroscience of Storytelling," accessed July 18, 2023, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/cco-digital/april-2019/storytelling-neuroscience-joe-lazauskas/>.

<sup>50</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 107.

<sup>51</sup> David James Randolph (1934–2022) was a teacher of Homiletics at Drew School of Theology. In 1965 he coined the term *New Homiletic* during the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics; see Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

begins with a conflict; it moves to the complication of the conflict, then it brings in a reversal that results in the resolution of thought and experience.<sup>53</sup> The narrative form of preaching “may or may not actually involve any particular story.”<sup>54</sup> The emphasis is on the plot. This is any preaching “in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot involving a strategic delay of the preacher’s meaning,”<sup>55</sup> to arouse interest, engage the listeners, make the message memorable, and inspire the transformation of lives.

**Homily:** This is the preaching that happens in the context of a liturgical celebration. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the homily “should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.”<sup>56</sup> Another name for the homily is liturgical preaching. While focusing on the communication aspect of preaching, Jan Michael Joncas (b. 1951) defines liturgical preaching as “oral communication,” that is “Spoken from faith .... Addressed to believers .... Contextualized by worship.”<sup>57</sup> The target audience of liturgical preaching is made up of those already converted to Christ, unlike evangelical or conversionary preaching that is targeted at those who are yet to experience the person of Christ and the message of

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<sup>53</sup> Eugene Lowry, “Narrative Preaching,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 342.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Catholic Church, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 65.

<sup>57</sup> Jan Michael Joncas, “Preaching from and for the Liturgy: A Practical Guide,” in *We Preach Christ Crucified*, ed. Michael E. Connors, CSC (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 45.

Christ. The source of liturgical preaching is the life of Christ as from the scripture in the liturgical year. The purpose of liturgical preaching is to direct the faithful “to share in the mystery of God’s life in the world ... as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>58</sup>

*Scene*: Dr. McKenzie defines a scene as “the action that takes place in one physical setting in more or less continuous time.”<sup>59</sup> In the same way, Sandra Scofield (b. 1943), an American novelist, essayist, and editor, defines scenes as “those passages in narrative when we slow down and focus on an event in the story so that we are in ‘the moment’ with characters in action.”<sup>60</sup> A scene is not the same as a story. It is a story event within a story.<sup>61</sup> The Story of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), for example, has about six scenes or story events: (1) the young man asking for his inheritance, (2) his squandering it in various forms of excess, (3) his decision to return home as he sits with the pigs; (4) his trip home rehearsing what he will say to his father, (5) his father’s greeting; (6) his father’s encounter with the older son.<sup>62</sup> Scenes do not tell us about something. Instead, scenes “invite us into somewhere (setting) to identify with someone (characters).”<sup>63</sup> “Sensory detail” and “dramatic energy” invite listeners to become active

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<sup>58</sup> Melinda A. Quivik, “On Liturgical Preaching: The Body of Christ in Time,” *Liturgy* 25, no.4 (2010): 3.

<sup>59</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Sandra Scofield, *The Scene Book: A Primer for the Fiction Writer* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 12.

<sup>61</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 35.

<sup>62</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

participants rather than spectators.<sup>64</sup> The outcome is the creation of an experience.

Since the listeners become emotionally involved in a scene, they leave the scene with images that help them remember the scene.<sup>65</sup> As McKenzie puts it, “Scene is the New Story.”<sup>66</sup> In advocating for scenic preaching, McKenzie urges preachers not to give up on telling the larger story in this age of smaller screens and attention spans, but instead to bring people into palm-sized chunks of it and then connect them to the bigger picture.<sup>67</sup>

***Boredom:*** This project adopts the definition of boredom from Cynthia D. Fisher, who received her PhD in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Perdue University. She states, “Boredom is a transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in the current activity.”<sup>68</sup> In this case, the activity at hand is liturgical preaching, and the individual refers to the listeners at the liturgical assembly.

***Engaging:*** An engaging preaching is one that captivates the senses on many levels. It involves “the imagination through sounds and images that evoke new perspectives on reality and new possibilities, rather than only describe them, goes far toward [captivating] a listener beyond the intellect alone.”<sup>69</sup> For preaching to be engaging, it means the listeners are actively involved and interested in the message being

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>68</sup> Bond University, “Boredom at Work: A Neglected Concept,” accessed, July 18, 2023, <https://pure.bond.edu.au/ws/files/33174732/fulltext.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Wallace, *Preaching in the Sunday Assembly*, 8.

conveyed. The sermon or homily captures their attention and holds their interest throughout the presentation. Preaching is engaging if the listeners are emotionally invested in the preaching.

***Memorable:*** Memorable preaching is preaching that remains in the minds of those who hear it, mostly because it connects to their life experiences, joys, and struggles. Such preaching is worth remembering because it guides them in their spiritual journeys. A way to assess how memorable the preaching was, is by asking the listeners to recall the message after the Mass, and how much of the message they can connect to their life experiences. McKenzie insists, “People seek guidance on how to make the connections between the disparate episodes of their daily lives.”<sup>70</sup>

I have identified three limitations. One, this thesis project was limited to preaching in the context of Catholic Sunday Liturgy (The Holy Mass). The project did not involve other forms of preaching like spiritual talks/reflections, retreat preaching, and catechesis. Two, the San Diego Diocese encompasses San Diego and Imperial Counties, but the intervention of this project was limited to four parishes in San Diego County: two parishes from the north and two from the south. Three, there was a workshop where I taught four preachers the preaching methodology, Scenic Preaching. The workshop was limited to eight hours on a Saturday, and the preachers were merely one priest and three permanent deacons. Because the duration of the workshop was only eight hours, I was available to preachers to answer questions and make clarifications as the need arose. The next section will present a summary of each chapter of this thesis project before this one comes to a close.

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<sup>70</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 27.

## Chapter Outline

This first chapter of my thesis has sought to present the project's overall purpose and context. It also presented the hypothesis, basic assumptions, relevant definitions, and limitations of the project. Chapter Two develops the thesis project's theological framework, "A Theology of Parable-based Preaching." The chapter begins by exploring some definitions of a parable before presenting my working definition of a parable. It explores how and why Jesus used parables. The chapter concludes by showing what and why contemporary preachers should learn from Jesus' use of parables. McKenzie's book, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, original interest in scenic preaching began in a paper she wrote as a student on proverbial wisdom.<sup>71</sup> She moved from there to identify the parabolic preaching of Jesus as "a genre that is a longer narrative cousin to the proverb."<sup>72</sup>

Chapter Three focuses on the thesis project's interdisciplinary framework, "Storytelling: A Common Denominator in Human Life." That chapter explores the centrality of storytelling in human life and the unifying power of storytelling. It also looks at how storytelling helps to engage listeners and to enforce memory. It then discusses the role of storytelling in Christian formation, concluding with a guide on how to tell a story well.

Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three as it presents the thesis project's homiletical framework, "A Homily as a Story-shaped Event." That chapter begins with an overview of the history of the New Homiletic Movement. It then explores the three

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<sup>71</sup> See *ibid*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

interrelated approaches of the preaching of the New Homiletic Movement, namely Inductive preaching, Narrative preaching, and Experiential Preaching. The final step in this chapter focuses on McKenzie's preaching methodology, Scenic Preaching, which falls under the experiential preaching of the New Homiletic Movement.

Chapter Five shows the step-by-step details of the ministerial intervention, which include the workshop for preachers, the training of facilitators, and the description of the post-preaching discussions by the focus group of listeners. The chapter shows the ethical procedures that this project followed, and it analyzes data from multiple sources, including insiders (preachers, facilitators, and listeners' focus groups) and an independent third-party reviewer. The data fall into two main groups, pre-intervention, and the post-intervention data.

Chapter Six presents the findings of this study. Based on the analysis of the data collected, the chapter submits that Scenic Preaching in the San Diego Diocese achieves listeners' engagement, and it makes the homily memorable. The chapter discusses areas for further research, including the impact of scenic preaching on parishes in the Imperial County of San Diego, and the effectiveness of scenic preaching in non-liturgical settings. That chapter is the outcome of the workshop and how the homilists demonstrated both the development and delivery of scenic preaching as a solution to boring homilies.



## Chapter 2

### A Methodology of Parable-Based Preaching

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” – John 1:14

“He did not say anything to them without using a parable.” – Mark 4:34

This project teaches homilists to utilize Alyce M. McKenzie’s preaching methodology, Scenic Preaching, to develop liturgical preaching that is engaging and memorable for its hearers, as a viable response to boring homilies. The parables of Jesus are foundational to McKenzie’s methodology, not merely as illustrations for sermons but as integral to the way in which sermons should be preached. McKenzie’s fascination with scenes began with a paper she wrote on Proverbs while in graduate school. She later extended her interest in scenes to other Old Testament Wisdom Literature.<sup>73</sup> Her search for scenes continued to the New Testament, where she describes the parable as “proverb’s first cousin.”<sup>74</sup> Comparing Jesus’s parables to Old Testament Wisdom Literature, McKenzie says, “Like Qoheleth ... [Jesus’] short sayings employ vivid scenes that challenge the entrenched attitudes and actions of religious tradition. But there the similarity between them stops. Jesus’ sayings don’t stop at subverting the status quo; they prepare the way for the inbreaking of a more just and merciful human community, the

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<sup>73</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 66.

<sup>74</sup> See *ibid.*, 70.

kingdom of God.”<sup>75</sup>

In 2015, at the end of a lecture by McKenzie, a man asked her, “What is the difference between a scene and a story, illustration, or anecdote in a sermon?” After reflecting on the question, probably for months, she shares that she wished she had responded, “What I mean by a scene is a story event within a story.” And she gives an example with one of the parables of Jesus, that of the prodigal son, a story, which she divides into six scenes.<sup>76</sup> Parables provide the general framework through which Jesus preached to gathered communities. Jesus’ parable-based preaching method offers a theological framework for contemporary preachers.

Studying Jesus’ parable-based preaching method is necessary to better comprehend McKenzie’s methodology. Jesus, the teacher of parables and a parable himself, provides the theological foundation for this project. This chapter explores several definitions of a parable. It examines the prevalence of parables in the Greco-Roman World<sup>77</sup> and the Hebrew Scriptures, which lay the foundation for the centrality of parables in the preaching ministry of Jesus. Next, the chapter moves to discuss how Jesus used parables, the characteristics of Jesus’ parables, and why Jesus used parables. The discussion of Jesus and parables leads to the presentation of Jesus himself as “the Parable of God.”<sup>78</sup> Having established the vital place of parables in the preaching ministry of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>76</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Also known as the Classical Era. It covers the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>78</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: The Concilium Foundation, 1995), 106.

Jesus, the chapter concludes by arguing why contemporary preachers should use the scenic method of storytelling which Jesus used in his parables.

### **What is a Parable?**

Over the years, scholars have attempted to define the word “parable.” Some begin by looking at the Hebrew and Greek words for “parable.” In Hebrew, the word for “parable” is *mashal*. In Greek, the word is *parabolē*. Both the Hebrew and Greek words give the idea of a parable as an illustration. Klyne R. Snodgrass (b. 1944), Professor Emeritus of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois, expands this understanding. “Parables are much more than illustrations.”<sup>79</sup> He continues, “Hardly anything said about parables – whether defining them or explaining their characteristics—is true of all of them.”<sup>80</sup> C. H. Dodd (1884–1973), who was Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University, offers this comprehensive definition of the parable: “At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>81</sup>

Madeleine I. Boucher (b. 1936), Professor of New Testament in the Department of Theology at Fordham University, insists that “in modern usage the word [parable] should be, and usually is reserved for those stories which are drawn from ordinary, everyday life, which convey a religious or moral lesson, quite indirectly, and which are

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<sup>79</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (London: James Nisbet, 1961), 16.

intended to convince or persuade, or bring the hearer to decision or action.”<sup>82</sup> A crucial part of Boucher’s definition of a parable is that the purpose of a parable is to engender a decision and an action by the listener. A parable calls on the listener to make a “radical choice.”<sup>83</sup> In continuation of this definition, Boucher outlines the following essential elements of a parable: “Every parable is a story; this story conveys a lesson, so that the parable has a double meaning, the story and the lesson; the parables’ purpose is to effect a change in the hearer, to lead to decision or action; and the lesson always is religious or moral.”<sup>84</sup>

The working definition of a parable this thesis project develops is that of 1.) an engaging and memorable short story or narrative, 2.) involving a plot that draws scenic images from what is familiar to the listener, and 3.) challenges the listener to look at life differently and, 4.) act without feeling coerced.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of a parable, according to this definition, is to expose the hearer to act, to change a behavior, to alter their approach to living. To accomplish this goal, the listener must first remember the content of the parable. If the parable did not engagingly convey the message, the listener will not be able to recall the message.

This section has examined some definitions of a parable, and has provided the working definition of a parable for this thesis project. The next section studies how

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<sup>82</sup> Madeleine I. Boucher, *The Parables* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1981), 14–15.

<sup>83</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 546.

<sup>84</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 16–17.

<sup>85</sup> Preaching is never coercive or manipulative. Manipulation is never what Jesus did and so is not part of my working definition.

parables were used in the Greco-Roman era, the era in which Jesus of Nazareth was born.

### **Jesus and Parables in the Greco-Roman World**

Parables played essential roles in argumentation and persuasion in ancient Greece and Rome. Snodgrass explains that Greco-Roman rhetoricians, politicians, and philosophers (including Homer, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle) utilized several kinds of parables, which Aristotle classified into two main kinds: historical and invented.<sup>86</sup> Historical parables drew from historical events, while invented parables were products of a person's imagination. People of this time period were familiar with the use and functions of both kinds of parables.

Jesus was not presenting a new literary genre in his use of parables, but was adapting a well-known genre. It is widely acknowledged that Jewish and Gentile cultures mixed during the first century CE. While the parables of Jesus differ significantly from those we know from extant Greco-Roman literature, some of them are certainly of the same pattern. Snodgrass insists, "Those claiming that Jesus' parables are something new could learn from a closer look at Greco-Roman materials."<sup>87</sup> The pieces that are most like Jesus' parables come from philosophers or other figures who confront people about their shortcomings. Such materials bear close resemblance with the Hebrew prophets'<sup>88</sup> use of parables, and of course, with Jesus' use of parables. One thing all of the parables have in

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<sup>86</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 37, 50, 55.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> In Judges 14:14, Samson gave this parable to the elders of the Philistines, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." In 2 Samuel 12:1–4, Prophet Nathan confronted King David with the parable of the rich man who confiscated a poor man's ewe lamb. In Isaiah 5:1–6 relates the parable of the beloved Vineyard that yielded wild grapes despite the care and nurture it received from the owner.

common is that they all feature well-known characters and events. Even if all parables are about morals, only Jesus' parables make a direct connection to the Kingdom of heaven.

Snodgrass cites Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), a Roman statesman, playwright, and Stoic philosopher, as providing an example of an ancient parable that is analogous to one of Jesus' parables: "Would anyone want to stab an enemy with such force as to leave his own hand in the wound and be unable to recover himself from the blow? But such a weapon is anger; it is hard to draw back" (*De Ira* 2.35.1).<sup>89</sup> Snodgrass continues by arguing that the following saying by Seneca is comparable to Jesus' proverb about seeing a speck in your brother's eye: "You look at the pimples of others when you yourselves are covered with a mass of sores" (*De Vita Beata* 27.4).<sup>90</sup>

There are numerous parallels and parable-like sayings throughout Epictetus' *Discourses* and *Enchiridion*. Epictetus (55–135 CE), along with several other contemporary authors, used interrogative parables similar to those that Jesus used. For example, in *Discourses* 1.27.19 he asks: "Who among you, when he wishes to go to a bath, goes to the mill instead?"<sup>91</sup> Epictetus similarly likens people who stop short of perfection because they are content with their accomplishments to someone who travels but stays at a good hotel but never arrives at his destination (*Discourses* 2.23.36–41).<sup>92</sup> The following section will focus on the use of parables in the Hebrew Scriptures, which most Christians refer to as the Old Testament. The section deals with Jesus' immediate

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<sup>89</sup> Trans., Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 48.

<sup>90</sup> Trans., *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Trans., *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>92</sup> See *ibid.*

culture and its impact on his use of parables.

### **The Hebrew Scriptures' Influence on Jesus' Parables**

The Hebrew Scriptures had the most significant impact on Jesus' use of parables. Boucher says, "The parables which most closely resemble Jesus' are those in the Old Testament and rabbinic literature. These Semitic parables (as distinct from the classical) are no doubt the predecessors of those we find preserved in the Synoptic Gospels."<sup>93</sup> There is strong evidence that Jesus read the Hebrew Scriptures,<sup>94</sup> particularly the prophets, and therefore would have, as a result, understand the parabolic patterns and method. Snodgrass observes, "Sometimes [Jesus] used parables as the prophets did, to confront the nation, but unlike the prophets Jesus also used parables to portray the kingdom, to confront individuals, and to teach about behavior, compassion, the use of money, and issues of discipleship."<sup>95</sup>

There are several parables in the Old Testament that are similar to Jesus' parables. The Parable of the Ewe Lamb, which Nathan tells David in 2 Samuel 12:1–14,<sup>96</sup> and the Parable of the Vineyard, "which expresses judgment on the house of Israel and the people of Judah for being so unproductive" (Isaiah 5:1–7),<sup>97</sup> are two examples of juridical parables.<sup>98</sup> Juridical parables in the Old Testament and in the New Testament are

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<sup>93</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 12.

<sup>94</sup> From the New Testament we know Jesus read scripture publicly, for example in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21), which would have been the only way for him to have read it as no one had an individual copy of the Scriptures back then.

<sup>95</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 41.

<sup>96</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 11.

<sup>97</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 40.

<sup>98</sup> This is an overall umbrella term. Examples of juridical parables exist in the various categories of parables.

parables that encourage listeners to make judgments in the world of the parable, and after passing the judgment on characters in the parables, the listeners later realize they themselves were the characters in the parables. For example, in the Parable of the Ewe Lamb, after David committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Prophet Nathan told him the story of a rich man, who confiscated the ewe lamb of a poor man. David, who did not immediately recognize himself in the parable, asked for the punishment of the rich man. According to Amy-Jill Levine (b. 1956), Rabbi Stanley M. Kessler Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, "David hears the parable and indicts himself."<sup>99</sup> Snodgrass also gives two more examples of juridical parabolic dramas:<sup>100</sup> The first is the Widow and the Avengers parable in 2 Samuel 14:1–20, in which Joab invited a wise woman from Tekoa to pretend she was a widow with two sons. One son killed the other. The people of her village came to kill the living son. The wise woman (pretending to be a widow and mother of two sons), sought the protection of King David for her living son. King David heard her story and rose to defend her, then she revealed to him that it was a parable about King David, who was angry with his own son Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1–20). The second is the Fake Injury parable, in which an unidentified prophet confronts Ahab (1 Kings 20:35–33).

Another example of Old Testament parables is in the Book of Judges, where Abimelech kills all but one of his brothers, to seize control of the city of Shechem.

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<sup>99</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014), 6.

<sup>100</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 40.



Jotham, the youngest brother, hides and makes it out alive. Standing on Mount Gerizim, Jotham addresses the city's top men using a parable after Abimelech is crowned king. The parable talks about how the trees wanted to anoint a king that would rule them. The various trees gave reasons why they could not be king then all the trees turned to the thorn bush to be their king. The thorn bush gladly accepts, but threatens to consume them with fire if they do not come to find refuge in its shade. Jothan concludes by revealing the true meaning of the parable. He uses the parable to condemn Abimelech, his half-brother, who had manipulated the people and killed all of his brothers to become king. The parable serves as a warning about the dangers of choosing unworthy and deceitful leaders with selfish ambitions. (Judges 9:7–21).

The Old Testament is not the only source of parables in the Jewish context.<sup>101</sup> They were commonplace at dinners, at home, in the workshops, in the fields, and in synagogues. Rabbis were renowned for teaching with the aid of parables. Joseph Frankovic (b. ca. 1945), who holds Master of Arts in American Studies from Northeastern State University and additional degrees in other disciplines, including Biblical Literature, Classical Studies, and Midrash, shares the following parable from Rabbi Ishmael (90–135 CE) regarding the problem of the dual nature of human beings:

It resembles a king who had an orchard of choice early figs. He posted in it two watchmen, one of whom was lame, and the other blind. He charged them, 'Guard carefully the early figs!' Then he left them and went his way. 'I see choice early figs,' said the lame man. 'Let's eat them!' said the blind man. 'Am I able to walk?' the lame man responded. 'Am I able to see?' the blind man replied. What did they do? The lame man sat on the shoulders of the blind man, and they picked and ate the early figs. Then each went to his post. After a number of days the king came and said to them, 'Where are the early figs?' 'Can I see?' answered the blind man. 'Can I walk?' answered the lame man. What did the shrewd king do?

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<sup>101</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 7.

He set the lame man on the shoulders of the blind man and judged them as one.<sup>102</sup>

Frankovic also shares another rabbinic parable in the same article, this time from Rabbi Levi (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE):

To what may the sons of Israel be compared? It is like a man who has a son, whom he places on his shoulders and takes for a stroll through the market. When the son sees something desirable he says to his father, “Buy that for me!” and he buys it for him. This happens not once, but three times. Then the son sees a man and asks him, “Have you seen my father?” His father retorts, “Foolish one! You are riding on my shoulders! Everything you want I am getting for you, and you say to this man, ‘Have you seen my father?’” What did his father do? He tossed the child from his shoulders, and a dog came and snapped at him.<sup>103</sup>

In the view of Frankovic, this parable was Rabbi Levi’s way of demonstrating the connection between two biblical scriptures. Despite being accompanied by the seven clouds of glory, receiving water, manna, and even quail in the wilderness, the Israelites asked, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” in Exodus 17:7. And Exodus 17:8 continues, “Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.” The dog who unexpectedly shows up and snaps at the kid is Amalek.<sup>104</sup>

Since Jesus was born and raised in Jewish culture, he likely adopted the Jewish storytelling and parabolic culture with ease. Having identified the Greco-Roman and Hebrew Scripture influences on Jesus’ use of parables, the next section will focus on how Jesus used parables as the hallmark of his preaching / teaching ministry.

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<sup>102</sup> Joseph Frankovic, “Jerusalem Perspective,” accessed July 27, 2023, <https://www.jerusalemerspective.com/2721/>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

## How Jesus Used Parables

Jesus preached through parables more than any other approach.<sup>105</sup> According to Snodgrass, “Parables make up about thirty-five percent of Jesus’ teaching in the Synoptics.”<sup>106</sup> There are over 102 proverbial sayings<sup>107</sup> and forty parables of Jesus in total in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.<sup>108</sup> Mark’s account of the Gospel says, “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples” (Mark 4:33–34). According to Benedict XVI (1927–2022), “There is no doubt that the parables constitute the heart of Jesus’ preaching. While civilizations have come and gone, these stories continue to touch us anew with their freshness and their humanity.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, many scholars continue to see parables as the hallmark of Jesus’ teaching and preaching.

In essence, scholars generally agree the parables are among the sayings we can confidently attribute to the historical Jesus. To quote Boucher: “[T]hey are for the most

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<sup>105</sup> Other methods Jesus used in his preaching include debates, questions, discussion, sermons (where he dealt with various moral and ethical issues), and miracles and healings (which serve as testimonies to God’s power and compassion).

<sup>106</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 22.

<sup>107</sup> Proverbial sayings are brief, practical, straightforward, and memorable statements that provide guidance for daily life. “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31), is a famous proverbial saying of Jesus. Many people call this saying “the golden rule.”

<sup>108</sup> See Charles Carlston, “Proverbs, Maxims and the Historical Jesus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 87–105. There are no parables of Jesus in the Gospel attributed to John and although there may well be a few authentic parables of Jesus preserved in some non-canonical books, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Apocryphon of James*, discussion of these falls outside of the scope of this thesis.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. from the German by Adrian J. Walker (New York, NY: Doubleday, Broadway Publishing Group, 2007), 183.

part authentic words of Jesus.”<sup>110</sup> The parables in the Gospels may therefore be the best way to connect with Jesus Christ’s thought process.

Furthermore, parables are of interest to New Testament scholars because they are a crucial method by which Jesus responded to the question, “What is the reign of God like?” The Jewish people had one response to that query: God’s reign or kingdom would begin with the Messiah, who would usher in a period of justice and peace on earth and a period of freedom from the oppression of their enemies.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus had a different answer. According to McKenzie, “Jesus believed that in his ministry the reign or kingdom or empire of God had been unleashed. The reign of God was present, but not yet fully realized. Where? In his healings and exorcisms, in his table fellowship with those the religious establishment viewed as “unclean,” and in his teachings: his parables and his aphorisms.”<sup>112</sup>

McKenzie further says,

Jesus’ parables offer four basic answers to the question “What is the kingdom of God like? 1. The kingdom of God is not under our control. 2. The kingdom of God shows up where we least expect it. 3. The kingdom of God disrupts business as usual. 4. The kingdom of God is a reign of justice and forgiveness.... In response to the first claim, we *divest* ourselves of our compulsion to control every aspect of our lives. In response to the second, we ask God to help us *discern* the presence of the kingdom amid the details of daily life. In response to the third, we accept the *disruption* the kingdom brings to our habitual actions and assumptions. In response to the fourth, we set our feet toward the *destination* of God’s kingdom of justice and forgiveness that is both yet to be and already within our grasp.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 9.

<sup>111</sup> See Alyce M. McKenzie, *The Parables for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts: “Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, to ‘know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.’ For those who stay ‘outside,’ everything remains enigmatic.”<sup>114</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds, “Like a wise teacher, [Jesus] takes hold of us where we are and leads us progressively toward the Father. Addressing the crowds following him, Jesus builds on what they already know ... from the Old Covenant and opens to them the newness of the coming kingdom. Then he reveals this newness to them in parables.”<sup>115</sup>

People viewed Jesus in different ways during his public ministry. Some saw him as a healer, and others as the Messiah. However, Jesus the teacher was an aspect of him that was instantly apparent. In his preaching, the teacher in him was obvious. His admirers frequently referred to him as Rabbi. Through his teaching, he revealed the kingdom of God and how people can participate in it. Parables were prominent in his tool box as a teacher. He used his parables to reveal the Kingdom’s existence and workings. As such, many of his parables begin with, “The kingdom of God is like... (Matthew 13:31–32; 44–46; Mark 4:26–34).<sup>116</sup> Having established that Jesus basically used parables to reveal the Kingdom, the next section will delineate three basic categories of the parables of Jesus.

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<sup>114</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 546; Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11.

<sup>115</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2607.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, ed., *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 198.

## The Three Categories of Parables

Since the late nineteenth century, scholars have divided the parables in the Gospels into three categories. These categories are (1) similitudes, (2) parables-in-the-strict-sense, and (3) exemplary stories (also known as illustrations).<sup>117</sup> According to Jan Lambrecht, SJ (1926–2023), who was Professor Emeritus of New Testament and former dean of the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, scholars make this distinction between the categories of parables based on Greek rhetoric, but “it is rightly stressed that neither Jews nor Christians knew these distinctions and, moreover, that these categories seldom appear in pure form.”<sup>118</sup>

**(1) *Similitudes*:** A similitude is a brief account of an ordinary or recurring incident from real life. It is the shortest kind of parable. It utilizes analogies and tells a tale that would be familiar to about everyone. Jesus shares a similitude of a woman in search of a lost coin in Luke 15:8–10. This similitude compares the joy in heaven over the repentance of a sinner to the joy of a woman who finds her lost coin. In Mark 4:26–29, Jesus uses a similitude to compare the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven to the growth of the seed, which happens without the sower knowing how it grows. Luke’s Gospel contains numerous similitudes that begin with “Which of you?”<sup>119</sup> In Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels, similitudes frequently begin by stating the comparison, “The

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<sup>117</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 17.

<sup>118</sup> Jan Lambrecht, SJ, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs 10 (Louvain: Peeters Press; [Grand Rapids, MI]: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 22.

<sup>119</sup> Luke 11:5 And he said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto to him, ‘friend, lend me three loaves . . .’” Luke 14:28 Jesus said, “Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”

Kingdom of God is as if” (Mk 4:26, 30–31; Mt 13:33).<sup>120</sup> A similitude has two components: a metaphorical section and a practical application section. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something other than what it actually means. “I am the vine” (John 15:5), and “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), are two examples of metaphor. In the Parable of The Lost Sheep, the “Lost Sheep” is not a literal sheep; it is a metaphor for a sinner, a human being who has broken the law of God. The first part of that parable that talks about the lost sheep is the metaphorical section of the parable. In this parable, as in many other cases, the practical application part of the parable begins with the words: “so also ...” or “just so ....”. After the metaphorical part of the Parable of The Lost Sheep, the practical application then states: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:1–7).<sup>121</sup>

**(2) *Parable-in-the-strict-sense:*** A parable-in-the-strict-sense is a short story that has character(s) and event(s), which present a puzzle without providing the solution, but with enough information to enable the listener figure out the solution. Compared to the similitude, the parable-in-the-strict-sense is frequently (but not always) longer and more detailed. The parable-in-the-strict-sense narrates a fictional, one-time event rather than a recurring real-life occurrence. The parables-in-the-strict-sense are fictional, yet they stay faithful to reality. Their persuasiveness lies in engaging the listener in a simple, straightforward, vivid, and original way. They are “once upon a time” tales, even though the Gospels do not use those exact terms. The verbs in a parable are usually in the past

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<sup>120</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 17–18.

<sup>121</sup> Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, 22.

tense. In Luke 16:1, Jesus begins, “There was a rich man ....” In Luke 7:41, he says, “A certain creditor had two debtors....” and in Mark 4:3; Matthew 13:3; Luke 8:5, “A sower went out to sow....” The Synoptic Gospels contain about sixteen examples that fit the definition of a parable-in-the-strict-sense.<sup>122</sup> In explaining the difference between a similitude and a parable, Lambrecht says:

The difference between a similitude and a parable in the strict sense is great indeed. A similitude is instructive, explanatory. It is addressed to the mind and makes a rather cold, matter-of-fact impression.... A parable in the strict sense, on the other hand, is not so explicit. To be successful, it must be a fascinating story which appeals to, captivates, and deeply moves the hearer. Moreover, the meaning of the parable has to be discovered and worked out by the hearer. It has been said, and with a great deal of truth, that a similitude *in-forms*, but a parable *re-forms*.<sup>123</sup>

An important aspect of parable-in-the-strict-sense is, it introduces an element of surprise. It features an unexpected element like the remarkable field (Matthew 13:44), the peculiar family in “The Prodigal Son,” (Luke 15:11–32), or the strange steward (Luke 16:1–9). Parables include metaphors the audience will understand. For Lambrecht, “Such metaphors would have to be familiar to the hearers and derived from their shared cultural heritage: for example, father, shepherd, kingdom, [and] vineyard.”<sup>124</sup> The story must be plausible, realistic, and meaningful, even if it initially comes across as a surprise.

**(3) Exemplary Stories:** An exemplary story invites the listeners to learn some virtuous acts from a character, or an exemplar, in the story. In some cases, the character may portray some vices that the listener must avoid. The difference between exemplary

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<sup>122</sup> See Boucher, *The Parables*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*



stories and the earlier categories (similitude and parable) is while there are parallels between two very dissimilar things in the similitude and the parable, in exemplary stories there are no parallels between dissimilar things. Where the Kingdom of God is like a seed, and a sinner is like a lost coin (Mark 4:26–33; Luke 15:8–10), there is no human character or exemplar to be emulated. However, in the story of the Good Samaritan, the human character (the Good Samaritan) exemplifies the love of neighbor (Luke 10:29–37). In the same way, the tax collector exemplifies the contrite and repentant sinner (Luke 18:9–14), and the rich man in Luke 16:19–31 represents materialistic tendencies. Simply put, “In the similitude and parable, the two things compared are dissimilar, whereas in the exemplary story, they are similar.”<sup>125</sup> There is no analogy or parallel in the exemplary story, it only has a “specimen,” or “a sample taken from real life.”<sup>126</sup> As a result, there is no requirement for a transfer from image to reality since the example already falls within the same realm as the intended “moral and religious world.”<sup>127</sup> Having examined the three categories of Jesus’ parables, the next section will now present the characteristics of Jesus’ Parables.

### **Characteristics of the Parables of Jesus**

The parables of Jesus are polyvalent, meaning they can have a variety of interpretations depending on the context in which they are preached. Each interpretation “plays” with the parable and extrapolates a fresh, original meaning from its story. As Philip Long points out, the same reader might revisit the text more than once and arrive at

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<sup>125</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 21.

<sup>126</sup> Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

very diverse interpretations of the same narrative. Since the reader has changed, new connections and insights may arise from the same text.<sup>128</sup>

In reading the synoptic gospels, it is easy to discover that the parables of Jesus are products of his immediate environmental and cultural contexts. The villages and farms of Jesus' upbringing in the Nazareth hill country inspired his parables. These parables come across as products of his three-decade-experience in this environment.<sup>129</sup> In the words of Raymond E. Brown (1928–1998), Auburn Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York, “Because they are polyvalent, the particular point of parables takes on coloration from the context in which they are uttered or placed.”<sup>130</sup> Jesus told each parable within a particular context; as such, understanding the parable as it relates to the kingdom, which he came to preach, begins by understanding the context in which he presented it.

Jesus' parables are brief and to the point. They do not use unnecessary words. For example, the Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26–29), and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30–32) are straight to the point. In the Parable of the Growing Seed, Jesus talks about how the seed grows day and night, and the one who plants it does not know how it happens. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, he brings out the point that his listeners must not ignore humble beginnings for the mustard seed begins little and ends up as a big plant. Jesus' parables are condensed because they leave out information

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<sup>128</sup> Philip J. Long, “The Parables of Jesus: Literary Approaches,” accessed June 5, 2023, <https://readingacts.com/2010/10/14/the-parables-of-jesus-literary-approachs/>.

<sup>129</sup> See James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 67.

<sup>130</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 132.

that is unimportant to the parable's basic idea. Even such facts as the names of the characters are not included, and they rarely discuss people's intentions. For example, in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19–31), all the characters are unnamed except Lazarus and Abraham, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11–32) does not mention the mother.<sup>131</sup>

In addition to the characteristic of brevity, a parable from Jesus usually tells the tale from just one point of view. The narration only covers one scene. It does not give any information regarding what goes on off-scene.<sup>132</sup> A scene should have at most two people or groups.<sup>133</sup> For example, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father does not interact with the prodigal son and older brother simultaneously; instead, he does so with each of them separately.

Furthermore, Jesus' parables primarily concern human beings, which makes them attractive and relatable.<sup>134</sup> For instance, Jesus narrates the parable of the man who departed on a journey and gave talents to three of his servants in Matthew 25:14–30. Two of them traded theirs, but one of them kept his. The man came back and praised those who had traded their talents, while chastising and punishing the one who had concealed his. Jesus used such characters to whom his listeners could relate to direct their thoughts and behaviors. One possible interpretation of this parable is, after hearing the parable, the audience would take away the lesson that at the conclusion of this life, each person would

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<sup>131</sup> See Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 17.

<sup>132</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, translated by John Marsh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1963), 174.

<sup>133</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 17.

<sup>134</sup> See *ibid.*, 18.

be asked, “What use have you made of the talents you received?”

Jesus’ parables usually include elements of reversal. This element of reversal is necessary because “[the parables] frequently seek to reorient thought and behavior, in keeping with Jesus’ teaching.”<sup>135</sup> For example, the Samaritan is a neighbor, not a Jewish elite; the tax collector is righteous, not the Pharisee; just like in the Old Testament, David the beloved king is the guilty party, not some horrible monster that anyone would condemn. The most essential part of such parables is typically near the conclusion, which operates much “like the punch line of a joke” due to their intention to elicit a response by using reversal.<sup>136</sup>

Jesus also used repetition frequently in his parables because he taught them orally. The Prodigal Son confesses twice in one incident (Luke 15:18–19; 21). In another case, the three groups of people invited to the feast each offer an explanation (Matthew 22:1–14); this is an illustration of triple repetition. Most people would concur that repetition helps memory. Repeating anything aids in understanding as well as improving memory.<sup>137</sup> Jesus also used dialogue, hyperbole, soliloquies (particularly as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke), and concrete elements in his parables to help people remember the point he was trying to convey to them.

Finally, the parables of Jesus deal with practical actions instead of theoretical concepts. According to Dodd, “[Parables] are the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions.”<sup>138</sup> They seek to give

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<sup>135</sup> See *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>136</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 22–23.

<sup>138</sup> Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 16.

information regarding human behavior or the action of God. Jesus says, “When you give alms, do not blow your trumpet,” rather than, “Beneficence should not be ostentatious,” and “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,” rather than, “Wealth is a grave hindrance to true religion.”<sup>139</sup> This characteristic of Jesus’ parables draws attention to the reality that the reign of God is an event, something occurring or becoming, and it invites the listener to enter. So, the parables do not aim at feeding listeners with concepts, instead, they present action stories to influence the behaviors or actions of the listeners.

Now that we are aware of some of the traits of Jesus’ parables, it is crucial to understand why Jesus favored using parables so frequently in his teaching and in his preaching.

### **Why Jesus used Parables**

Jesus used parables for several reasons. Jesus taught in parables because parables are easy to remember. To quote Boucher once more: parables are “simple enough to be readily understood on hearing, and to be easily remembered afterward.”<sup>140</sup> Parables “derive their material from real life, from the everyday world of family and friends, work and worship.”<sup>141</sup> Many of Jesus’ parables are related to agriculture (the sower, mustard seed, the lost sheep, the weed, etc.) because he lived in an agricultural area, which makes them simpler for listeners to comprehend and remember. It then makes sense that Jesus used them as his teaching aids because his listeners could relate to them and remember

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 23.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

them.

Furthermore, Jesus taught in parables to help his listeners to move beyond listening to thinking and doing. In the words of Levine, the parables of Jesus “challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge.”<sup>142</sup> For example, the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:33–34 revealed something about the chief priests and the elders of the people, which they had refused to acknowledge. Since the stories are drawn from real-life situations and at first seem to have little to do with the subject at issue, the parables prevent the listeners from denying that it is about them.<sup>143</sup> A parable’s primary goal is to be “compellingly interesting;”<sup>144</sup> by engaging the audience, it disarms and diverts attention. Humans typically become defensive when they sense an attack. Directly telling human beings what they have done wrong makes them defensive. However, in the use of parables, the message does not come as a direct attack, so the listeners let their guard down. By the time they realize they are guilty, the message has already been passed on to them. A parable prompts awareness, stirs the conscience, and inspires action. So, Jesus’ use of parables empowered the listener to decide and act on the decision that emanates from the parable.

It follows then that although Jesus told parables to capture the attention of his listeners, more importantly, he wanted to move people to alter their view of life and their

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<sup>142</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 2.

<sup>143</sup> Boucher, *The Parables*, 36.

<sup>144</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 8.

behavior. His parables served to teach his listeners how to behave in a manner consistent with the Kingdom he came to proclaim. McKenzie sees the two general themes or objectives for most of Jesus' parables as: "What is the Kingdom of God like?" and "How should we live so that we participate in [the Kingdom of God], both now and in the future?"<sup>145</sup> In the same way, Levine explains that Jesus' parables echo the warning on the arrival of the Kingdom that John the Baptist preached (Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:17), and what this arrival of the Kingdom requires of us.<sup>146</sup> Jesus understood that the best instruction on how to live in the Kingdom of God does not come from being spoon-fed information. Instead, the instruction comes from stories that serve as a reminder of things we already know but find difficult to remember. The instruction comes from stories that encourage us to form our own opinions. The instruction derives from stories that members of the community can exchange, which calls for constant evaluation of the conclusions and actions of others as well as ours.

Finally, parables serve as a lens through which hearers can see the truth. They allow hearers to notice new things and adjust their perceptions. Levine insists, "Jesus knew that the best teaching comes from stories with memorable characters who are both familiar and strange, who play upon our stereotypes even as they confront them."<sup>147</sup> For instance, the idea of a Good Samaritan was antithetical to the Jews (Luke 10:25–37), just as it was novel to them that God heard the prayer of a tax collector and not that of a Pharisee (Luke 18:9–14).

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<sup>145</sup> McKenzie, *The Parables for Today*, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 13.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

The conversation so far has portrayed Jesus as the giver or teller of parables. However, beyond being the teller of parables, there is a unique relationship between his parables and his person.

### **Jesus is a Parable of God**

The parables of Jesus were not limited to his verbal teachings; his person also communicated a parable to his listeners. Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009), a Catholic Dominican priest, supported this claim as he identified Jesus as a “Preacher of Parables” as well as a “Parable of God.”<sup>148</sup> He explained, “Jesus himself [was] a parable: his person, his stories, and his actions.”<sup>149</sup> In the Incarnation of Jesus, God reveals Godself to humanity, “Look, this is what God is like.” Jesus revealed God to human beings through his incarnation. When Jesus became a human being, it became easier for human being to relate to him, and through him come to a better knowledge of God and relationship with God. In this way, Jesus, the Son of God, becomes a parable since parables use images to reveal something profound to the listeners.

John R. Donahue, SJ (b. 1933), Raymond E. Brown Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies at St. Mary’s Seminary and University, Baltimore, argues that Jesus is the subject of parabolic images:

One of the interesting ways in which the evangelist John refashions the traditions about Jesus found in the other Gospels is by making Jesus himself the subject of parabolic images. In Matthew (18:10–14) and Luke (15:3–7) Jesus tells of a shepherd who seeks a lost sheep; in John, Jesus is the “good” shepherd who will lay down his life for the lost. In the Synoptics Jesus tells parables about vineyards where God is the owner (Mark 12:1–2, and parallels; Matt 20:28–32), while in John, Jesus himself is the vine and the disciples are the branches (John 15:1–11).

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<sup>148</sup> Schillebeeckx, *The Language of Faith*, 106.

<sup>149</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 30.



The parable giver of the Synoptic Gospels becomes the parable of God in John.<sup>150</sup>

Despite being divine, Jesus, the Word of God, became a human being to be a point of contact between God and human beings. The same way, parables use metaphorical language to operate as a bridge between heavenly truths and earthly experiences. Put differently, Jesus is the meeting point of divinity and humanity just as parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus, who was from above and spoke of divine truth, still talked in terms that are from below. He frequently employed figurative language or metaphors to describe himself, the Parable of God, and to spread his message about the Kingdom of God.<sup>151</sup> Except for three of Jesus' parables—the rich fool, the rich man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the tax collector—all of his parables are 'worldly' and make no mention of God.<sup>152</sup> "And yet," as Schillebeeckx explains, "anyone who listens to them knows that through these stories he or she is confronted with God's saving actions in Jesus."<sup>153</sup> Jesus' teachings and actions reveal that this is how God acts.

In conclusion, the parabolic teachings of Jesus flow from his person as a Parable of God. Christianity is as much about Jesus Christ as a person as it is about a teaching. Schillebeeckx was surely correct when he stated: "Humanity, the life story of this man Jesus, thus becomes the unique chance by which God's immediate presence becomes accessible to those who are willing to undergo ... self-critical metanoia or

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<sup>150</sup> John R. Donahue, *Hearing the Word of God: Reflection on the Sunday Readings Year A* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 57.

<sup>151</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament*, 333–34.

<sup>152</sup> Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us*, 29.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

repentance.”<sup>154</sup> Jesus began his public career by seeking out disciples and promising them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He did not summon them to instruct them but to transform them into something new and to effect an ontological change in them. Jesus the teacher of parables is a Parable of God, and his ultimate mission is not to fill his listeners up with instructions but to transform them to become more like who (and what) he is. Therefore, the responsibility of Christians in response to Jesus and his parables is to embrace and share the story of and about Jesus and to make their lives a reliving of the parable. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer asked Jesus who his neighbor was. Jesus told him the story of a man who suffered from the hands of robbers and the actions of a priest, a Levi, and a Samaritan. The lawyer approved the Samaritan as the true neighbor to the victim of the robbers. Jesus then said, “Go, therefore, and do likewise!” (Luke 10:37). So, the parables do not conclude with a moralizing statement but rather continue the dynamics of the story (either tacitly or overtly), with a view toward a new story. As a result, the focus of the next section is on illuminating the need for modern preachers to continue Jesus’ parabolic preaching legacy.

### **Why Contemporary Preachers Should Use Parables**

Throughout the course of Jesus’ public ministry and the history of the Church, the parable has been a powerful teaching and preaching tool. The relevance of Jesus’ parables cannot be overstated. The fact that every parable is included in the Sunday lectionary readings shows how highly the Church holds them in regard. Snodgrass argues, “At no point are the vitality, relevance, and usefulness of the teaching of Jesus so

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 31–32.

clear as in his parables. Jesus was the master creator of story, and nothing is so attractive or so compelling as a good story.”<sup>155</sup> This thesis project argues that if parables worked for Jesus, they can work for us today. Little wonder Snodgrass affirms that for the most part, “Tell me some facts” is not what children and adults say, instead, they “want a story.”<sup>156</sup>

Preachers should learn from Jesus’ use of parables because parables are captivating. The functions of parables are to amuse, inform, engage, inspire, authenticate, and mirror existence. Jesus got the attention of his audience through his parables and delivered powerful preaching. What can preachers of this present age learn from Jesus’s method to deliver powerful preaching today? In this age of social media, vivid preaching with details almost like Instagram movie is the kind of preaching that will appeal to listeners. Through the use of vivid stories, the preacher is able to arrest the listeners, and take them on a mental journey that they would never have conceived. Every detail in preaching should paint the circumstance or sequence of events in the most vivid way possible to capture the audience’s attention. The vividness of the preaching is a valuable tool to connect with listeners as it helps them think about how the preaching relate to numerous scenes in their daily lives.

According to one definition, religion is “designed to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.”<sup>157</sup> Parables are effective ways to afflict the comfortable. When people are comfortable or in a familiar setting, they believe they have comprehensive

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<sup>155</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 1.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 3.

knowledge and understanding. In addition, they often resist direct communication when it challenges this belief. A parable, as an example of indirect communication, pierces one's view of reality and causes one to question such view. It frequently happens that the parable's main point functions as camouflage, making it impossible for the listener to detect a foreign concept until they have fully internalized it.

Apart from lowering the defenses of the listeners, "stories are," as Snodgrass points out, "the quickest way to learning."<sup>158</sup> Our brains store information most readily in the abstract. However, before storing abstract ideas, we learn first and best in the concrete. Repeating an abstract concept that we already understand while preaching or teaching is a shortcut that ignores the lessons that others still need to learn in the concrete before they store them in the abstract. As Jesus did, we would do better as contemporary preachers to frequently wrap the abstract in concrete experience and story. According to Dodd, the "appeal [of the parables of Jesus] to the imagination fixed them in the memory, and gave them a secure place in the tradition."<sup>159</sup> This appeal to the imagination is an essential reason for contemporary preachers to borrow a leaf from Jesus in their preaching methodology. The use of stories in teaching and preaching follow the natural way that humans learn and recall what they have learned.

Finally, one noteworthy reason for contemporary preachers to keep using parables is that parables are invitations to a new reality. Parables invite other ideas or further discussion. Parables. Levine explains, "continue to inform our lives, even as our lives

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<sup>158</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 13.

continue to open [them up] to new readings.”<sup>160</sup> On this note, McKenzie similarly observes, “Parables . . . make us evaluate our lives. While we think we are interpreting them, they are actually interpreting us.”<sup>161</sup> Parables typically draw in listeners, elicit thought, and encourage action. They are incisive and convincing arguments for a far too frequently slow-witted or resistant audience. They try to provoke people into taking the actions for which the kingdom and the gospel both call. Snodgrass opines: “One of the major problems of Christian churches, of Western Christianity in particular, is our stultifying passivity. The parables compel us – for Christ’s sake literally – to do something.”<sup>162</sup> The aim of a parable, therefore, is not simply to suggest that there is another world out there; instead, it is to open us up to a new option within this world, our world, to begin to view and experience life and the world in a very different manner from how we often do.

Finally, contemporary preachers should use parables for the same reasons Jesus used them. They are easy to remember; they are relatable, hence, simple to understand; they are compellingly interesting, hence, they capture attention; and they invite the listeners to reflect and to see and do things in a new way.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis project advocates for the narrative form of preaching in response to the quest for engaging and memorable preaching. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as a preacher who used parables frequently, and John’s Gospel presents Jesus himself as the

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<sup>160</sup> Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 297.

<sup>161</sup> McKenzie, *The Parables*, 1.

<sup>162</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 9.

parable of God. In Palestine, where Jesus preached, people were familiar with stories, and communication in that culture was basically narrative in form. As such, when we engage the gospels in preaching, we need to remember the original culture and the form of communication in that culture. This chapter has also described why Jesus used parables and the characteristics of his parables. The chapter ends with the assertion that Jesus is the supreme model for Christian living (1 Peter 2:21). So, when preachers look for a biblical model for preaching, we should look to Jesus. Because Jesus' life serves as our example of how to live as Christians, his preaching should also serve as our guide. He invites other preachers to follow in his footsteps and use parables in their sermon delivery

## Chapter 3

### Storytelling: A Common Denominator in Human Life

“Story isn’t the icing on the cake, it is the cake.”<sup>1</sup>

“The storyteller is not speaking to people, but speaking for them.”<sup>2</sup>

This thesis project is grounded in a theology of Jesus the Parable of God and the preacher of parables. It is also grounded on a homiletic of story-shaped preaching. It focuses on scenic preaching and the preacher as a scene-maker. The interdisciplinary framework for this study is storytelling because compelling narrative is a requirement for engaging and memorable preaching, that is free of boredom.

Story saturates human life. Story communicates what is happening to us and those around us, as well as how we interact with others. People connect through story and tell stories to narrate a range of life events. Storytelling helps people understand their history and make sense of their lives. It establishes a framework in which to understand cultural and familial traditions. Families tell new stories, and they rehash old ones. Businesses utilize stories to entice customers to goods or services. Any attempt to outgrow or undermine the role of stories or storytelling in human life will be counterproductive. Peter Guber (b. 1942), chairman and CEO of Sony Pictures, argues,

For too long the business world has ignored or belittled the power of oral

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<sup>1</sup> Guber, *Tell to Win*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Craddock, “Preaching as Storytelling,” in *The Arts and Crafts of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Christianity Today International), 492

narrative, preferring soulless PowerPoint slides, facts, figures, and data. But as the noise level of modern life has become a cacophony, the ability to tell a purposeful story that can truly be heard is increasingly in demand. Moreover, in this age of acute economic uncertainty and rapid technological change, it's not the 0's and 1's of the digital revolution, but rather the oohs and aahs of telling ... that offer the best chance of overcoming fear or compelling listeners to act on behalf of a worthy goal.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter focuses on storytelling as a common denominator in human life. This chapter explores the centrality of storytelling in human life and the unifying power of storytelling. It examines how storytelling engages listeners and enforces memory. This chapter then discusses the role of storytelling in religion and suggests possible sources of stories. Finally, the chapter presents practical tools for effective storytelling.

### **The Centrality of Storytelling in Human Life**

Storytelling saturates human existence. Jonathan Gottschall (b. 1972), an English professor at Washington and Jefferson College, likens the connection between people and stories to that between fish and water. He insists their bond is “all-encompassing and not quite palpable.”<sup>4</sup> Even sleep does not hinder the act of storytelling.” When the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.”<sup>5</sup> Whether awake or asleep, humans cannot escape storytelling.

Human beings naturally tell stories. Storytelling is so natural to human beings that sometimes, they tell stories without thinking about it. This human attribute of storytelling begins in childhood. Gottschall shares a story of how his daughters, ages four and seven, spend most of the day reading or making up their own stories in the form of children's

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<sup>3</sup> Guber, *Tell to Win*, vii.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



play. Because of his experience with his daughters, he concludes: “Story is, for my girls, psychologically compulsory. It is something they seem to need in the way they need bread and love. To bar them from Neverland would be an act of violence.”<sup>6</sup> He continues, “Story is so central to the lives of young children that it comes close to defining their existence. What do little kids do? Mostly they do story.”<sup>7</sup>

I resonate with the idea of children “doing story.” As early as the age of four, I saw myself as a priest. In my play acting, I could celebrate more than ten “Holy Masses” in a day. My best moments were when I could gather children of my age to play “Mass.” I was always the priest. Cookies served as “Eucharistic Bread.” Soft drinks served as “Eucharistic Wine.” Several Catholic priests have shared similar stories of how they “played Mass” as children. Gottschall unpacks this: “The most common view of play across species is that it helps youngsters rehearse for adult life. From this perspective, children at play are training their bodies and brains for the challenges of adulthood—they are building social and emotional intelligence. Play is important. Play is the work of children.”<sup>8</sup>

Problem-solving is central to storytelling. According to Gottschall, “Stories the world over are almost always about people (or personified animals) with problems.”<sup>9</sup> The problem may come in the form of an obstacle that stands in the way of a person’s desire to survive, to win the affection of another person, or to locate a kid who has gone

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

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 52.

missing.<sup>10</sup> The effort to overcome the problem in order to achieve the goal gives life to the story. Effective advertisers utilize problem-solving by posing a problem and expressing how their product addresses the problem to achieve the desired result. “A commercial rarely just *says* that a laundry detergent works well; it *shows* that it does through a story about an overworked mom, rascally kids, and a laundry room triumph.”<sup>11</sup> Identifying and solving a problem is key to the practice of storytelling.

Stated most clearly: being human equates with telling stories. Storytelling is an inherent and important part of human existence. Exploring the practice of storytelling, knowing its benefits, and maximizing its influence benefits individuals and strengthens communities. The next section of this chapter will explore the unifying power of storytelling.

### **The Unifying Power of Storytelling**

Storytelling unites people. According to Jon Goode, Moth<sup>12</sup> Host and Storyteller, “Stories are what turn friends into family.”<sup>13</sup> Simply put: stories build communities. Gottschall supports this position by noting what happens in a movie theatre. People of different racial backgrounds, religions, political views, genders, ages, social, and economic levels forget their differences while experiencing a story in a movie theater.

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<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> The Moth is a non-profit organization that focuses on the art of storytelling. George Dawes Green, a poet and novelist, founded it in 1997. It hosts live storytelling events where participants share their personal stories, frequently in relation to a particular theme. These events usually take place in various cities, and some of the stories are subsequently broadcast on radio or turned into a podcast.

<sup>13</sup> Jon Goode (birthdate unavailable) cited in Meg Bowles, Catherine Burns, Jenifer Hixson, Sarah Austin Jenness, and Kate Tellers, *How to Tell a Story: The Essential Guide to Memorable Storytelling from The Moth* (New York, NY: Crown, 2022), 19.

Together they laugh, cry, hold their breath, clap, and share a single breath. They do these things without considering the backgrounds of others nearby. Gottschall concludes: “A film [an onscreen story] melds minds. It imposes emotional and psychic unity. Until the lights come up and the credits roll, a film makes people one.”<sup>14</sup>

There is scientific evidence to support the unifying power of storytelling. Similar to the movie theatre experience, the directors of *The Moth Story Night* (Meg Bowles, Catherine Burns, Jenifer Hixson, Sarah Austin Jenness, and Kate Tellers) report how the storyteller and the audience seem to inhale and exhale at the same time at the best storytelling events. Every brain in the room fires in unison with each story. Hearts beat at the same rate. The directors of *The Moth* were delighted to discover scientific backing for their observations:

A study led by neuroscientist Uri Hasson found that when a person is listening and comprehending a story, their brain activity begins to couple, or align, with the brain of the teller. The scientific term is ‘speaker-listener neural coupling.’ MRI scans of two brains, one talking, one listening, showed that the brains began to sync. Where the teller’s brain showed activity, or ‘lit up,’ soon after, the listener’s brain lit up too. One catch is that this only happens when the listener is engaged and comprehending the story being told.<sup>15</sup>

The Movie Theater and *The Moth Story Night* experiences reinforce the idea that storytelling impacts the human experience. Storytelling and stories help us to imagine and visualize situations we have not experienced personally.<sup>16</sup>

In a world where individual differences can create a crisis, storytelling is a much-needed tool to bring people together without denying their individuality. Through

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<sup>14</sup> Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, 136.

<sup>15</sup> Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 10–11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

storytelling, I can remain my authentic self, and sincerely say, “I feel your pain/joy! We are one!” Having looked at the unifying power of storytelling, the next section explores how this quality can enhance the listener’s engagement.

### **Storytelling and Listeners’ Engagement**

The phrase “Once upon a time,” is a magical incantation<sup>17</sup> that grabs our attention and sweeps us off our feet. These four words can transport us centuries into the past, centuries into the future, and thousands of miles away from our physical location. Even when the story ends, the image the story creates follows us and turns our world. Such a story changes us. Images transport us and, in doing so, create a new *imagination*.<sup>18</sup>

Studies have demonstrated when we talk about or execute certain behaviors or watch someone else perform them, certain neurons in our brains are stimulated. These neurons are called “mirror neurons.”<sup>19</sup> Mirror neurons provide the ability to interpret another person’s behaviors and emotions as if we were inside the person’s experiences. Through connections and sentiments of empathy, mirror neurons enable us to infer, learn, and model one another’s intent. Guber states, “Stories work by turning on and tuning in both the teller’s and listener’s mirror neurons.”<sup>20</sup> Oral storytelling increases the impact of a story. Mirror neurons are activated to a greater degree in oral storying as the sounds, facial expressions, and physical movements in the storyteller and the listeners are activated. When I see you smile, my mirror neurons activate and I smile, starting a chain

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<sup>17</sup> Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> The “*nation*” in “*imagination*” is deliberately in italics. It is my attempt to play on words. I am highlighting the power of an image to transport a person in a non-physical way to a different *nation*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Guber, *Tell to Win*, 44–45.

reaction of brain activity. As Guber points out, “This two-way attunement of mirror neurons creates the optimal state for telling a story. If a story is well told, both teller and audience will be and remain attuned to their shared ‘ah ha!’ when the teller’s original epiphany is experienced by the listener as his or her *own* eureka.”<sup>21</sup> An effective storyteller can use storytelling to activate the mirror neurons in the listeners to create a desired experience or behavior to engender transformation in the listeners.

Similarly, Gottschall, relying on what he gathered from biology, psychology, and neuroscience, insists “... a story can sneak up on us ... make us laugh or cry, make us amorous or angry, make our skin shrink around our flesh, alter the way we imagine ourselves and our worlds.”<sup>22</sup> When we perceive an attack in real life, we typically take a defensive stance. When an attack is wrapped in a story, we can evaluate it with greater objectivity. When we reach the conclusion of the story and realize our role as characters in the story, it is too late to change our initial, unbiased evaluation of the events or lesson it teaches.<sup>23</sup> According to Sondra B. Willowbee,<sup>24</sup> adjunct professor of preaching at Methodist Theological School in Delaware, Ohio, 2 Samuel 12:1-15 is an example of how “stories are sneaky.”<sup>25</sup> King David had passed a judgment on himself before realizing the story Prophet Nathan told him was about his own sin of adultery.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>22</sup> Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, xv.

<sup>23</sup> Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long, eds., *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 231.

<sup>24</sup> Birthdate unavailable.

<sup>25</sup> Sondra B. Willowbee, *The Write Stuff: Crafting Sermons that Capture and Convince* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 44.

A storyteller can leverage curiosity as a tool to keep the listener interested and engaged. Listeners become curious when they realize something is missing. According to Chip Heath (b. 1963), professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University, and Dan Heath (b. 1973), senior fellow at the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University, “In 1994, George Loewenstein, a behavioral economist at Carnegie Mellon University, provided the most comprehensive account of situational interest. It is surprisingly simple. Curiosity, he says, happens when we feel a gap in our knowledge.”<sup>26</sup> To leverage curiosity as a tool for interest and engagement, a storyteller must first create and maintain a gap. Rather than fast-forwarding to facts, the storyteller must help listeners understand their need for these facts. This missing knowledge can be some sort of secret or a scenario with an uncertain outcome. When a storyteller asks a listener to predict an outcome, according to Heath and Heath, it “creates two knowledge gaps – What *will happen*? And *Was I right*?”<sup>27</sup> Heath and Heath observe media outlets regularly use this tactic through teaser ads as follows: “There’s a new drug sweeping the teenage community – and it may be in your own medicine cabinet!’ ‘Which famous local restaurant was just cited—for *slime in the ice machine*?’ ‘There’s an invisible chemical in your home—sand it may be killing you right now!’”<sup>28</sup> Listeners typically do not care about these things until the media creates a gap. This gap makes the listener curious. Could their teenage child be hiding or using this new drug? Could their favorite restaurant be the one with slime? They must keep watching to close the gap.

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<sup>26</sup> Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008), 84.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In conclusion, initial objective of storytellers is to pique the curiosity of their audience. The next objective is to keep that interest alive. To do this, storytellers need to master a variety of techniques. These techniques involve enhancing mirror neuron function, understanding the surprise nature of stories, and leveraging gap theory. Effective storytelling often results in listeners remembering the story and making changes in their thinking or behavior. The next section will focus on the relationship between storytelling and memory.

### **Storytelling and Memory**

Oral civilizations strengthen memory. It is a common belief that you can only claim to know something if you can recall it. How do such cultures acquire structured information for recall? What does or can such a culture know about a structured manner without the luxury of written text? How does it pass information from one generation to the next? Oral cultures rely on human memory. Because oral cultures do not have written words, they transmit information by spoken words. Walter J. Ong, SJ (1912–2003), University Professor of Humanities and Professor of Humanities in Psychiatry at Saint Louis University, Missouri, argued, “First, in a primary oral culture ... knowledge cannot be managed in elaborate, more or less scientifically abstract categories. Oral cultures cannot generate such categories, and so they use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know.”<sup>29</sup> Storytelling is the key to the retention and transmission of information in an oral culture. Guber insists, “Stories make facts and figures memorable, resonant, and actionable.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1982), 140.

<sup>30</sup> Guber, *Tell to Win*, 57.

What qualities make a story easy to remember? The first quality of a story that makes it memorable to listeners is the emotional experience it creates in the listeners.

According to Guber,

When someone tells us a story with data tucked inside, our brains cleverly lock the data onto the feelings we experience while listening to that story. Then, when the information is recalled, so is our feeling of [experiencing the story]. The more rewarding our experience of the [story] the more positive our view of the data is likely to be.<sup>31</sup>

A good storyteller creates an emotional experience for the audience. A good storyteller causes the audience to feel something. Both qualities help the audience retain, remember and recall the facts of the story.

The second quality of a story that makes it memorable is simplicity. Simplicity, according to Heath and Heath, is “finding the core of the idea ... stripping an idea down to its critical essence.”<sup>32</sup> The French author and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944) is quoted by many sources to have described engineering elegance as follows: “A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”<sup>33</sup> In the same vein, a good storyteller should aim for an economy of words. Simplicity aids memory.

The third quality that makes a story memorable is surprise. Surprise is key to getting people’s attention. According to Heath and Heath, “The most basic way to get

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 46–47.

<sup>32</sup> Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> My first source for this quotation comes from Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 28. Further Internet search reveals that there is no specific book where Antoine de Saint-Exupéry has written or documented those words even though many fingers point to him as the originator of those words.



people's attention is this: Break a pattern."<sup>34</sup> Humans like patterns. When patterns are broken, humans notice. For example, we notice the sound of a motor engine when the motor stops. We notice darkness when power fails. We become more aware when a pattern changes: someone rearranges the books or reorganizes the spices. These breaks in patterns surprise us. Surprises get our attention.

The fourth element that makes a story memorable is concreteness. A thing is concrete if you can experience it through your senses; if you can see, taste, smell, hear, or feel/touch it. A concrete thing is that which is not abstract. For example, a car engine is concrete, while high performance is abstract. Only experts can access abstract concepts. The best way to reach most people, if not everyone, is to use words that refer to concrete things.<sup>35</sup> According to and Heath and Heath, "Language is often abstract, but life is not abstract. Abstraction makes it harder to understand an idea and to remember it."<sup>36</sup> That is why, according to Ong, oral cultures "identified geometrical figures by assigning them the names of objects, never abstractly as circles, squares, etc. A circle would be called a plate, sieve, bucket, watch, or moon; a square would be called a mirror, door, house, apricot drying-board."<sup>37</sup>

Finally, we must continue to value and foster the human ability for memory regardless of the advances humans make in the areas of science and technology. Oral cultures teach us that the key to memory is storytelling. The emotional response that

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<sup>34</sup> Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, 64.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 99–100.

<sup>37</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 51.

storytelling elicits in the audience, as well as simplicity, surprise, and concreteness, are four aspects of storytelling that help people remember things. This storytelling research should improve the caliber of liturgical preaching. Given that preaching is a religious duty, the next section will focus on the purpose of storytelling in religion.

### **The Role of Storytelling in Religion**

Storytelling is crucial to many religious traditions. William J. Bausch,<sup>38</sup> Catholic priest of the diocese of Trenton, New Jersey, and an award-winning author of numerous books on parish ministry, the sacraments, Church history, storytelling, and homiletics, situates the roots of the Judeo-Christian religion in the oral tradition of storytelling.<sup>39</sup> The transmission of religious practices from generation to generation relies on stories. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Bible is a library of stories. According to Gottschall, “[When you read] the holy books of the three great monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam ... you will be flipping through anthologies of stories.”<sup>40</sup> He adds, “The world’s priests and shamans knew what psychology would later confirm: if you want a message to burrow into a human mind, work it into a story.”<sup>41</sup>

Religious stories bring hope and transformation to the lives of religious adherents. The telling of and listening to stories from their nations provided comfort to African slaves in harsh conditions, and preserved their culture in an alien environment. African slaves and their descendants discovered the God who saves—the God who “makes a way

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<sup>38</sup> I could not access his year of birth.

<sup>39</sup> William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Clear Faith Publishing LLC, 2015), xii.

<sup>40</sup> Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

out of no way”—by listening to the Bible’s stories. The story of Exodus and its ramifications and potential applications offered particular hope in the midst of their own predicament.<sup>42</sup>

Storytelling is important in catechesis. timone a. davis,<sup>43</sup> assistant professor of pastoral theology at Loyola University, Chicago, says, “[The] integration of ... biblical story into ... daily living is precisely the gift of African American storytelling. As a method of catechesis, it allows everyone to integrate scripture and Catholic traditions into their lives whereby they will be transformed.”<sup>44</sup> For example, by repeating the Exodus story, enslaved Africans and African Americans kept a historical event alive for a faithful people. They recounted the story in a way that brought the past into the present rather than just recalling events from the past.<sup>45</sup> Storytelling in catechesis uses the cycle of reflection/action/reflection to find an individual’s story in God’s story and God’s story in the individual. Story-influenced catechesis helps catechists understand how the biblical stories speak at various points in their lives.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to aiding catechesis, storytelling gives life to preaching. davis notes, “In the Catholic Church today there is a battle cry that often rises above the noise of many complaints: We need relevant preaching!”<sup>47</sup> In response to this complaint, davis

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<sup>42</sup> timone a. davis, *Intergenerational Catechesis: Revitalizing Faith Through African-American Storytelling* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2021), 31.

<sup>43</sup> Birthdate unavailable.

<sup>44</sup> davis, *Intergenerational Catechesis*, 32.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

posits African American storytelling as life-giving to preaching ministry.<sup>48</sup> She argues: “Preaching, as a form of storytelling, must have facts that the preacher has personally experienced and/or the preacher must be able to tell a story that appeals to the imagination, calling up experience.”<sup>49</sup> When storytelling finds its place in preaching, the sermon becomes an engaging event where God’s story meets the stories of individuals and people to transform the people of God.

Most if not all religions incorporate storytelling into their beliefs. Christianity, for example, uses storytelling to pass on its beliefs from one generation to the next. Religious followers also find hope in religion through storytelling. They gain hope for the future when they learn about what God has done in the past for followers of the religion. Storytelling also gives life to preaching as it makes preaching engaging. After examining the impact of storytelling in religion; the following section will concentrate on where and how to find stories.

### **Where / How to Find Stories**

Stories exist throughout human existence. The ability to notice stories, however, requires ongoing development and nurturing. A storyteller must make conscious efforts to locate and notice stories. According to Bowless et al.,

Finding your story requires the hard work of sifting through all your life experiences, all the phone calls, alarm clocks, and deadlines; the sunsets and taxes; the breakups and stumbles and epic fails; the home runs and stupid luck. You look through all that and try to identify the significant moments when you felt most like yourself, or the self you could finally see you wanted to become.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 27.

Alyce M. McKenzie identifies three specific areas in which preachers should search for stories: “[O]ur inner life (inscape), life around us (landscape), and the life of the biblical text (textscape).”<sup>51</sup> When searching for inscape, landscape, and textscape, for what should we be looking? Borrowing from creative writers, McKenzie shares the following items for which to look: 1. Dilemma, 2. Incongruity that leads us to ask, “Why?” 3. Connection between two otherwise unrelated people, events, or situations, 4. Memory, 5. Common emotion, 6. Archetypal characters, 7. Flexible image or concept, 8. Imaginative situations, and 9. Intriguing fictional situation.<sup>52</sup>

McKenzie argues two barriers might prevent us from noticing stories. The first is the lack of discipline, and the second is the instinct for self-protection.<sup>53</sup> We must have the discipline to pause, read between the lines, and keep track of what we have observed. The human instinct for self-protection causes us to avoid stories that recall painful events. Little wonder, Amy-Jill Levine opines, “What makes the parables [which are stories] ... difficult, is that they challenge us to look into the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives. They bring to the surface unasked questions, and they reveal the answers we have always known, but refuse to acknowledge.”<sup>54</sup> Since we are aware of these barriers, we must address them to improve our storytelling abilities rather than allow them deny us the benefits of stories.

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<sup>51</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, *Novel Preaching: Tips From Top Writers on Crafting Creative Sermons* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (New York: NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 36.

For example, we may want to ignore a story from our past because it reminds us of our mistakes. However, according to Bowles et al., “Our biggest mistakes often lead to great stories,” and “The beauty of a well-told story is that it can turn your most embarrassing moment into something you’re proud of.”<sup>55</sup> Everyone makes mistakes. When we admit our failures, it reminds people that everything is okay because we are all human. We can learn from our failures, get better, and maybe even stop taking ourselves so seriously.<sup>56</sup> When we are open to sharing our less-than-ideal aspects, it can be reassuring. We almost seem to provide the listener permission to be themselves. What they hear is that the speaker is not flawless, so it is okay if the listeners are not either; this is not a contest or an exercise to impress. When as storytellers, we become vulnerable this way, it creates a sacred bond; it creates a sacred trust between us and the audience; as Bowles et al. put it, “And that trust is the gateway to great empathy and memorable storytelling.”<sup>57</sup>

To conclude, stories are fundamental to human existence. We can find stories in our inner lives, the world around us, and in books like the Bible. The lack of discipline and the human impulse for self-preservation are two barriers that can prevent us from noticing these stories. However, by being aware of these challenges, we can better position ourselves to use these barriers as assets in our search for powerful stories. Having the proper tools is one thing, but effectively using them is another. This chapter has thus far explored the various tools and aspects of storytelling. How to effectively tell

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<sup>55</sup> Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 43.

<sup>56</sup> See *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

a story will be the subject of the following section.

### **The How of Effective Storytelling**

Effective storytelling is a skill. Effective storytelling requires assessment and planning. There are numerous techniques for telling stories; the storyteller must make choices. One of the primary choices relates to structure. According to Bowles et al., “The best structure supports the story you want to tell and allows all the parts and elements to flow together seamlessly, without confusing the listener. It should feel organic and authentic, never forced, or prescriptive.”<sup>58</sup> The Moth identifies two structures a storyteller can use for effective delivery.

**One: Chronological.** This structure tells a story based on the order in which the events of the story happened. The storyteller can even simultaneously tell two stories that unfold chronologically.<sup>59</sup> Hence, we can tell a story in the order in which events occurred, and we can also simultaneously tell more than one story in the order in which events occurred.

**Two: Flashback.** This structure pauses the story to add information from the past. This information often provides details or context that inform the primary story.<sup>60</sup>

There are at least four ways to use a flashback. A. The callback as framing. This way of using flashback employs an opening scene, to which the storyteller returns at the conclusion of the story to set the overall tone.<sup>61</sup> B. The classic flashback. In this case, the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 148.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.*, 157.

storyteller might start out by presenting the story chronologically before switching to flashback at a crucial point to set the scene or heighten the tension. This technique acts as the brake in a fast-paced plot and gives life to a slower, more reflective portion.<sup>62</sup> C. The cliffhanger flashback. The cliffhanger is like the classic flashback, except that the cliffhanger comes only at the beginning, while the classic flashback can be at any point in the story. The beginning of the story could be a brief scene. Right from the start, it builds tension and sets the stakes. You can stop the action and travel back in time to explain how you arrived there, leaving your audience wondering, “What happened?!” Then, proceed chronologically until you reach the cliff’s edge scene from your opening. The unresolved opening of the story keeps readers engaged throughout as long as the listener can clearly see how the scenes relate to one another.<sup>63</sup> D. Multiple flashbacks. As the name implies, this strategy employs more than one flashback, which are usually short in length.<sup>64</sup>

After deciding between chronological and flashback, the storyteller should use the crucial building components that fit into the structure. Guber identifies “*challenge, struggle, and resolution*” as “the building blocks of all compelling stories.”<sup>65</sup>

A *challenge* is an obstacle or a difficult situation that requires effort, skill, and determination to overcome. An “unexpected challenge or question”<sup>66</sup> at the beginning of

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<sup>62</sup> See *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.*, 153.

<sup>64</sup> See *ibid.*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> Guber, *Tell to Win*, 20.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



a story develops and shapes the narrative arc of the story. Depending on the genre and setting of the story, a challenge might take many different shapes. It could involve a personal struggle, such as overcoming a painful event, overcoming inner demons, or working toward the realization of a long-held goal. Alternatively, it could feature an external conflict, such as a danger to the protagonist's safety that is about to strike, a rescue mission, or a search for justice and the truth. The challenge at the start of a story introduces the main conflict, piques readers' or viewers' interest, and entices them to accompany the protagonist on their quest for a solution.

In the context of a story, the *struggle* is the protagonist's response to the initial challenge at the start of the story. It is the protagonist's "struggle [or effort] to overcome that challenge or find the answer to the opening question."<sup>67</sup> A struggle has several functions in a story. First, it produces conflict and tension, both of which are crucial for holding the audience's attention and advancing the plot. The conclusion of the protagonist's trip becomes more significant and meaningful as a result of the increased stakes and sense of urgency in the struggle. Second, a struggle provides an opportunity for character development and growth. The way a protagonist navigates and overcomes their struggle often leads to personal transformation, learning, and self-discovery.

*Resolution*, in the context of a story, refers to the point at which the central challenge or conflict are resolved or brought to a conclusion, which, as Guber points out, "calls [the audience] to action."<sup>68</sup> The resolution is the moment that provides closure and answers the questions that arose throughout the story. The resolution serves to bring a

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, and relief to the audience. It ties up loose ends, clarifies the outcomes of the characters' journeys, and provides a sense of finality to the story. It can be a pivotal moment that reveals the ultimate fate of the characters, resolves their personal or external conflicts, or delivers the desired or unexpected outcomes. The resolution can take different forms, depending on the genre and nature of the story. It could involve a decisive victory over the main antagonist, a successful achievement of the protagonist's goals, the resolution of a mystery, or the reconciliation of conflicting parties.

In summary, deciding whether to tell a story in flashback or chronological order is crucial to the success of storytelling. Challenge, conflict, and resolution are essential components of whatever structure we decide to employ. Guber says, "Listeners are rarely hooked if they don't sense some compelling challenge in the beginning. They won't stay engaged if they're not excited by the struggle of the middle. And they won't remember or act on the story unless they feel galvanized by its final resolution."<sup>69</sup> So, an unexpected challenge or question grabs the listener's attention from the beginning of the story. The protagonist's response to the challenge or question generates an emotional response from the listeners, which keeps them engaged. Then, the resolution at the end encourages action from the listeners.<sup>70</sup>

### **Eight Elements of a Story**

In addition to the structure and the building blocks of a story, eight elements keep

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*, 20–21.

a story moving: character, drama, climax, the me-to-we-factor,<sup>71</sup> stake, trailer, details, and opening and closing.<sup>72</sup>

**One: Character.** A character is an individual or entity that plays a role within the story. Characters are the driving force behind the events and actions within the story, and they can be human, non-human, or even abstract concepts personified. A story needs a character, a heroine or hero who makes things happen, someone for whom the audience roots or has sympathy.<sup>73</sup>

**Two: Drama.** Drama is the element in a story that focuses on creating tension, conflict, and emotional intensity. It often explores the complexities of human relationships, inner struggles, and the consequences of choices and actions. Drama typically involves the portrayal of realistic and intense situations. It often centers on interpersonal conflicts, moral dilemmas, or personal challenges. It aims to evoke strong emotional responses from the audience. Character gets the attention of the listener; drama keeps the listener engaged.<sup>74</sup>

**Three: Climax.** The turning point of a story's greatest tension and intensity is called the climax. It is the culmination of the central conflict or main storyline. It is the most suspenseful and dramatic point in the narrative, serving as a turning point that propels the story towards its resolution. This is the time to tighten all the loose ends in the story. Timing is of the essence here. The climax loses its impact if it comes too early, it

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<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>72</sup> See Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 51, 54, 67–68.

<sup>73</sup> See Guber, *Tell to Win*, 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> See *ibid.*, 28.

loses the listeners if it drags on for too long. It is a successful climax when the reaction of the listener is, “I’ve got it!”<sup>75</sup>

**Four: The Me-To-We Factor.** The term “me-to-we factor” describes a movement in a story’s emphasis from the individual storyteller to a communal and collaborative perspective that involves both the storyteller and the listener. When listeners realize a storyteller is discussing an emotion or circumstance they have personally encountered, it sparks their empathy, establishes their confidence in the storyteller, and ensures their attention and commitment to the call to action.<sup>76</sup> As Guber explains, the “me-to-we factor” tells the listener, “I’m you. I have the same problems and frustrations as you do.”<sup>77</sup> This element makes stories approachable. If you can instantly build a connection with your listeners through your story, they will be more likely to remember your message and stand with you.

**Five: Stakes.** Stakes in a story are the possible repercussions, dangers, or outcomes that the characters encounter as a result of the primary conflict or in pursuing their objectives. They refer to what is at risk, or what the character hopes to gain in the story. A story’s tension and drive come from the stakes. They raise anxiety. They provide the listeners a cause to accompany you on this journey by evoking either excitement or dread in them. As Bowles et al. point out: “Clear stakes establish why *you* care, which tells us why *we* should care.”<sup>78</sup> Examples of stakes, according to Bowles et al., include:

- A problem that needs to be solved.

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<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>76</sup> See *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>78</sup> Bowles et al., *How to Tell a Story*, 51.

- A struggle over a tough choice.
- A question that needs to be answered.
- A mystery you're trying to get to the bottom of.
- An unexpected event.<sup>79</sup>

The stakes create tension making the listeners lean forward in anticipation as they wonder what happens next.

**Six: Trailer.** In the context of a story, a trailer is a condensed and carefully crafted preview that offers an intriguing glimpse of a story. Its purpose is to generate excitement, capture the audience's attention, and motivate them to seek out and experience the full story. Bowles et al. give the following example: "It took a disaster for me to appreciate the important role my father played in our community."<sup>80</sup> This one line is the trailer of the story. The trailer acts as the map. It does not really need to show up in the story, but it tells you, the storyteller, whether you are on track.<sup>81</sup>

**Seven: Details.** Details refer to particular facts, descriptions, or components that enhance the story's overall richness, depth, and vividness. Details create a sensory experience that enables listeners to imagine and fully immerse themselves in the story. Details make the story unforgettable to the listeners. According to Bowles et al., "The specificity of details brings the scene to life. Instead of *it was raining*, tell us about the noise of the rain on the roof or the puddles that blocked the path."<sup>82</sup> Details include the inner dialogue of the storyteller. Details are important, but too detail overload is problematic. Too much detail can wear out and distract a listener. If a detail provokes a

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>81</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 87–88.

question or causes the listener's mind to wander, they miss part of the story. This distraction may also break the connection between the teller and the listener. Details to avoid include too many specific dates, too many names or characters, too many graphic details, details at odds with your story, misleading details, questioning the details in your own story, and using details to settle a score.<sup>83</sup>

***Eight: Opening and Closing.*** Finally, every story has an opening and a closing. According to Jenifer Hixson, a senior director at The Moth, "Takeoff and landing are considered the most dangerous parts of a flight. And so it goes with stories."<sup>84</sup> Openings and closings establish the framework of a story and serve as its "hello" and "goodbye." There is one chance to make a first impression. There is one opportunity to resolve whatever questions or confusions the listener has encountered. Elements that form good openings and closings include examples, brief scenes, or details that are indicative of the story's main theme.<sup>85</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This thesis project focuses on scenic preaching and the preacher as a scene-maker. Storytelling provides the interdisciplinary foundation to this thesis because I will be arguing that storytelling is central to scenic preaching. Storytelling unites people, creates memory, and contributes to the propagation of religion. Storytelling requires skills to yield the intended results. This chapter has explored the centrality of storytelling, the effectiveness of storytelling, and particular storytelling skills. Having laid the theological

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<sup>83</sup> See *ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>84</sup> Jenifer Hixson, "Beginnings and Endings," in *ibid.*, 170.

<sup>85</sup> See *ibid.*, 170–72.

and interdisciplinary foundations for this project, the next chapter will provide the homiletic foundation of the project.

## Chapter 4

### Narrative Theology: Homily as a Story-shaped Event

“We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”

– 1 John 1:3.

“I propose that we begin by regarding the sermon as a homiletical plot, a narrative art form, a sacred story.”<sup>1</sup>

A homily is a story-shaped event in which the preacher engages listeners. An effective homily is the meeting point of many stories: the biblical story, the liturgical story, the community story, the preacher’s story, and the stories of individual worshippers.<sup>2</sup> Many parishioners complain homilies are boring and not memorable. I believe these complaints come up because priests and deacons do not treat preaching as a story-shaped event.

Previously, the common understanding of preaching was an event in which the preacher was active and the listeners were passive. Over time, preachers realized the

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<sup>1</sup> Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, xxi.

<sup>2</sup> See Allen., *The Renewed Homiletic*, 21–22.



office of preaching required engaging listeners as active participants rather than passive spectators. So, preachers and teachers of preaching spent many years brainstorming how to engage listeners as active participants. They have studied a range of strategies to meet the goal of engaging listeners.

This thesis project proposes Alyce M. McKenzie's preaching method, Scenic Preaching, as a remedy for "boring homilies." Boredom is a sign of non-involvement. Fred Brenning Craddock argued that boredom is a form of evil, which "works against the faith by provoking contrary thoughts or lulling to sleep or draping the whole occasion with a pall of indifference."<sup>1</sup> Scenic Preaching reduces or eliminates boredom by employing the power of creating vivid scenes to delight, involve, inform, inspire, and transform the listeners in their faith journey.

As such, Scenic Preaching is the preaching method I am teaching in my ministerial intervention. Scenic Preaching is an experiential approach of the New Homiletic Movement. The three approaches of the New Homiletic Movement are the inductive, the narrative, and the experiential approaches. The New Homiletic Movement was born in the 1970s and it formalized the shift from story-filled preaching to story-shaped preaching. Before the New Homiletic Movement was born in the 1970s, there were already indications of dissatisfaction with the earlier approaches to preaching. As will be explained below, one of such indications came from none other than Harry Emerson Fosdick. University sermons and Puritan Plain Style were earlier approaches to preaching. They were deductive and story-filled (rather than story-shaped).

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<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978), 13.

This chapter will discuss the transition from preaching as a story-filled event to preaching as a story-shaped event. This chapter will also examine the New Homiletic Movement's three interconnected approaches to preaching. The remainder of this chapter will cover the qualities of a captivating scene, the preacher as a scene maker, and the reasons for Scenic Preaching, followed by the chapter's conclusion.

### **The Shift from Preaching as Story-filled to Preaching as Story-shaped<sup>2</sup>**

Story-filled preaching arose as a response to the call to make preaching more engaging. Story-filled preaching sought to tell stories as illustrations. This approach to preaching sometimes departed from scripture, and at times, was more entertaining than transformative. Later, story-shaped preaching came as a response to the shortcomings of story-filled preaching. Story-shaped preaching is primarily narrative in structure.<sup>3</sup> Story-shaped preaching entails presenting the preaching using a story format with an opening, a middle, and a closing. Story-shaped preaching may contain a story, but the emphasis is not on having a story in the preaching so much as it is on following the format of a story in the preaching event. This section focuses on story-filled preaching.

One form of story-filled preaching that originated towards the end of the medieval period was the University Sermons by the Franciscans and the Dominicans. This form of preaching began with a central theme. The central theme was divided into three points. Those three points were further divided into three subsections.<sup>4</sup> This approach to

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase came from my elective course, *The Art of Sermonic Storytelling*, with Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie from June 16, 2021 to September 23, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> See Mary Donovan Turner, "Narrative Form," in *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, Paul Scott Wilson, gen. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 397.

<sup>4</sup> See Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 3.

preaching launched what some people described as a “three-point, two-joke, and one-poem sermon.”<sup>5</sup>

A later form of deductive preaching, following that of University Sermons, is the Puritan Plain Style of preaching, developed in the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This form of preaching originated in Calvinism.<sup>7</sup> The focus of this approach was the exposition of Scripture. There were three steps in this approach:

1. The preacher offered commentary on the ancient text from the point of view of its ancient setting.

2. The preacher shared the doctrinal points drawn from the commentary the preacher gave in the first step.

3. The preacher applied the doctrine to the lives of people in the congregation.

Most simply, the Puritan Plain Style of preaching entailed biblical exegesis, theological interpretation, and moral exhortation.<sup>8</sup>

The University Sermon and Puritan Plain Style sermons were both deductive; that is, they moved from general to specific, from universal to particular. They began with a general doctrinal point and moved to particular applications or inferences based on that general point.<sup>9</sup> Both sermon styles were sometimes story-filled, that is, they used stories as illustrations, but the sermons did not take the shape of a story.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*

Preachers began moving away from the University and Puritan Sermon forms. Prior to the development of the New Homiletic in the 1970s, Harry Emerson Fosdick was an American pastor who like Craddock, but much earlier, diagnosed preaching as boring.<sup>10</sup> He presented the expository and topical approaches of the University Sermons and the Puritan Sermons as the culprits. He believed the only way to keep listeners from getting bored during the preaching event was to make the preaching relevant to their lives by addressing their social, moral, psychological, theological, and existential concerns. According to Fosdick, “Only the preacher proceeds still upon the idea that folk come to Church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites. The result is that folk less and less come to Church at all.”<sup>11</sup> The point here is that basing the preaching on the needs of the hearers will make it relevant to them and will lead to transformation in their lives. This position of Fosdick paved way for the future works of the New Homiletic Movement regarding the shift of attention to the hearer.<sup>12</sup> The following section will focus on the history and contributions of the New Homiletic Movement to preaching.

### **The New Homiletic Movement**

The New Homiletic Movement championed a shift in attention to the hearer in the preaching event and the shift from story-filled preaching to story-shaped preaching. This story-shaped preaching refers to the use of narrative as the major structure for the sermon as opposed to the use of story and narrative as illustrative materials.<sup>13</sup> As earlier

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<sup>10</sup> See Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What is The Matter with Preaching?” *Harper’s Magazine* (July 1928), 134, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://harpers.org/archive/1928/07/what-is-the-matter-with-preaching/> (member-only website).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Donovan Turner, “Narrative Form,” 397.

mentioned in Chapter One, David James Randolph, who taught homiletics at Drew School of Theology, coined the term “New Homiletics” during the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in 1965.<sup>14</sup> The New Homiletic Movement promoted “the inductive, narrative, experiential approaches to proclamation”<sup>15</sup> and breathed “new life into an ailing pulpit.”<sup>16</sup>

Other disciplines impacted the New Homiletic Movement. These other disciplines included linguistics, scripture, and hermeneutic. In the early part of the 20th century, philosophers including Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) asserted that language created reality rather than just named it.<sup>17</sup> In the area of scripture, New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) applied Heidegger’s existentialist philosophy to biblical interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Bultmann’s students, Ernst Fuchs (1930–2015) and Gerhard Ebeling (1912–2001), utilized the teachings of Heidegger and Bultmann to come up with the New Hermeneutic in the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> The New Hermeneutic viewed Scripture as *word event*.<sup>20</sup> The New Hermeneutic argued for existential

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<sup>14</sup> David James Randolph delivered a paper at the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in which he referred to this approach to preaching as a product of the New Hermeneutic.

<sup>15</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Due to Martin Heidegger’s influence on Rudolf Bultmann, he (Bultmann) applied existentialism and demythologization to biblical interpretation. For Bultmann, the worldviews in the Bible were rooted in ancient mythology and cosmology. So, to make the Christian message relevant to people of the modern age, the Bible interpreter must first demythologize the Bible. In other words, for Bultmann, the Bible should be read in a way that addresses the existential concerns and questions of contemporary individuals.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*

investment. Existential investment drew readers from the historical critical approach to an approach that allows the Scriptures to have direct impact on the reader.<sup>21</sup> Linguistics, scripture, and hermeneutics contributed to the birth and development of the New Homiletic Movement.

Charles Rice (1936–2018), Fred Craddock (1928–2015), Henry Mitchell (1919–2022), Eugene Lowry (b. 1933), and David Buttrick (1927–2017) were the pillars of the New Homiletic Movement.<sup>22</sup> There are three main characteristics of the New Homiletic Movement. The first characteristic is a focus on listeners. The New Homiletic Movement focuses on how listeners hear and experience words. This focus uses language to create a particular experience and bring about change in the lives of listeners.<sup>23</sup> The second characteristic is a move from deductive preaching to inductive preaching. The path in the New Homiletic Movement is from specifics of actual experiences to broad statements. Rather than giving instructions, sermons in the New Homiletic Movement convey what is.<sup>24</sup> The third characteristic is the centrality of imagery.<sup>25</sup> The New Homiletic Movement uses imagery as the message itself, in contrast to the propositional sermons that came earlier, which used imagery as optional decoration.<sup>26</sup> Like the Bible, the sermon is a word

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<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>25</sup> Previously, preachers used stories for illustrations in preaching, they also used imagery for illustration. But in the New Homiletic Movement, preachers now use imagery as the message itself, just like they now “tell” the preaching in the format of a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

<sup>26</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 9.

event, in which the language shapes the human beliefs, perception, and experience.<sup>27</sup> The New Homiletic Movement has three approaches that portray the characteristics of focus on listeners, induction, and imagery. The following section will explore the three interrelated approaches of the New Homiletic Movement.

### **Three Interrelated Approaches of the New Homiletic Movement**

Fred Craddock , Eugene Lowry , and Alyce M. McKenzie were/are critical contributors to the three interrelated approaches of the New Homiletic Movement. Craddock unpacked the inductive approach. Lowry presents the narrative approach. McKenzie focuses on the experiential approach.<sup>28</sup>

***Inductive Approach to Preaching:*** Craddock stated, “Anyone who would preach effectively will have a primary methodological concern [that is] the matter of movement. Does the sermon move and in what direction?”<sup>29</sup> Craddock added, “Movement is of fundamental importance not simply because the speaker wants to ‘get somewhere’ in the presentation but because the movement itself is to be an experience of the community in sharing the Word.”<sup>30</sup> Deductive and inductive reasoning are the two main directions of thought. Deductive reasoning moves from the general truth to the specific application or experiences.<sup>31</sup> Applying deductive reasoning to preaching, Craddock said, “Homiletically, deduction means stating the thesis, breaking it down into points or

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<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*

subtheses, explaining and illustrating these points, and applying them to the particular situations of the hearers.”<sup>32</sup> Deductive preaching failed to engage listeners and generate transformation because in real life, the conclusion does not precede the premises.

In response to the failure of deductive preaching, Craddock recommended inductive preaching.<sup>33</sup> The inductive approach to preaching moves from the individual experiences of the preacher and the listeners to the general or universal truth.<sup>34</sup> The inductive method empowers the listeners to take ownership of the preached message and apply it to their lives.<sup>35</sup> Inductive preaching is effective because it follows the regular pattern of human communication.

The plain fact of the matter is that [in preaching] we are seeking to communicate with people whose experiences are concrete. Everyone lives inductively, not deductively. No farmer deals with the problem of calfhood, only with the calf. The woman in the kitchen is not occupied with the culinary arts in general but with a particular roast or cake. The wood craftsman is hardly able to discuss intelligently the topic of “chairness,” but is a master with a chair.... The minister says “All people are mortal” and meets drowsy agreement; he announces that “Mr. Brown’s son is dying,” and the church becomes the church.<sup>36</sup>

Craddock recognized most preachers, use inductive reasoning in their sermon preparations but, instead of inviting listeners to experience the totality of this process, they present only the culmination. Craddock, therefore, suggested, “[O]n Sunday morning [preachers should] retrace the inductive trip [they] took earlier and see if the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.*, 45–50.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> See Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.



hearers come to that same conclusion [as the preachers did at their study desk].”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to arguing for inductive preaching, Craddock also equates a good preacher to a good storyteller.<sup>38</sup> When we preach, we do not simply address those folks; we also speak on their behalf. The hallmark of a good preacher just like a good storyteller is that they speak not just to but for their listeners. An effective preacher taps into the experiences, faith, devotions, struggles, hopes, and love of those individuals—all of whom have a story to tell but are unable to express it themselves.<sup>39</sup> Craddock also remarked, “The mark of a good story is when it’s over people say, ‘As you were talking I was thinking about when...’ Good storytelling speaks for the congregation and evokes their own stories. Good preaching is an act of the people.”<sup>40</sup> It is the responsibility of the preacher to speak for listeners; this is what it means to preach inductively, this is what it means to “tell” the preaching like a story.

***Narrative Approach to Preaching:*** A narrative sermon is any sermon in which the order of ideas resembles a story with a deliberate and skillful delay of the preacher’s message.<sup>41</sup> A narrative sermon unfolds as a narrative, often with clear beginning, middle, and end. Usually, a narrative sermon begins with a conflict. It continues with some complication, and concludes with a reversal or resolution of the conflict.<sup>42</sup> Lowry argues

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>38</sup> See Craddock, “Preaching as Storytelling,” 492.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> See William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds. *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY), 342.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

sermons should utilize a narrative structure.<sup>43</sup> He asserts, “[W]e begin by regarding the sermon as a homiletic plot, a narrative art form, and a sacred story.”<sup>44</sup> For Lowry, the movement of a sermon is “from conflict to resolution, or from itch to scratch.”<sup>45</sup> This narrative preaching form is called the “Lowry Loop.”<sup>46</sup> It has five steps:

1. *Upset the listeners’ equilibrium.* This step is sometimes referred to as “sermonic itch.”<sup>47</sup> Lowry says, “The first step in the sermon as preached is to upset the equilibrium of the listeners in such a way as to engage them in the sermon theme.”<sup>48</sup> Upsetting the equilibrium develops an ambiguity or a conflict that needs resolution. The focus of this step is describing the situation, characters, and context of a biblical story, or an extra-biblical story. This initial step sets the stage for the rest of the sermon, and draws the listeners into the narrative because they are curious about the resolution of the conflict. Rather than “Today I want to talk about love,” Lowry suggests “Our problem is that so many times we extend our hand in love only to bring it back bruised and broken. To love is to risk rejection.”<sup>49</sup> The latter identifies a problem and fuels a desire for the resolution.

2. *Analyze the discrepancy.* Step two is exegesis. Here, the preacher asks questions to deepen the ambiguity. Typically, the preacher asks a “Why” question to

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<sup>43</sup> See Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>45</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

explore the underlying discrepancy in the message.<sup>50</sup> For example, after the first stage of describing the risk of rejection that accompanies love, the preacher then begins to explore why some people respond to love with rejection. The goal of the question is to help the listeners understand the spiritual, ethical, and cultural principles present in the narrative. This stage typically takes more time during delivery than the combination of the other four parts. Most of the preaching takes place in this stage. In Lowry's judgement, this is the most critical stage as it shapes the ultimate message of the gospel. "The main task of the preacher [at this stage]" according to Lowry, "is in diagnosing the gap between what is and what ought to be."<sup>51</sup>

3. *Give a clue to the resolution.* Step three provides a clue to the missing link by employing a reversal; it looks at things in a way that turns "common sense" upside down.<sup>52</sup> For Lowry, "When found, the missing link is the bridge from problem to solution, from itch to scratch."<sup>53</sup> The clue to the resolution is like a correct diagnosis:<sup>54</sup> everything can be seen in a different light. At this point, the preacher bridges the gap between the biblical or narrative context and the contemporary context of the listeners. In the second step, the question was, "Why?" In the third step, the question becomes, "How?" For example, here the preacher asks, "How does this ancient story relate to our lives today?"

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<sup>50</sup> See *ibid.*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>52</sup> See *ibid.*, 59, 61.

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

<sup>54</sup> See *ibid.*, 74.

4. *Offer the Good News.* Step four is where the preacher proclaims the gospel message directly to the listeners. The question the preacher addresses is, “So what?” In response, the preacher proclaims the significance and relevance of the biblical message. Some preachers misstep by beginning with step four. They may give the best proclamation here, but they may not engage their listeners. Instead, preachers must secure the interest of the listeners prior to the proclamation. Timing is crucial here.<sup>55</sup> Borrowing from medicine to explain the role of this step, Lowry asserts that the content of the good news must match the diagnosis, just as “[t]he cure must always match the disease.”<sup>56</sup>

5. *Provide closure.* The fifth step serves as the conclusion. During step five, the preacher concludes by summarizing the key points of the sermon, reinforcing the main message, and anticipating the consequences of the message in the future lives of the listeners. An excellent example of the fifth step is in Romans 8:31-35, where St. Paul wrote, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things?” ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” The closure offers the expectation of the emergence of a new being in each listener.<sup>57</sup> By using these five steps of Lowry’s homiletic plot, the sermon mirrors the plot of a story, which moves from a specific beginning to an identifiable end.

***Experiential Approach to Preaching:*** McKenzie adds to the New Homiletic Movement by proposing an experiential approach to preaching. This approach involves creating vivid scenes from scripture, personal life, the lives of others, and events in

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<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, 80.

society. In creating these scenes, the preacher invites the listeners to be active participants or characters in the scenes, and to have a personal experience of the preaching. It is an approach that promotes “Show, don’t tell” while preaching. McKenzie describes this experiential approach to preaching as “[Making] a Scene in the Pulpit.”<sup>58</sup>

McKenzie defines a *scene* as “the action that takes place in one physical setting in more or less continuous time.”<sup>59</sup> Instead of telling us about something, scenes draw us into a situation in which we can identify with a character or characters.<sup>60</sup> The main tools used to create a scene are “sensory detail”<sup>61</sup> and “dramatic energy.”<sup>62</sup> These tools invite the audience to be active participants rather than spectators.<sup>63</sup>

Effective Scenic Preaching results in the creation of an experience instead of reporting an experience.<sup>64</sup> Craddock observed, “[P]reaching is not just transferring information. It’s creating the experience of that information.”<sup>65</sup> He explained,

If you are preaching on freedom, what’s going to be the size, the sound, and the shape of that experience? There’s freedom and then there’s *freedom*. There’s bombs-bursting-in-air, Fourth-of-July-parade, firecrackers, drums, 76-trombones, John-Philip-Sousa-down-Main-Street freedom. You can also preach freedom

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<sup>58</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Sensory details refer to descriptive words that appeal to the senses. They are concrete words as against abstract words. Words that describe things we can see, smell, hear, taste, and / or touch. Anger is abstract. But when we describe anger based on the sound we hear, the color we see, etc. anger becomes concrete and relatable.

<sup>62</sup> Dramatic energy is the emotion that comes from conflict, suspense, dialogue, and surprise in a plot. This is what makes a story compelling. It keeps the listeners emotionally invested and eager to see how the story unfolds.

<sup>63</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*.

<sup>64</sup> See *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Craddock, “Preaching as Storytelling,” 493.

that's as quiet as six female voices outside a county jail humming "We Shall Overcome." Don't just say you're preaching on freedom. What experience are you going to create?<sup>66</sup>

For McKenzie, life is lived in scenes. The people who gather to listen to the sermon and to worship come from various scenes in life, such as traffic, family exigencies, homework, regional politics, jobs, doctor's appointments, and vacations. After church, these worshippers return to scenes. McKenzie invites preachers to connect to listeners through scenes. She sees the scene in preaching as a simulator. Just like the pilot uses the simulator for practice, the preacher's use of scenes is the training ground to prepare listeners for life outside the Church.<sup>67</sup>

McKenzie's Scenic Preaching responds to contemporary challenges related to attention span in preaching. Attention spans are shorter than those of previous generations. People are capable of being partially present in many places simultaneously through the use of electronic/communication gadgets. The short scenes on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube win and sustain the attention of people of this generation. McKenzie invites preachers to learn from the workings of these electronic gadgets to create short and vivid scenes in sermons that appeal to the listeners.

Therefore, McKenzie's experiential approach to preaching thrives on scenes. What makes her approach unique in the New Homiletic Movement is her scenes are driven by a visual culture. Her scenes are driven by the visual element of social media, which is a critical culture of the twenty-first century. The next section will focus on the McKenzie's characteristics of a compelling scene.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 75.

## Characteristics of a Compelling Scene

McKenzie identifies eight characteristics of a compelling scene. They are pulse; purpose; plot; point of view; memorable imagery; concrete significant detail; show, don't tell; and dialogue.<sup>68</sup>

1. *Pulse*: According to McKenzie, “[The pulse of a scene] is the product of the interaction of event and the characters’ emotions.”<sup>69</sup> Pulse is the rhythm, energy, or dynamic movement that drives a scene and engages the audience. Pulse gives life to a scene. It is what keeps the audience invested in what is happening. A strong pulse often involves tension, conflict, or a sense of progression that captures the audience’s attention.

2. *Purpose*: This is the specific function that the scene plays vis-à-vis the entire sermon.<sup>70</sup> It is like a house of cards, where each scene is a card. Any card whose removal does not bring down the house is unnecessary. That is to say, any scene whose absence does not destroy the sermonic story is not needed.<sup>71</sup>

3. *Plot*: Plot is the structure of the scene. It entails “a beginning, a middle and an end.”<sup>72</sup> Plot is the sequence of events occurring in a specific time and place. It advances the story as it reveals character dynamics, conflicts, emotions, and shifts within the scene.

4. *Point of View*: Point of view is the perspective from which the preacher narrates the scene’s events. The choice of point of view influences how listeners connect

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<sup>68</sup> See *ibid.*, 78–79, 99–103.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

with the character(s), understand the story, and engage with the scene. McKenzie advises preachers to “choose one point of view and stick with it [for the entire scene].”<sup>73</sup> The point of view can be the preacher’s point of view, which makes the story more intimate. It can be the listeners’ point of view in which case the preacher makes them imagine themselves in a situation. It can also be the point of view of a character in the scene.

5. *Memorable Imagery*: Memorable imagery describes vivid and powerful mental pictures or scenes produced by descriptive words that appeal to the senses. These mental pictures can evoke intense feelings and often result in deep and lasting impression in the minds of the audience. McKenzie defines imagination as “the ability to experience that which is not immediately before us.”<sup>74</sup>

6. *Concrete, Significant Detail*:<sup>75</sup> Concrete, significant details help listeners visualize a scene. A scenic preacher should always ask, “What details will help my listeners visualize the scene?” Concrete, significant details describe sounds and images. When preaching about a scene beside the sea, the preacher can talk about birds whistling, waves pounding on the shore, the sight and smell of seaweed along the shoreline, the gulls circling in the sky, and the impact of wind on the hair of bystanders. These details help listeners visualize the scene.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, 100.

<sup>76</sup> See Kevin A. Miller, “3-D Storytelling: How to Make Sermon Stories Come Alive,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, gen. eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Christianity Today International), 483.



7. *Show, Don't Tell*: Show, don't tell reminds preachers to describe a character's actions, sensations, and reactions in a way that allows the listeners to experience the character's emotions. This technique engages the listeners' imagination and draws them into the scene by making the scene more vivid, engaging, and memorable. Instead of "A young man has anxiety because it is his first time in an elegant restaurant," McKenzie suggests "Have his hand hover over the array of three forks, waiting until his hostess picks hers up to lift his own from the table."<sup>77</sup>

8. *Dialogue*: Dialogue brings stories to life. Through dialogue, the audience overhears conversation. It is human nature to listen in on engaging conversations. People eavesdrop on conversations in restaurants, buses, airplanes, shops, hospitals, and family gatherings. When preachers use the characters' actual words in the dialogue, listeners pay more attention to the preaching.<sup>78</sup>

Beginnings and endings merit special consideration. The following section will focus on the importance of a strong start and a firm closure for the scene.

### **Effective Opening and Closing**

A scene's opening and closing are crucial in determining how interesting, inspirational, and memorable the scene will be. McKenzie identifies six options (or "launches") for a compelling opening:<sup>79</sup>

1. *Image Launch*, which uses a relevant image.
2. *Action Launch*, which grabs people's attention with an action.

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<sup>77</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 102.

<sup>78</sup> Miller, "3-D Storytelling," 484.

<sup>79</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 103–107.

3. *Character Launch*, which immediately inserts the character.
4. *Narrative Summary Launch*, which provides an overview of the scene.
5. *Familiar Phrase Launch*, which uses familiar words from an earlier scene to strengthen the listeners' memory and keep them engaged.
6. *Setting Launch*, which comments on an aspect of the setting.

Paradoxically as it may sound, it is more helpful for the preacher to wait until the end of the sermon preparation before coming up with the choice of introduction.<sup>80</sup>

Craddock stated, "Be very careful in the preparation of an introduction. How can you prepare an introduction to what you don't have? For most of us it should be prepared last. Then you will not unload too soon your strong material and stories that need contexting."<sup>81</sup> Kevin A. Miller, executive editor of *PreachingToday.com*, adds:

Sometimes when we're preaching, without meaning to, we tip off what's going to happen in the story. For example, let's say I want to tell a story about human folly to demonstrate the waywardness of people apart from God's Spirit, and to illustrate that I want to use a story from my college days. I could start that story by saying, "Let me tell you about the time the dean kicked me out of college and suspended me for three days because of what I had done." But as I'm setting up that story, I've already told my listeners the punch line. It is much better for me to say, "It was 2:00 a.m., and there I was hanging on the ivy, clinging to the downspout of Houser dormitory as I got ready to make my raid." Well, now everybody is listening. They want to hear what happens in the story, and eventually of course will come the punch line: "The dean suspended me, and I learned a lesson about the perils of human folly."<sup>82</sup>

To achieve an effective opening, the preacher must avoid starting with the conclusion. An effective closing facilitates listeners' retention and provides time for

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<sup>80</sup> See Miller, "3-D Storytelling," 485.

<sup>81</sup> Craddock, "Preaching as Storytelling," 492.

<sup>82</sup> Miller, "3-D Storytelling," 485.

reflection and processing of the message.<sup>83</sup> McKenzie identifies the following types of closings<sup>84</sup> or endings:<sup>85</sup> 1). *Summary Ending*: This ending summarizes the scene. 2). *Dialogue Ending*: This ending employs the use of dialogue. 3). *Cliffhanger Ending*: This ending leaves the audience wondering. 4). *Ending with a Question*: This ending highlights a question that emanates from the scene. 5). *Conclusive Ending*: This ending summarizes the scene and ends all discussion.

Preachers must not rush to the conclusion. It is a mark of respect to gradually lead listeners to the conclusion.<sup>86</sup> Having discussed the significance of an effective opening and closing in a scene, the following section will focus on the preacher as a scene-maker.

### **The Preacher as Scene-Maker**

McKenzie advises preachers to make a scene in the pulpit. She explains when you hear someone say, “Don’t make a scene,” they are saying, “Don’t invite other people into our drama, keep your voice down, and let us talk about this later when we are by ourselves.” She asserts this is not what preachers should want to do. On the contrary, preachers should invite people into the drama. Preachers should invite people to engage in the moment. McKenzie says, “Make a scene. Do everything you can to draw bystanders into our drama. For God’s sake, make a scene in the pulpit.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See Jordan Rosenfeld, *Make a Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 2008), 29.

<sup>84</sup> McKenzie uses “ending.” However, I prefer “closing” as it matches “opening” more than “ending” does, in my opinion.

<sup>85</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 105–107.

<sup>86</sup> See Craddock, “Preaching as Storytelling,” 494.

<sup>87</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 1.

Preachers need to understand the importance of details when making a scene. Preachers need to add details in order to create a scene. This task might be difficult for some preachers because many Bible narratives lack details.<sup>88</sup> To make the Bible's stories come alive for a modern audience, preachers must use their imagination to paint vivid pictures of biblical scenes with sensory details.<sup>89</sup> If not, when preachers tell the story as it is written in the Bible, it will sound flat and boring.<sup>90</sup> After all, preaching is a work that requires the use of the human imagination.<sup>91</sup> Imagination is the capacity to completely immerse oneself in the reality of another person, whether they are other parishioners or biblical figures.<sup>92</sup> Here is an illustration of how I used details to bring a biblical story to life. It depicts Mary Magdalene arriving at the tomb on Easter Sunday, very early in the morning:

So, alone with none but God, she tip toes one step after another to the tomb very early in the morning while it is still dark. The hem of her gown soaked with the morning dew, she keeps going; one step after another. Her feet and her sandals wet from her drenched gown, she keeps going; one step after another. Occasionally, she holds her breath and quickly looks behind her because she thinks she can hear some footsteps behind her, but she sees no one. She keeps going, one step after another. What if something bad happens to her? What if some evil spirits decide to attack her? Do you remember those seven demons Jesus chased away from her? What if they hear about the death of Jesus and they decide to launch a fresh attack on her? What if the soldiers guarding the tomb decide to do something bad to her, or even kill her and bury her, who will take the

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<sup>88</sup> See Steven Mathewson, "Bringing Bible Stories to Life: How to Paint the Scenes that Engage Modern Audiences," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, gen. eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Christianity Today International), 499.

<sup>89</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> See Lisa Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), 19.

<sup>92</sup> See Sondra Willobee, *The Write Stuff: Crafting Sermons that Capture and Convince* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 29–30.

news back home? Well, her conviction about Jesus and her love for Jesus are greater than her fear for her life. So, she keeps going, one step after another. She is ready to stand alone as long as she is standing with God.<sup>93</sup>

This illustration does not distort the Bible story, but uses imagination and detail to portray what a character might experience in that situation.<sup>94</sup>

As scene-makers, preachers must hone their ability to notice real life scenes and imagine them, too. Scenes are easy to find when preachers pay attention to pastoral interactions, daily experiences, and challenges related to life transitions. When we visit parishioners in their homes and workplaces, it becomes easier for us to deepen our understanding of their lives. Familiarity with parishioners will reveal the noteworthy scenes in their ordinary experiences, such as trying to provide for family members, finding time for vacation, reconciling after a quarrel, mourning the loss of a loved one, celebrating the birth of a child, or adjusting to the reality of the empty nest when their last child leaves home.<sup>95</sup>

Preachers must notice because God notices.<sup>96</sup> In the first biblical account of creation in Genesis 1, after each day of creation, God declared what he had created as good. For example, after creating light, “God saw [that is, noticed] that the light was good” (Genesis 1:4). On the last day of creation, “God saw [that is, noticed] everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). McKenzie observes that

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<sup>93</sup> Emmanuel Ochigbo, “Alone But not Alone: Easter Sunday Year A on April 9, 2023,” accessed on August 15, 2023, <https://fadaochigbo.com/?s=Easter+Sunday+2023>.

<sup>94</sup> Mathewson, “Bringing Bible Stories to Life,” 499.

<sup>95</sup> See Richard Exley, “Overexposure: Transparent Preaching is not without Risks,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, gen. eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christianity Today International), 519.

<sup>96</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 57.

after completing the work of creation, God now shares the responsibility of seeing/noticing with creatures.<sup>97</sup>

To access more scenes, preachers must cultivate the practice of reading.<sup>98</sup> Preachers should read many kinds of literature. In addition to the Bible and religious literature, preachers should read fiction, biographies, newspapers, journals, magazines, and cartoons. Preachers should also create a system in which to catalog stories. The system should include citations.

As preachers, we can also create scenes based on our own experiences or the experiences of people we know.<sup>99</sup> When presenting a scene, the preacher should communicate it is a made-up scene. For example, “Once upon a time...” Or “There was a certain man/woman...” Having explored McKenzie’s recommendation that preachers should be scene-makers, the next section will present reasons for Scenic Preaching.

### **Reasons for Scenic Preaching**

McKenzie shares three reasons for using scenes in preaching: anthropological, biblical, and communicational.<sup>100</sup>

1. *Anthropological reason*: This is how human beings experience and relate to life. Life is made up of short segments that combine to create life’s entire story.

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<sup>97</sup> See *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>98</sup> See Willobee, *The Write Stuff*, 65.

<sup>99</sup> See *ibid.*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> See McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 2.

2. *Biblical reason*: The Bible is the story of God's love for God's creation and God's expectation of a corresponding response from creation to the Creator. This big biblical story has segments or scenes.

3. *Communicational reason*: Scenes help to break down the big message into smaller and digestible segments, thereby making communication easier.<sup>101</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began by exploring the transition from preaching as a story-filled event to preaching as a story-shaped event. It identified the New Homiletic Movement as the promoter of that change. The New Homiletic Movement had three interconnected approaches to preaching. One of the approaches, the experiential approach, was the main focus of this chapter. This thesis project utilizes an experiential approach in the form of Scenic Preaching. McKenzie invites preachers to see the goal of preaching as creating an experience for the hearers by using vivid scenes. As such, she makes the clarion call to preachers: "For God's sake, make a scene in the pulpit!"<sup>102</sup>

Scenes are helpful in preaching because they capture and hold listeners' attention and act as laboratories for solving real-world issues. Scenes serve "as ethical simulation chambers for dealing with real-life challenges, drawing us in to identify with characters, undergo changes with them, and take that changed perspective back into our world."<sup>103</sup> Scenes create suspense in the audience, making listeners look forward to what is ahead in the subsequent scenes. Effective scenes capture attention, create suspense, and engage

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<sup>101</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

listeners in a way that fuels their curiosity.<sup>104</sup>

The following chapter will present the ministerial intervention of this project. The intervention involves developing and leading a workshop on Scenic Preaching. The intervention assesses how a focus group is impacted by Scenic Preaching.

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<sup>104</sup> See Paul Borden and Steven D. Mathewson, “The Big Idea of Narrative Preaching: What are the Clues to interpreting a Story?” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, gen. eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Christianity Today International), 271.



## Chapter Five

### Once Upon a Time:

#### Teaching Scenic Preaching to Preachers and Testing its Impact on Listeners

“I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—  
things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide  
them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of  
the LORD....” –Psalm 78:2–4

“Remember the axiom—*do less, more thoroughly.*”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is the ministerial intervention of this thesis project. Tim Sensing (b.\ 1959), Director of Academic Services and Professor of Homiletics at the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University, wrote, “The DMin Projects are ministry interventions designed to address particular problems for specific contexts.”<sup>2</sup> The particular problem this thesis project sought to address was that of boring Sunday Preaching (Homilies)<sup>3</sup> in the context of the Catholic Diocese of San Diego. I designed

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>3</sup> I use the terms preaching and homily as well as preacher and homilist interchangeably. Preaching is a more generic term, while homily in the Catholic context specifically refers to preaching within the liturgy. The homily usually draws on the biblical readings assigned in the liturgical celebration, the prayers, or the feast being celebrated in that liturgy.

and administered an intervention in which I trained four preachers (three deacons and one priest) to use Scenic Preaching for their homilies. I assessed the effectiveness of the intervention through focus groups with listeners in each of the four parishes.

I discussed the foundations for this intervention in the previous chapters. The theological foundation for this intervention is a theology of Jesus, the Parable of God, and the preacher of parables. The interdisciplinary framework for this study is storytelling: a compelling narrative is required for engaging and memorable preaching, free of boredom. The homiletic foundation is a homiletic of story-shaped preaching, focusing on Scenic Preaching and the preacher as a scene-maker.<sup>1</sup> This chapter presents the details of the ministerial intervention. The chapter articulates the ethical issues surrounding the intervention, defines the types and sources of data, and analyzes the collected data.

### **The Participants in the Ministerial Intervention**

I am the primary researcher for this thesis project. I invited four preachers to participate in this ministerial intervention. The preachers are homilists (one priest and three permanent deacons) in the Diocese of San Diego. They serve in four different parishes. Deacon Pete Johnson is a retired pharmacist who serves as a deacon at St. Pius X Catholic Parish, Chula Vista, California. Deacon Tim Schulz, retired from the United States Navy, serves as a deacon at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Parish, San Ysidro, California. Deacon Mark Wiczorek is an attorney who serves as a deacon at Sacred Heart Catholic Parish, Ocean Beach, San Diego, California. Reverend Kizito Ndugbu, a religious priest of the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy, is a hospital chaplain in

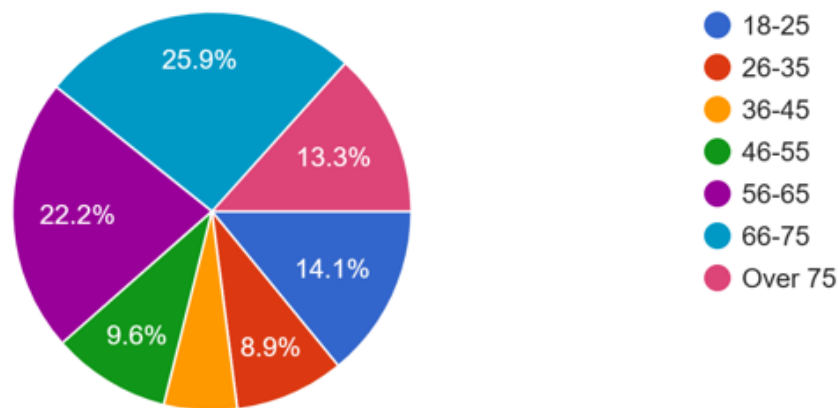
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<sup>1</sup> Scenic Preaching and the preacher as a scene-maker are ideas from Alyce M. McKenzie. She wrote elaborately on Scenic Preaching in her book *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Learners* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

residence at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, San Diego.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the represented parishes had a listeners' focus group. I assigned pseudonyms for each member of the focus groups. Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish focus group (Parish A) had nine members. Church of St. Mary Magdalene focus group (Parish B) had nine members. Sacred Heart Parish focus group (Parish C) had eleven members. St. Pius X Parish focus group (Parish D) had nine members. Thirty-eight individuals participated in focus groups. The demographic representations from each of the four parishes can be found in Appendix 1. Figure 1 below reports all the listeners in one pie chart.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1: Age Breakdown of All Four Listeners' Focus Group Members

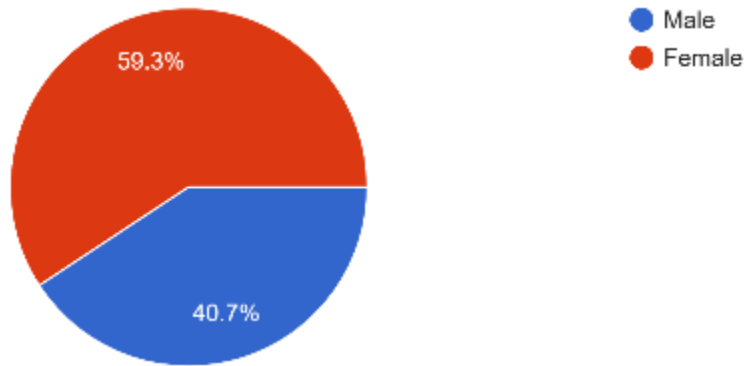


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<sup>2</sup> Even though Fr. Ndugbu works as a hospital chaplain, for the purpose of this ministerial intervention, he will be ministering at his parish of residence, Church of St. Mary Magdalene.

<sup>3</sup> The survey system that created this pie chart probably left out the percentage for the orange piece because the space was too small to fit in the letters. By simple addition and subtraction, the unlabeled area represents 6%, which is the remainder of 100% left after adding up all the other percentages.

Figure 2: Gender Breakdown of All Four Listeners' Focus Group Members



I assigned a facilitator to each focus group. Esther Diaz was the facilitator for Parish A. Esther Diaz is in the final year of formation for the permanent diaconate in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego. She is also a Master Catechist in her parish and a hospital chaplain. Facilitator B was the facilitator for Parish B.<sup>4</sup> Gregg Sprosty was the facilitator for Parish C. He is a lector and an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at Parish C. Mario Diaz was the facilitator for Parish D. He is in his final year of formation for the permanent diaconate and a Master Catechist. I chose the facilitators because of their interest in this project, familiarity with the parishes and parishioners, and commitment to carrying out the tasks.

I chose Bernadeane Carr as an outsider/independent expert observer. Ms. Carr has served as Director of Education, Editor of *The Southern Cross* and Director of Communications in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego. She recently retired as Director of the Diocesan Institute. The Institute trains catechists, permanent deacons, and parish leaders. Carr's involvement in this project equipped me to compare observational data

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<sup>4</sup> This facilitator did not consent to the use of their real name in my final project. So, I will always refer to this facilitator as Facilitator B.

with interviews, as well as to check my biases and ensure more impartial research.<sup>5</sup> She analyzed the data from the focus groups survey, and she interviewed the preachers and the facilitators.

### **The Venues of the Activities of the Intervention**

The four parishes that participated in this intervention were from San Diego County. I believe the four parishes are representative of the diocese. Parish A is predominantly Hispanic and is in the southern part of San Diego County. Parish B and Parish C are mainly Anglo-American and located in the central part of the county. Parish D is a mix of Anglo, Asian, and Hispanic in the southern part of San Diego County. I led the one-day workshop for the participating homilists in the conference room at the rectory of Sacred Heart Church of Ocean Beach.

### **Recruiting and Training of the Participants**

I started by recruiting and training the preachers who would participate in the project. My initial proposal for this ministerial intervention was to have five preachers (three priests and two permanent deacons) from five parishes. A few days before the ministerial intervention, the three priests in the group told me they could not continue with the project for various reasons. One had to accompany students on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land because the priest initially assigned by his congregation to accompany the students had a medical emergency. The second priest could not continue because the diocese reassigned him to a new hospital, with a more challenging work schedule. The third priest received a new diocesan assignment requiring him to speak on priestly vocations from parish to parish. He could not commit to preaching at the same parish for

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<sup>5</sup> See Michael Quin Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 161–63.

the four Sundays of intervention. The responses from the priests left me with two deacons. I began a new search for preachers. I succeeded in getting one more deacon and one priest. So, the intervention eventually turned out to involve four preachers (three deacons and one priest).

Through individual phone calls, I gave each preacher a brief overview of the ministerial intervention. After introducing the project, I explained I would establish the baseline of the preaching of each homilist by asking all the homilists to preach on a particular Sunday at their various parishes. I specified this preaching should be based on the Mass and readings of the Sunday. The homilists would submit the transcripts of their preaching to me. After the first preaching, I explained I would facilitate a one-day workshop with the homilists on a Saturday at Sacred Heart Church of Ocean Beach. At the workshop, I would train the homilists in McKenzie's preaching style of Scenic Preaching. Then, using what they would learn from the workshop, they would preach in their parishes on three Sundays I would assign. After each preaching, they would submit the transcripts of their preaching to me. I told each preacher I would reach out to facilitators who would help me select members of listeners' focus groups. The listeners would respond to a survey and discuss the preaching of the day with their facilitators. The preacher would not be part of the discussion. After answering the preachers' questions and securing their verbal consent, I sent them a formal invitation letter and consent form.<sup>6</sup>

See Appendix 2 for the invitation letter and consent form for preachers.

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<sup>6</sup> For the use of the parishes, I sought the verbal consent and permission of my pastor for Sacred Heart Parish. I also sought the verbal consent and permission of the pastors of St. Pius X Parish and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish. Reverend Kizito Ndugbu, SMMM, on my behalf, sought the verbal consent / permission of the pastor of Church of St. Mary Magdalene where Reverend Ndugbu is priest in residence, and did his preaching for the intervention.

After I recruited the preachers, I recruited and trained the facilitators. I made individual phone calls to each of the four facilitators. During the phone calls, I provided an overview of the project. I then explained their tasks as facilitators. I explained there would be a listeners' focus group of five to ten parishioners representing the demographics of each parish. The facilitators would help recruit the listeners (representing parishes' demographics) through public announcements at Sunday Masses prior to the commencement of the ministerial intervention. The facilitators would secure a space in their parish where the focus group would meet after each Mass/preaching. During the Mass, the facilitators would make a video recording of the preaching, which they would submit to me. After the Mass, the facilitators would direct the focus group members to complete the individual online post-preaching questionnaire. After responding to the questionnaire, the group would discuss their experiences of the day's preaching for thirty to forty-five minutes.<sup>7</sup> After the meeting with the focus group, the facilitators would write a one-to-two-page report on their observations of listeners' engagement and submit it to me. They would also submit an audio recording of the discussion to me. After answering the facilitators' questions and securing their verbal consent, I sent each of them an invitation letter and consent form. See Appendix 3 for the invitation letter and consent form for facilitators.

On Sunday, February 5, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. Pacific Time, I scheduled a one-hour Zoom Meeting/Training with the four facilitators. At the meeting, after the opening prayer, I invited each facilitator to say a few words about themselves and their parishes. I

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<sup>7</sup> The group discussions were after the group members had individually responded to the questionnaire. This order of proceedings encouraged independence of thought as much as possible.

repeated what I had told them individually during the phone calls. To give the facilitators a better understanding of my research project, I shared the following information with them:

1. *Purpose*: The purpose of the focus group is to test if Scenic Preaching engages the listeners and helps them remember the preaching content.
2. *Engagement*: Preaching is engaging when the listeners are actively attentive to and interested in the message. Such preaching captures listeners' attention and holds their interest throughout the presentation. Preaching is engaging if it evokes emotional responses from the listeners. The level of engagement can be assessed through the emotions of the listeners as expressed in their words and body language.
3. *Memorability*: A memorable preaching sticks in the minds of those who hear it, because it connects to their life experiences, joys, and struggles. Such preaching resonates with the listeners. A way to determine how memorable the homily was can be through assessing how much of the message the listeners recall after the Mass and how much they can connect it to their life outside the Church.

I then shared the following questions with the facilitators. I designed these questions to help them guide the post-preaching focus group discussion.

1. How did God's word touch your life today? What did you experience in hearing God's word in the homily today?
2. How did the homily make you feel?
3. What stands out for you in today's homily, and why?
4. How did you connect with the message of the homily?



5. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the homily?

At the end of the Zoom Meeting/Training, I emailed the definitions and questions above, to the four facilitators. Throughout the ministerial intervention, I checked on the facilitators through phone calls, text messages, emails, and personal visits to know their progress and to answer their questions. They contacted me with questions and clarifications. There was no training for the members of the listeners' focus groups prior to their first meeting. I provided invitation letters and consent forms through their facilitators. See Appendix 4 for the invitation letter and consent form for the listeners' focus group members. See Appendix 5 for the post-preaching questionnaire for the members of the listeners' focus groups. The listeners responded to the same questionnaire for all four Sundays/preaching. The listeners responded online after receiving the link to the survey after the Mass/preaching.

My outsider/independent expert observer, Bernadeane Carr, helped to create the online survey after I submitted the questions to her. At the end of the ministerial interventions, I submitted the following to her for her analysis: the introductory/foundational chapters of this thesis project and a copy of the workshop materials to enable her understand the goal of the intervention, the transcripts of all the preaching, the video recordings of all the preaching, and the survey responses. At the end of all the preaching, she interviewed each preacher by email. She also interviewed the facilitators by email. She determined the questions after studying the materials from the ministerial interventions. Her report served the purpose of triangulation and forms a substantial portion of the next chapter, which is the concluding chapter of this thesis project.

## Timelines and Durations of the Activities

Here are the dates, locations, and times of the significant activities of the ministerial intervention:<sup>8</sup>

1. Sunday, February 5, 2023: Zoom Meeting/Training for Facilitators.
2. Sunday, February 12, 2023: Pre-workshop preaching<sup>9</sup> at the four parishes by their respective preachers. Preaching was based on the liturgy of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A. Each focus group met at their respective Parish Hall/Meeting Room immediately after the Mass/Preaching.
3. Saturday, February 18, 2023: Workshop on Scenic Preaching at the rectory of Sacred Heart Parish of Ocean Beach.
4. The weekend of Sunday, February 26, 2023: First post-workshop preaching at the four participating parishes. The preaching was based on the Liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent Year A. Each focus group met at their respective Parish Hall/Meeting Room immediately after the Mass/Preaching to respond to the post-preaching questionnaire and discuss their preaching experience.
5. The weekend of Sunday, March 12, 2023: Second post-workshop preaching at the four participating parishes. The preaching was based on the Liturgy of the Third

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<sup>8</sup> The plan for the intervention was for the preachers to deliver the homily during the Sunday Mass, then the listeners would meet to discuss the preaching with their facilitators after the Mass. On one occasion, the preacher at one of the parishes did not preach during the Sunday Mass, so he gathered the listeners on the previous Saturday evening outside of Mass and preached the homily of that Sunday. The group then met after the preaching to share their feedback. At another parish, the preacher had a scheduling conflict, he was not available to preach on a Sunday, so he gathered the listeners during a weekday after the Sunday where he preached the homily of the Sunday, and the listeners met after the preaching to discuss the preaching.

<sup>9</sup> The purpose for the pre-workshop preaching was to establish the baseline preaching for each preacher, and to compare the pre-workshop preaching with the post-workshop ones. From the comparison, I hoped to discover an improvement in preaching by analyzing the data from the participants.

Sunday of Lent Year A. Each focus group met at their respective Parish Hall/Meeting Room immediately after the Mass/Preaching to respond to the post-preaching questionnaire and discuss their preaching experiences.

6. The weekend of April 16, 2023: Third post-workshop preaching at the four participating parishes. The preaching was based on the Liturgy of the Second Sunday of Easter Year A. Each focus group met at their respective Parish Hall/Meeting Room immediately after the Mass/Preaching to respond to the post-preaching questionnaire and discuss their preaching experience.

### **Workshop on Scenic Preaching for Four Preachers**

The purpose of the workshop on Scenic Preaching was to train four preachers to use Scenic Preaching for Sunday homilies. See Appendix 6 for the full content of the workshop. I led the workshop in the conference room at the rectory of Sacred Heart Church of Ocean Beach on Saturday, February 18, 2023. The pastor of my parish granted me permission to use the conference room, the 65-inch TV screen for projecting workshop materials, and other facilities at the rectory. I provided breakfast, snacks, and lunch, which amounted to \$342.36. One of the facilitators, Esther Diaz, and her granddaughter Evelyn served the meals. The cost of stationery (pens, paper, name tags, presentation handouts, and binders) was \$83.29.

Three preachers arrived before 8:00 a.m. and they seemed receptive of the workshop. The fourth preacher arrived shortly before the end of the first half of the workshop. I took about fifteen minutes to bring the fourth preacher up to speed before proceeding to the rest of the workshop.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Apart from his late arrival, the fourth preacher shared that after reading my invitation letter/consent form, he made his private research on Scenic Preaching, and he had some reservation about

After welcoming the preachers, sharing breakfast, and making initial announcements, I formally opened the morning session with a prayer, which I led at 8:15 a.m. The participating preachers and I offered brief self-introductions. I read out the program of the day, reviewed and received the signed consent forms, and answered a few questions.

In my opening remarks at 8:30 a.m., I shared a study by the Pew Research Center in 2016, that shows when Americans choose a new church or house of worship, the first item they consider is the quality of sermons.<sup>11</sup> I offered this information to highlight the importance of what we do as preachers, and how preaching influences the decisions parishioners make. I presented the critique of preachers by Yves Congar. He observed the faithful “complain that preachers are too bookish in their expressions, [and] that they are overly concerned to use canonical formulas or to pass on passages of official documents (where they often betray a merely superficial reading).”<sup>12</sup> He added, “[Preachers] talk like licensed dealers of orthodox formulas that sound impersonal and fixed.”<sup>13</sup>

I continued my opening remarks by sharing Pope Francis’ (b. 1936) concern about the state of preaching. The Pope in his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, highlights the concern of people about the poor preparation and delivery of

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its effectiveness, but was ready to try it. From my observation, he spent more time at the workshop expressing his doubts about Scenic Preaching, than the time he spent to understand the workshop even though he consented to be part of the intervention. Though unintended, as the results from the surveys would show, the fourth preacher’s disposition revealed that the success of Scenic Preaching relies to a large extent on the openness of the preacher to its proper use.

<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center, “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship.” Washington DC: Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship/>.

<sup>12</sup> Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

homilies.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Pope Francis expressed his concern about the length and boringness of homilies. He used the word “disaster,”<sup>15</sup> to describe long and boring homilies. After highlighting the need for simplicity in preaching, Pope Francis shared some wisdom from one of his professors: “A professor I had would say that a homily should have internal coherence: an idea, an image and an emotional effect so that people go home with an idea, an image and something that moved their heart.”<sup>16</sup>

I concluded the opening remarks by stating that my concern about the state of homilies in the Catholic Church led me to seek a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri, where I took a course on a method of preaching called, Scenic Preaching. This method of preaching is driven by a visual culture emanating from the visual element of social media. Scenic Preaching makes use of sensory details to make a scene be as visual as possible. I designed this workshop to train the participating preachers in preparing and delivering Scenic Preaching in the context of the Sunday Liturgy. The preachers would help me test this method of preaching in their various parishes, and their listeners’ focus group’s responses would help me study the effectiveness of Scenic Preaching on the listeners regarding engagement and memorability.

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<sup>14</sup> Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii gaudium*,” Par. 135 (24 November, 2013) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2013), accessed July 18, 2023 [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

<sup>15</sup> Rome Reports, “Pope Francis warns priests to Avoid Long, Boring Homilies: ‘They are a Disaster,’” accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.romereports.com/en/2023/01/24/pope-francis-warns-priests-to-avoid-long-boring-homilies-they-are-a-disaster/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

At 9:00 a.m., I asked the participating preachers, “What is a homily to you? How would you explain this to a fourth grader?” After listening to their responses, taking notes, and discussing their responses, I concluded with the following remarks,

I see a homily as a story-shaped event in which a preacher engages listeners. An effective homily is the meeting point of many stories, including the biblical story, the liturgical story, the community story, the preacher’s story, and the stories of individual worshippers. I believe a homily can be boring to parishioners when the homilist does not treat it as a story-shaped event.<sup>17</sup>

Following this definition of a homily, I gave an overview of the New Homiletic Movement. I talked about the shift from story-filled preaching to story-shaped preaching. I explained the three interrelated approaches of preaching in the New Homiletic Movement: the inductive approach by Fred Craddock, the narrative approach by Eugene Lowry, and the experiential approach by Alyce M. McKenzie. I explained we would study the experiential approach, which creates vivid scenes using scripture, personal experience, the experiences of others, and events in society. The experiential approach to preaching in the New Homiletic Movement is an approach that promotes “Show, don’t tell.” McKenzie describes this experiential approach to preaching as Scenic Preaching.

Between 9:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., I explained Scenic Preaching. I began by asking the preachers to describe something they experienced in the last twenty-four hours. I concluded this exercise by saying, “Scenes are around us. What made this one memorable? Why did you remember this scene? Why did you choose this scene out of the many things that happened?” This activity paved the way for my presentation of the definition of a scene by McKenzie and examples of scenes in the Bible.<sup>18</sup> McKenzie

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<sup>17</sup> See Workshop in Appendix 6.

<sup>18</sup> The story of The Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32 has about six scenes: 1. The boy asking for his inheritance. 2. The boy squandering his inheritance in various forms of excesses. 3. The boy’s decision to

defines a scene as “the action that takes place in one physical setting in more or less continuous time.”<sup>19</sup> In the same way, Sandra Scofield (b. 1943), an American novelist, essayist, and editor, defines scenes as “those passages in narrative when we slow down and focus on an event in the story so that we are in ‘the moment’ with characters in action.”<sup>20</sup> A scene is not the same as a story. It is a story event within a story.<sup>21</sup>

I explained the characteristics of an effective scene: pulse, purpose, plot, point of view, memorable imagery, concrete significant detail, and show, don’t tell. I discussed effective openings and closings of a scene. Before taking a ten-minute break at 10:30 a.m., I concluded this session by sharing the reasons for preaching with scenes.

After the break, from 10:45 a.m. to 11:50 a.m., we studied the script of an example of scenic preaching by Alyce McKenzie titled “Locked in a Room with Open Doors.”<sup>22</sup> The preaching is an example of a “Single-Scene Sermon That Uses a Biblical Scene as Its Home Screen.”<sup>23</sup> The preaching is based on John 20:19–23 in which the disciples locked themselves up in fear, in the Upper Room after the crucifixion and death of Jesus. They did not know he had risen from the dead.<sup>24</sup>

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return home as he sits with the pigs. 4. The boy journeys back home while rehearsing what he will say to his father. 5. The father’s greeting. 6. The father’s encounter with the older son.

<sup>19</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Scofield, *The Scene Book: A Primer for the Fiction Writer* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 35.

<sup>22</sup> McKenzie originally preached this sermon at the Second Annual National Young Preachers’ Festival, a gathering of high-school, college, and seminary students interested in exploring ministry as a vocation. The two-day event featured sermons, keynotes, and worship related to preaching. See Appendix 6 for copy of this preaching as part of the workshop.

<sup>23</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 164–69.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 6 for a complete copy of this sermon.

We discussed how this example of Scenic Preaching from McKenzie fits what we had discussed earlier. After answering questions from the participating preachers, it seemed to me that three out of four of them had a good grasp of Scenic Preaching. The morning session ended at this point. Lunch was at the dining room of the rectory at Sacred Heart Parish from 11:50 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. My intention was that lunch would provide a break from Scenic Preaching and that we would discuss other things while we ate. However the participating preachers wanted to continue with conversations on Scenic Preaching. So, while we ate, I listened to the preachers and I answered questions. At the end of the lunch, we were excited to return to the conference room for the afternoon session.

The afternoon session began at 12:45 p.m. with an activity. In groups of two, I tasked the preachers to create a scene of two minutes at maximum, and one group member presented the scene to all the participants. The aim of the activity was to ascertain whether the preachers understood what makes a compelling scene. After each presentation, we shared what we thought were the strong points of the scene and what we thought needed improvement. By my evaluation, three participants enthusiastically demonstrated an excellent understanding of how to create and present a scene.

Having ascertained through feedback from the preachers that they were ready to apply what they learned in the morning session, I presented a recipe for preparing a Scenic Homily.



## **Recipe for Preparing a Scenic Homily**

This section presents the process for preparing Scenic Preaching. Any preacher who follows this process should come up with an engaging and memorable preaching. The process of preparing for next Sunday's homily should begin as soon as your last preaching for this Sunday ends.

***Prayer:*** Begin with invoking of the Holy Spirit to inspire your preparation and your delivery. Pray also that God may open the ears and hearts of your listeners.

***Initial Reading:*** Read all the texts for the day: the scripture readings and the liturgical prayers. Write down the images, emotions, thoughts, keywords, and scenes you observe in the text. In the case of a non-narrative text, imagine a scene or scenes that could be behind the text. For scripture text, find out the scene's location and where it stands in relation to the rest of the book and the rest of the Bible. How does your knowledge of the position of the text influence your view of its significance?

### ***Setting:***

- What can you taste, smell, touch, see, and hear in the text?
- Compare and contrast the biblical scene with its contemporary form.
- What seems odd or intriguing to you about the scene?
- What do you like and what do you dislike about the scene?
- What images in the text would make for vivid preaching?
- What is the agenda of the author?
- What is the background or situation of the original audience to which the work was directed?
- What aspects of the scene would you like to research in commentaries?

***Plot:***

- What is the conflict behind the scene or in the scene?
- Who has power, and who does not?
- What is at stake? Who wants what?
- Where do you see similar conflicts in life within and around you in your community and world?

***Characters:***

- Which character do you identify with most?
- Which character would your congregation identify with most?
- What are the motivations of the characters for the way they act in the scene?
- How is each character admirable or flawed?
- How are our actions similar to the characters?
- Whose voice seems absent in the scene?

***Application:***

- Where does the scene fit into your current life context?
- How does it invite you in to find clarity, comfort, or challenge?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes from your own life?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes from the lives of those around you?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes in the larger world?
- Does the scene remind you of historical scenes?

***Theology:***

- Who is God, as portrayed in this scene?
- Who are human beings?

- What changes does God ask of us?
- What are we to believe and do as a result of entering into this scene?

***Theme:***

- What is the general theme here?
- What question does this scene address?
- What challenges does this scene pose?
- In what way does this scene provide comfort?
- What answer does it offer?

***Impact of the Scene and Homily:***

- What comes after the scene, and what impact do I envisage it to have?
- What is the next scene in the book?
- What scene comes next for you?
- What scene comes next for your listeners as they leave the liturgy and enter the world?

***Commentaries:*** At this point, you may consult commentaries with questions and hunches to fine-tune your ideas.

***Rehearse:*** After your first complete draft of homily, record (audio or video) and listen to yourself. Move ideas around. Delete whatever does not fit the theme. Share with a friend or family member for feedback. Continue to revise until your message becomes as vivid as possible.

After presenting this recipe to the preachers, I gave them a copy of the rubric developed by Alyce M. McKenzie for grading a Scenic Homily. The rubric guided the preachers in their self-evaluation of their homilies. The rubric guided me in determining

the performance of each preacher and, by extension, my performance as organizer of the workshop. See Appendix 6 for a copy of the rubric. After going through the contents of the rubric and answering questions from the preachers, I gave each of them a copy of the post-preaching listener's questionnaire so they would know what the listeners would be expecting from their homilies. See Appendix 6 for a copy of the questionnaire.

At 2:15 p.m., we had a breakout session where I divided the preachers to form two groups of two preachers each. I assigned them the Liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent Year A 2023. One group went to a living room upstairs at the rectory, while the second group went to a living room downstairs. The groups had one hour to pray, study the readings, and come up with ideas for a Scenic Homily for that Sunday, the first post-workshop preaching. After one hour, all the preachers returned to the conference hall. Each group had fifteen minutes to present their work and to receive feedback from the other preachers and me. I then led a general question and answer session. The preachers seemed well-prepared for the tasks ahead.

After I expressed my thanks to the preachers, one of them closed the workshop with prayer at 3:55 p.m. As a follow-up to the workshop, I created a group email thread for each Sunday where the preachers submitted drafts of their homilies and received feedback from the other preachers and me. The preachers also reached out to me individually to seek clarification.

## Ethical Considerations

During the ministerial intervention, I was mindful of my ethical obligations to the human subjects in this project.<sup>25</sup> I sent consent forms<sup>26</sup> to all participants in which I introduced myself, my school, my project, and what I intended to do with the data I would collect. I explained their potential role in the project, and assured them I was not aware of any risk associated with this project. I added that participation was voluntary, and there was no stipend for participation. I collected the signed consent forms from the preachers on the day of the workshop (February 18, 2023). The facilitators collected the signed consent forms from the members of the listeners' focus groups before the discussion on the day of the pre-workshop preaching. The facilitators submitted their signed consent forms, along with those of the focus group members, to me within the first week of the intervention. See Appendices 2 to 4 for the consent forms.

I have been honest in my collection and presentation of data to the best of my understanding and ability. I have avoided data fabrication or misrepresentation. I have acknowledged all sources I consulted and cited. I used anonymity to protect the identity of participants. I was conscious of my own bias and the possibility of members of the listeners' focus group being reserved in evaluating my preaching, so I was not one of the preachers. The facilitators informed the focus groups their preachers could not access their responses. In my choice of participants (preachers, facilitators, and listeners), I ensured they were people who were interested in their ongoing post-ordination formation in preaching.<sup>27</sup> The preachers would be better equipped, while the facilitators and

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<sup>25</sup> See Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, 235–36.

listeners would have better prepared preachers.

### **Data Collected**

In collecting data, I was mindful of Tim Sensing's insider, outsider, and researcher triangulation consideration.<sup>28</sup> The triangulation provided multiple perspectives, and it ensured objectivity as much as possible. As the researcher, I had access to all the data from the participants.

There were four Sunday liturgies in this ministerial intervention. For each preaching, I collected the transcript of the preaching, the video recording of the preaching, the responses to the questionnaire from the listeners, and the report from the facilitators.

### **Data Analysis**

The evaluation and analysis of the data from my ministerial intervention was based on the transcripts of preaching, the video recordings of preaching, the online survey of listeners, and the report from facilitators. After the final preaching, Ms. Carr conducted written interviews with each of the preachers and facilitators. She designed the interview questions after reviewing the data.

Carr and I compared the data collected from the participants about the preaching before and after the workshop. We wanted to test if teaching Scenic Preaching would affect the preachers' subsequent preaching style. We also wanted to test if the preachers' subsequent preaching would impact the responses from listeners.

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<sup>27</sup> See Natasha Mack et al., *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide* (Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International, 2005), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72–77.

The survey questions were both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative aspect of the data came from survey answers that required the listeners to indicate how they felt about an aspect of the preaching on a scale of one to five, where one represented the most commendable and five represented the least commendable. In order to address the limitations of quantitative research, I also applied qualitative research methods in which I posed questions to which respondents could respond in their own words.<sup>29</sup> Carr's interviews were also part of the qualitative research.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described in detail the practical aspect of my thesis project. The ministerial intervention directly involved fifty persons. Even though the intervention lasted through a span of three months, most of the participants followed through. The biggest challenge I faced was recruiting preachers who would commit to the duration of the intervention. When I eventually was able to secure the four preachers, they all followed through. At the end of the intervention, the majority of the preachers shared with me that they enjoyed the process; and indicated interest in participating in future events of this nature. The preachers encouraged me to organize regular workshops on Scenic Preaching for more priests and deacons in the Diocese of San Diego. This chapter described in detail, the practical aspect of this thesis project by presenting the participants in the ministerial intervention, the activities, ethical considerations, and data collected. The following chapter, which is the project's concluding chapter, will present the findings, observations, and conclusions that emanate from the data as it pertains to the thesis of this project.

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<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*, 49–50.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings, Observations, and Future Opportunities**

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” – Romans 10:14–15.

This study tested the effectiveness of McKenzie’s preaching style, Scenic Preaching, as a viable method in response to boring and not memorable homilies in the San Diego Catholic Diocese context. I trained four preachers (three deacons and one priest) in Scenic Preaching. This chapter will present the findings from the data I collected.

I employed quantitative and qualitative analysis in this project. I will present the quantitative data in the form of line graphs. This analysis is important but less elucidating than the qualitative data and analysis. Numbers do not always translate perfectly into words. The numbers may stay the same, but the comments from listeners reveal some changes. Hence, I will also present the qualitative data analysis. According to Tim Sensing, “Qualitative analysis requires some creativity, for the challenge is to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine data in a holistic fashion, and to



find a way to communicate the interpretation to others.”<sup>1</sup> He adds, “For qualitative research, three angles of vision are considered the saturation point to support the criteria of trustworthiness.... Triangulation provides more conversation partners to inform your judgment.”<sup>2</sup>

I utilized triangulation by providing multiple perspectives. In addition to my perspective as the researcher, I collected data from members of the listeners’ focus group. This data provided insiders’ perspectives through their responses to a questionnaire,<sup>3</sup> their post-preaching discussions, and their facilitators’ observations of the listeners during the preaching and the post-preaching discussions. Bernadeane Carr, hereafter referred to as the independent expert observer, offered her insights to provide an outsider’s perspective. She analyzed the preaching transcripts,<sup>4</sup> the preaching video recordings, questionnaire responses, and reports from preachers and facilitators.

This chapter will present an overview of the assessment of the preaching from each of the four parishes in a line graph. This line graph averages the listeners’ ratings (on a scale of 1 to 5) of each preaching based on the following qualities: clear, compelling, memorable, vivid, challenge, and hope. Next, the chapter will present the findings and observations on each parish. For each parish, the report of the findings and observations will contain a brief introduction, a line graph showing listeners’ average

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

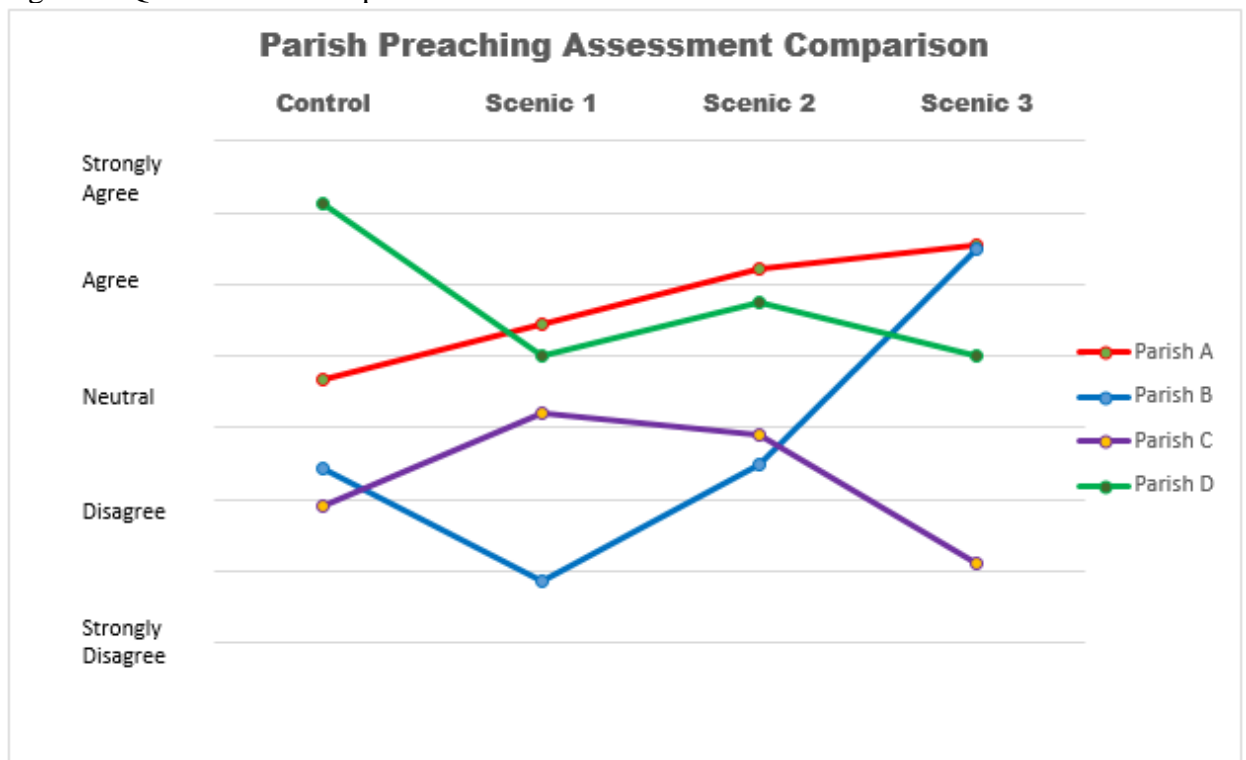
<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire is in Appendix 5.

<sup>4</sup> There were four homilies by each of the four preachers (a total of sixteen homilies). A full transcript of each homily is available through Father Emmanuel Ochigbo at [emmaochigbo2001@yahoo.com](mailto:emmaochigbo2001@yahoo.com).

assessment of each preaching, a summary of the preaching, and the independent expert observer’s qualitative analysis of listeners’ responses. After the final preaching for each parish, I will conclude by reporting the preacher’s feedback and my own observations on the intervention in that parish. Before concluding the chapter, I will share what I should have been done differently and my plans for future opportunities.

### An Overview of the Questionnaire Responses from the Four Parishes

Figure 3: Questionnaire Responses from the Four Parishes<sup>5</sup>



There were four homilies preached in each of the four parishes. The first homily was the control preaching. This preaching was before I trained the preachers in Scenic Preaching. For the purpose of comparing the control preaching with the Scenic Preaching, I used the same questionnaire to assess all four homilies in all four parishes. There were thirteen questions in the questionnaire. Six of the questions provided

<sup>5</sup> You will find figures 1 and 2 in chapter 5.

quantitative data where respondents assessed an aspect of the preaching from 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly Agree and 5 being Strongly Disagree. Each quantitative question had one corresponding qualitative question, in which respondents could express themselves in their own words. I assessed the effectiveness of each preaching in terms of six qualities: clear, compelling, memorable, vivid, challenge, and hope. The final question required respondents to state what they perceived as the central message of the homily. See Appendix 5 for a sample of the post-preaching questionnaire.

Finally, the line graph, which portrays quantitative analysis, is from a cumulative average of responses to the six qualities<sup>6</sup> that describe Scenic Preaching. Ideally, there should have been the same number of participants across the four homilies for each parish. However, due to illness and other unforeseen circumstances, some listeners were absent after the first preaching. Because the groups varied in size (both between and among parishes), I graphed the cumulative average for each parish; not the cumulative total.<sup>7</sup>

### **Findings and Observations on Parish A**

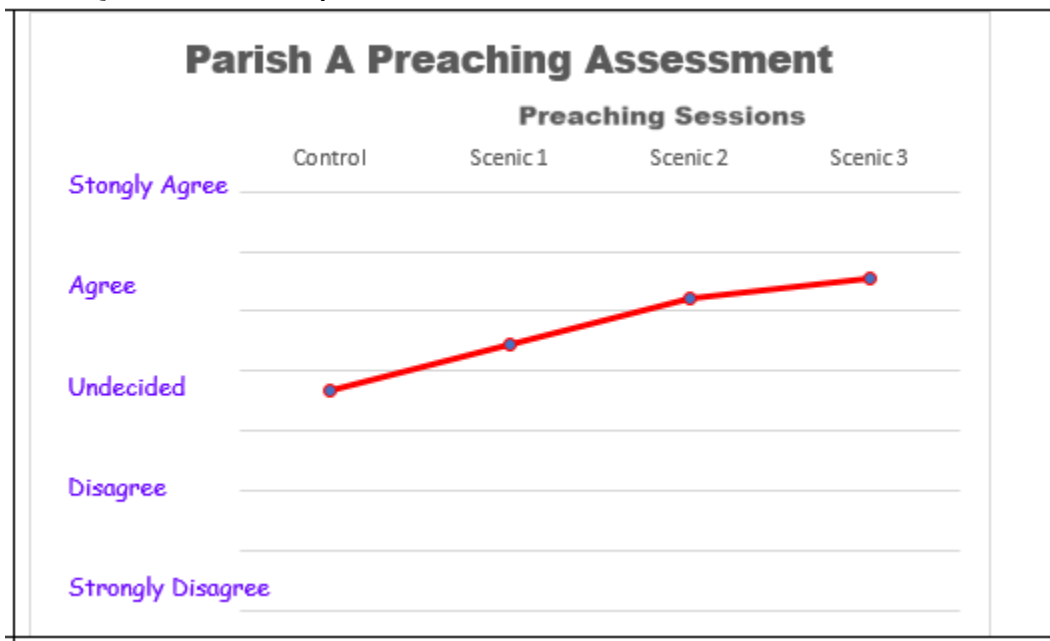
Deacon Tim Schulz was the preacher at Parish A (Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish). Esther Diaz was the Listeners' Focus Group Facilitator. There were nine members on the Listeners' Focus Group. In collating the responses from the listeners, I used the pseudonyms A1 to A9 to protect confidentiality.

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<sup>6</sup> Clear, compelling, memorable, vivid, challenge, and hope.

<sup>7</sup> I arrived at the cumulative average by tallying the cumulative total and dividing it by the number of participants.

Figure 4: Questionnaire Responses from Parish A



**Control Preaching at Parish A<sup>8</sup>**

The control preaching was the pre-workshop preaching, which was for the Mass of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, February 12, 2023. Deacon Schulz based this preaching on Matthew 5:17–37, part of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus talked about himself as one who came to fulfill (not abolish) the law and the prophets. In his preaching, Deacon Schulz admonished his listeners to obey the commandments, not out of the fear of God, but out of the love of God.

The independent expert observed from the data she analyzed that the preaching was not clear to most of the listeners. However, four respondents out of nine remembered the love of God. The others remembered the gospel passage or something from the preacher’s example. Seven respondents identified the central message of the love of God

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<sup>8</sup> The Control Preaching was the preaching before the workshop where I taught Scenic Preaching Method to the four homilists. It served as the benchmark against which I tested the three preaching of each preacher after the workshop.

in contrast to fear. Five respondents found the preacher's childhood experience vivid, and each listener felt a unique challenge from the preaching. In the aspect of hope, five respondents found hope in God's love. However, one respondent, a younger person, seemed to have distorted the message, saying, "I should be who I am and do what I do because God will love me," without mentioning the need to obey God's commandments.

### **First Scenic Preaching at Parish A**

The first Scenic Preaching at Parish A was for the Mass of the First Sunday of Lent, Year A, February 26, 2023. Deacon Schulz based this preaching on Matthew 4:1–11, which narrates how the devil tempted Jesus in the desert. In his preaching, Deacon Schulz shared his experience of his final pre-diaconate ordination retreat and how he found it difficult to give his time and himself for God's service. He placed his retreat experience alongside Jesus' experience in the desert. He challenged his listeners to walk with Jesus in the desert to discover God's will for them.

The independent expert noted that listeners' responses revealed that this homily was clearer than the previous one. Everyone assessed the preaching as clear. One respondent stated that the flow was magnificent and easier to follow than previous preaching. All the listeners assessed the preaching as very compelling and personally engaging. Four of eight respondents identified the central message as "trust in God," while the remaining identified different points. Four respondents remembered the preacher's shared personal story; three respondents remembered his closing invitation to take time for God, while one respondent remembered a tangential evaluation of another less central element of the homily. Each respondent pointed to a specific part of the preacher's story as vivid to them. Each respondent stated a uniquely personal challenge;

each of these challenges connected to some element of the homily. In terms of hope, four respondents found hope in the preacher's personal story, three in God's love, and the oldest in the group found hope in their faith in Christ.

### **Second Scenic Preaching at Parish A**

The second Scenic Preaching at Parish A was for the Mass of the Third Sunday of Lent Year A, March 12, 2023. Deacon Schulz based his preaching on John 4:5–42, which narrates the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well. Deacon Schulz shared his conversion story, beginning with how he was running away from God. He placed his own story alongside that of the Samaritan Woman. He concluded by assuring his listeners that Jesus was seeking them and challenged them to put Jesus at the center of their lives.

The independent expert observed that all listeners assessed this homily as clear and very compelling. Each respondent stated a point in tune with the homily as their idea of its central message. Five out of nine respondents remembered the preacher's personal experiences, and three remembered the concluding idea of expecting God to call us. For eight respondents, the most vivid aspect of the preaching was the experience the preacher shared about something that happened at Parish A. Five respondents felt the challenge to deepen their attentiveness to God; two felt challenged to answer the call to service; and the oldest respondent focused on what God does rather than on their response. In terms of hope, four out of nine respondents found hope in the preacher's experience, while others found hope in varied aspects of the preaching.

### **Third Scenic Preaching at Parish A**

The third Scenic Preaching at Parish A was for the Mass of the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) Year A, April 16, 2023. Deacon Schulz based his preaching on John 20:19–31, which narrates the appearance of Jesus to his followers in the Upper Room after his resurrection. In his preaching, Deacon Schulz talked about his experience of losing his mother in 2012. He compared the darkness he experienced to the darkness of the Upper Room in the absence of Christ. His experience of the risen Christ in the Upper Room with the disciples gave Deacon Schulz the hope that his mother is alive in the living Body of Christ, the Church. In conclusion, he invited his listeners to live in this Body of Christ that brings peace.

The independent expert observer affirmed that two out of six respondents found it difficult to link the homily to the readings. One respondent expressed getting lost after the first personal story. Two respondents found the preaching captivating. One respondent did not find a central message; for three listeners, the central message was, “God is always with us.” The remaining two respondents stated varied messages as central, with the oldest person sticking closer to the words of the gospel than to the homily. Each respondent remembered something different from the preaching; the oldest person zeroed in on the gospel words themselves more than the homily. In terms of what was vivid, four respondents mentioned the loss of the preacher’s mother, which most found as a good comparison to the apostles’ experience of losing Jesus. The homily challenged all the respondents in different ways. In terms of hope, one respondent noted they did not specifically find any message of hope in the preaching, while others said hope was vague this time.

### **Preacher's Feedback and My Observations**

Deacon Schulz responded to some questions from the independent expert observer at the end of the ministerial intervention. In his response, Deacon Schulz said that he had noticed a significant improvement in his preaching and listeners' feedback. He wrote, "Scenic Preaching ... has helped me be more mindful of keeping a structure for my homilies; a roadmap if you will. It has also helped me be more conscious that I must sit with the readings before I start researching." He added, "The thing I like best about this method is that I find myself entering into the scene.... It helps me to recall events, good and bad, from my life that support the scripture reading." Deacon Schulz noted that he has received more positive feedback from parishioners about his preaching since using Scenic Preaching. The challenging thing about the method, according to him is it is "time-consuming."

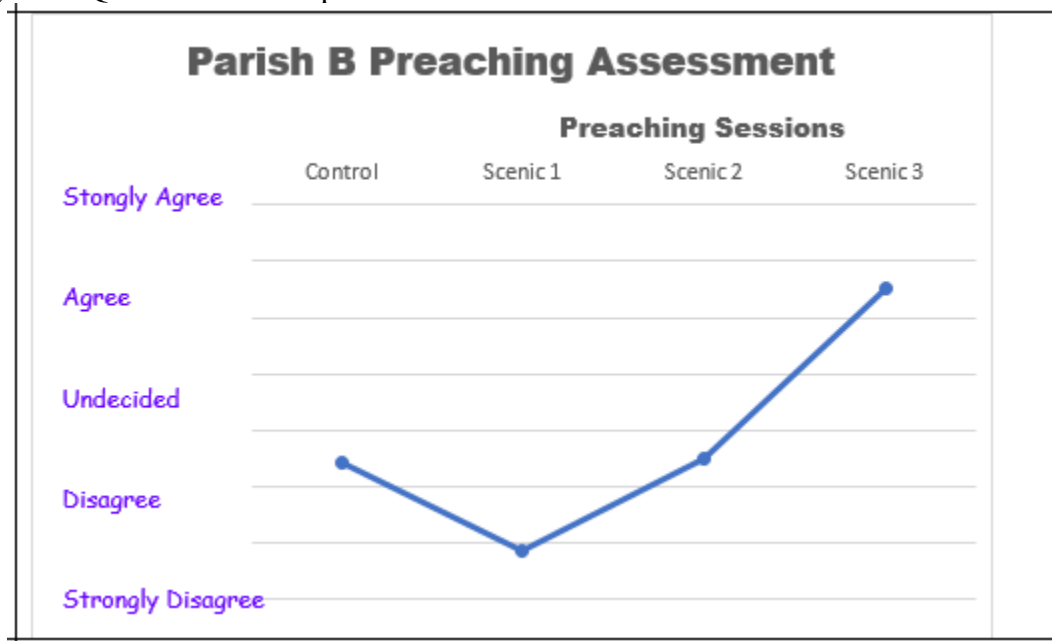
It is my observation as the researcher, in agreement with the independent expert that in the first and second Scenic Preaching, Deacon Schulz effectively used scenes from his life that related to the readings and which resonated with the audience. As such, his listeners recorded much higher levels of engagement in the first two Scenic Preaching than in the control preaching. His third Scenic Preaching was still more engaging than the control preaching but less engaging than the first and the second Scenic Preaching. I attribute the drop in quality of the third Scenic Preaching to the time lag between this preaching and the workshop.



## Findings and Observations on Parish B

Father Kizito Ndugbu, SMMM, was the preacher at Parish B (St. Mary Magdalene Parish). Facilitator B<sup>9</sup> was the Listeners' Focus Group Facilitator. There were nine members on the Listeners' Focus Group. In collating the responses from the listeners, I used the pseudonyms B1 to B9 to protect confidentiality.

Figure 5: Questionnaire Responses from Parish B



### Control Preaching at Parish B

The control preaching was the pre-workshop preaching, which was for the Mass of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, February 12, 2023. In this preaching, Father Ndugbu, reminded his listeners of the main messages from the three scripture readings. The central message he picked from the three readings was that living a good and happy life depends on obeying God's commandments. He acknowledged it is difficult to obey God's commandments, so he encouraged his listeners to seek the help of

<sup>9</sup> This Facilitator did not consent to using their real name here.

the Holy Spirit.

The independent expert observed that four out of nine listeners lost the thread due to issues with the public address system, hearing loss, and the homilist's foreign accent. One listener noted that trying to tie all the readings together made for difficult transitions. Five listeners identified similar central messages in tune with the homily, and four listeners did not respond to the question about the central message of the homily. From the homily, four respondents remembered the call to focus on love more than law. One remembered the commandments as the central message, seemingly misunderstanding the point of the homily about love being paramount in importance. There was no substantial response as to what was vivid in the homily. The homily challenged one listener to see the commandments as a way of life, not just duties. And four respondents found hope in the peace and joy of living the commandments with love.

### **First Scenic Preaching at Parish B**

The first Scenic Preaching at Parish B was for the Mass of the First Sunday of Lent, Year A, February 26, 2023. Father Ndugbu based this preaching on Matthew 4:1–11, which narrates how the devil tempted Jesus in the desert. He included the first reading, Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1–7, the Fall of Adam and Eve, in this preaching. In his preaching, he talked about his upbringing in Nigeria and explained that the season of Lent was difficult for him as a young man because he felt deprived of many things. He added that he later felt the benefit of Lent during the Easter season. He invited his listeners to learn from Jesus by withdrawing to a quiet place to work on their relationship with God and with fellow human beings.

The independent expert observed that one out of seven listeners assessed the

preaching as clear. One listener had difficulty with the tie-in to the temptation of Eve. Two listeners struggled with the homilist's accent, and three had no comment regarding the clarity of the homily. For five listeners, the central message of the preaching was the persistence of temptation and the role of divine grace. While for another listener, the central message was the call to use Lent to focus on our relationship with God. Furthermore, from the homily, one listener remembered grace. Another listener tailored what they remembered to seeking improvement over perfection. Two others recalled the need to avoid temptation, while one listener remembered the homilist's childhood dislike of Lent.

In terms of what was vivid, the independent expert further noted that for two listeners, it was the ever presence of God with us. Lent as a season for growth was vivid for two listeners. For one listener, the call to fast as Jesus did was vivid. Two listeners had no comment. The preaching challenged two respondents to take fasting more seriously, three respondents to avoid temptation, and one respondent to forgive someone. One respondent had no comment in the area of challenge. One respondent experienced hope from the constancy of God. One respondent found hope in the call to perfection, two respondents found hope in Jesus' victory over temptation, and three respondents had no comment on where they found hope in the preaching. The independent expert found this homily lacking in focus, and the homilist's personal story needing better development in terms of its applicability.

## **Second Scenic Preaching at Parish B**

The second Scenic Preaching at Parish B was for the Mass of the Third Sunday of Lent Year A, March 12, 2023. Father Ndugbu's preaching was a call to repentance. He drew his message from the first reading, Exodus 17:3–7 where the Israelites grumble against God, and from John 4:5–42, which talks about the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well.

The independent expert observed that the homily was clear to two respondents. One respondent wondered about the water source: is it the same water Moses got from the rock? Three out of six respondents had no comment regarding the clarity of the preaching. The preaching was not compelling for two respondents. One responded that the preaching needed more focus at the beginning. Three respondents had no comments on the compelling quality of the homily. The listeners could not identify the central message of the homily as evidenced by the fact that two respondents went off on a tangent. One made a vague reference to a line from the homily, and the other respondents had no comment.

With regard to the memorable nature of the homily, three respondents remembered the thread of turning to God in brokenness and treating others kindly. One respondent remembered Jesus drinking water, and two respondents had no comment. As for what was vivid in the homily, two respondents noted the reaction of Jesus to the woman, one respondent noted the message, "Forgive yourself and others." Three respondents had no comment regarding what was vivid.

Finally, the independent expert observer noted that the homily challenged two respondents not to judge others, and the other respondents had no comment. As for hope,

three listeners had no comments, while two listeners found solace in God's constant mercy. One listener focused on Lent as a time to try to do better. The independent expert observed the homily was "rather disjointed overall," with "unrelated experiences and ideas floating around an unclarified center."

### **Third Scenic Preaching at Parish B**

The third Scenic Preaching at Parish B was for the Mass of the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) Year A, April 16, 2023. Father Ndugbu drew from the first reading, Acts 2:42–47, the gospel passage, John 20:19–31, and the celebration of Divine Mercy in his preaching. From the first reading, he shared that the early Christians gave today's Christians an excellent example of divine mercy. From the gospel passage, he shared that Jesus' invitation to his disciples to choose faith and his gift of peace also applies to contemporary Christians. He concluded by challenging his listeners to extend to others the mercy and peace they have received from Christ.

The independent expert observed that the preaching was clear to three out of four respondents, and one respondent had no comment regarding the clarity of the preaching. One respondent reported they were attentive due to many good points. Another respondent made an extra effort to be attentive, and two did not comment on how compelling the homily was. The central point of the homily for two respondents was the message of mercy. One respondent mentioned other parts of the Mass aside from the homily as central for them. One listener did not comment on what was central in the homily. As far as the memorability of the homily, two respondents noted the gift of peace, one respondent noted "empty promises," something not referred to in the homily, and one respondent did not comment. The vivid aspect of the homily for one respondent

was Jesus meeting Mary Magdalene at the tomb, which was neither in the readings nor the homily. Other respondents did not comment on what was vivid.

Finally, the independent expert observer affirmed that three listeners found a personal challenge tied to the homily, while one gave no response regarding how the homily challenged them. On the aspect of hope, one listener found hope in God, one listener found hope in the power of faith, and one listener found hope in knowing Christ is alive and real.

### **Preacher's Feedback and My Observations**

Father Ndugbu responded to some questions from the independent expert observer at the end of the ministerial intervention. In his response, Father Ndugbu said, "The Scenic Preaching method helped me inculcate vivid mental images through words, descriptive language, storytelling, and sensory details to make the message come alive in the minds of my listeners." Concerning what he disliked about the method, Father Ndugbu said, "Ultimately, the effectiveness of the Scenic Preaching method depends on [the preacher's] skill in crafting engaging narratives and selecting appropriate imagery, as well as [the preacher's] understanding of [their] audience's preference and needs. This requires work!"

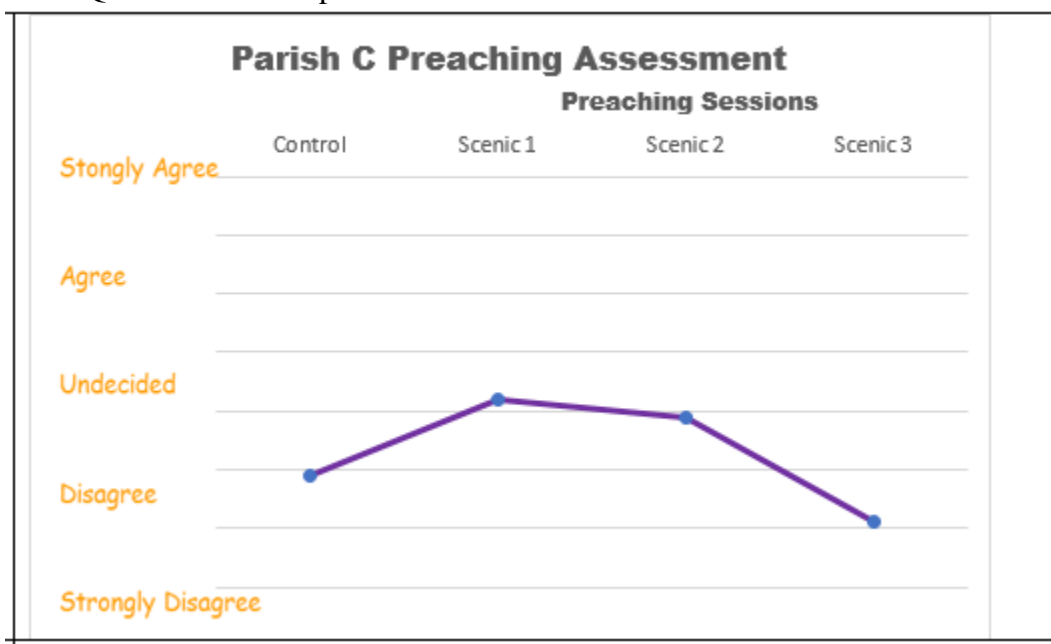
In my observation as the researcher, I agree with the independent expert observer, who noted that this homilist and his listeners seemed tired of the experiment. Hence, the homilist returned to his original preaching style at the final preaching. He also faced challenges with some of his listeners being either hard of hearing or cognitively challenged. As the researcher, I observed the homilist's foreign accent, late arrival to the workshop, and reservations regarding the value of Scenic Preaching, as noted in Chapter

Five, were some of his challenges. The line graph shows his listeners’ agreement with the effectiveness of his preaching dropped drastically below “disagree,” at the first Scenic Preaching. Furthermore, at the final preaching, where he returned to his usual method, there was some improvement in average responses on agreement. He would have engaged his listeners better if he had been more open to Scenic Preaching.

**Findings and Observations on Parish C**

Deacon Mark Wieczorek was the preacher at Parish C (Sacred Heart Parish of Ocean Beach). Gregg Sprosty was the Listeners’ Focus Group Facilitator. There were eleven members on the Listeners’ Focus Group. In collating the responses from the listeners, I used the pseudonyms C1 to C11 to protect confidentiality.

Figure 6: Questionnaire Responses from Parish C



**Control Preaching at Parish C**

The control preaching was the pre-workshop preaching, which was for the Mass of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, February 12, 2023. Deacon Wieczorek centered his preaching on the gospel passage, Matthew 5:17–37, part of the Sermon on

the Mount. He shared what Jesus could have meant by fulfilling the law and the prophets. He then introduced a story from C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* to illustrate the need for forgiveness in the new (Christian) dispensation.

The independent expert observed that one out of eleven listeners noted the homily was too long, and other listeners said the preaching had too many examples. Several listeners lost focus when life examples distracted them from the message. Gus, the neighborhood cat wandering into the Church, distracted one listener. Four listeners agreed on the central message. One listener shared a message outside the homily. Other listeners identified a related tangent as the central message. On the aspect of what was memorable, ten listeners remembered to read *The Great Divorce*. For one listener, the neighborhood cat wandering into the Church was most memorable. Six listeners found the bus from heaven to hell as vivid. The example of sinners versus saints was vivid for two listeners, and for one listener, sin beginning in the heart was vivid. Four respondents identified challenges related to the homily, while others identified challenges not directly related to the homily. Each respondent found hope in an aspect of the homily. The independent expert noted that the homily had a “solid theme, illustrated points well, and was engaging enough but was a bit complicated in its message.”

### **First Scenic Preaching at Parish C**

The first Scenic Preaching at Parish C was for the Mass of the First Sunday of Lent, Year A, February 26, 2023. Deacon Wieczorek based this preaching on Matthew 4:1–11, which narrates how the devil tempted Jesus in the desert. He ended his preaching by inviting his listeners to pray to Jesus to provide for their eternal life and joy.

The independent expert observed that the homily was clear for all the



respondents, but many of them commented that the message lost strength at the end. One listener felt the homily was slow, and the repeating of “and then you noticed ... then you saw” was redundant. All the listeners agreed on the central message of the homily. In the area of memory, five listeners remembered imagining themselves in the desert with Jesus. For two listeners, the thought of food was most memorable, and for two others, avoiding temptation was memorable.

Furthermore, the independent expert observer noted that for nine listeners, imagining themselves personally in the story was vivid. For one listener, their tangential conclusion—that hunger creates vulnerability—was most vivid. Eight listeners felt challenged to follow Jesus, while two felt no significant challenge. Most listeners found hope in God through the homily, while one listener found no message of hope. The independent expert articulated that this homily was “an attempt to make the gospel come alive, but not real preaching.” The homilist has yet to understand how to apply Scenic Preaching in his homily.

### **Second Scenic Preaching at Parish C**

The second Scenic Preaching at Parish C was for the Mass of the Third Sunday of Lent Year A, March 12, 2023. Deacon Wiczorek preached on John 4:5–42, which talks about the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well. He invited his listeners to imagine themselves as the Samaritan Woman. He then pointed out, referencing St. Augustine, that Jesus is thirsty for the faith of his listeners.

The independent expert observed that the homily was clear to most listeners. One listener complained of getting lost in the “imagining the story” phase. One was distracted by Gus, the neighborhood cat. The preaching was compelling to nine listeners. One

listener had trouble entering into the mind of the Samaritan woman. One listener lost interest when the details just repeated the gospel story. Seven respondents identified the central message of the homily as Jesus waiting for us. Four listeners focused on the gift of living water by Jesus as the central message. On the question of what was vivid, eight respondents said it was the idea of being present with the woman at the well. One respondent noted that the stages of the woman's experience were vivid, and two mentioned that the woman running to tell others was the most vivid.

Furthermore, the independent expert observer noted that one listener felt the challenge to trust that Christ is at their side. Another listener felt the challenge to seek the living water. Six listeners were challenged by the realization that Christ wants and waits for them. One listener felt no challenge. Two listeners found hope in Jesus. Four listeners found hope in the notions of "No matter what, no matter who you are, he is always waiting," and one found hope in the fact that faith leads to happiness and joy. The independent expert also noted that compared to the first Scenic Preaching, this homilist did a better job this time of making the gospel story come alive while also pulling out universal spiritual elements that apply to his listeners. This assessment corresponds with the line graph representation of the feedback from the listeners.

### **Third Scenic Preaching at Parish C**

The third Scenic Preaching at Parish C was for the Mass of the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) Year A, April 16, 2023. In his preaching, Deacon Wiczorek drew from the gospel passage, John 20:19–31. He explored the reason for Thomas' absence when Jesus first visited the disciples in the Upper Room after his resurrection. He highlighted that Thomas' doubt gained later generations a special

blessing. He concluded by challenging his listeners to continue their Lenten practices until they see Jesus face to face.

The independent expert observed that one listener lost the thread due to repetitions of the gospel story. Three out of ten listeners experienced some mind wandering. Five listeners noted the central message was to believe without seeing. Other listeners had varied personal messages as central to the homily. On the question of what was memorable from the homily, three listeners remembered the real-life example of a modern woman. Two listeners remembered making the biblical figure more human with personal doubts. Several other listeners remembered faith versus doubt and one listener had no comment.

In addition, the independent expert observer noted that seven respondents found the descriptions of Thomas' fear and shame to be vivid. Seven listeners articulated hearing a personal challenge from the homily. These challenges differed among respondents. Six respondents experienced hope in the story of Thomas, who was initially perceived as weak but later became a saint and three respondents found hope in a faith commitment. In her assessment of Deacon Wieczorek's third Scenic Preaching, the independent expert said, "Personally, I thought [the preaching] had too many invitations to 'imagine' without a real purpose, which just becomes an opportunity for distraction. Imagery needs to be more selective, to guide the imaginations of the assembly, [and] zero in on a message."

## **Preacher's Feedback and My Observations**

Deacon Wieczorek found Scenic Preaching to be helpful in certain circumstances but not in all, according to his interview with the independent expert. He found it harder to use because it was new to him. He acknowledged the fact that Scenic Preaching “creates a vivid way to capture the attention of the audience,” however, this attention-capturing comes at the expense of “teaching time.” He also observed that the method encouraged redundant retelling of the biblical stories. According to him, the feedback from parishioners when he used Scenic Preaching “seemed neutral or perhaps slightly negative.”

I serve at the same parish with Deacon Wieczorek. I know him to be an excellent homilist. I am confident that having a good grasp of Scenic Preaching will add to his already great rating among parishioners. His Scenic Preaching for this project reveals that I did not make the content of the workshop understandable enough to him. His feedback showed that he missed the teaching quality of Scenic Preaching. He also seemed to misunderstand Scenic Preaching as a retelling of the Bible story rather than making the story come alive by using more visual images to paint the picture of the scene and filling in the gaps in the story.

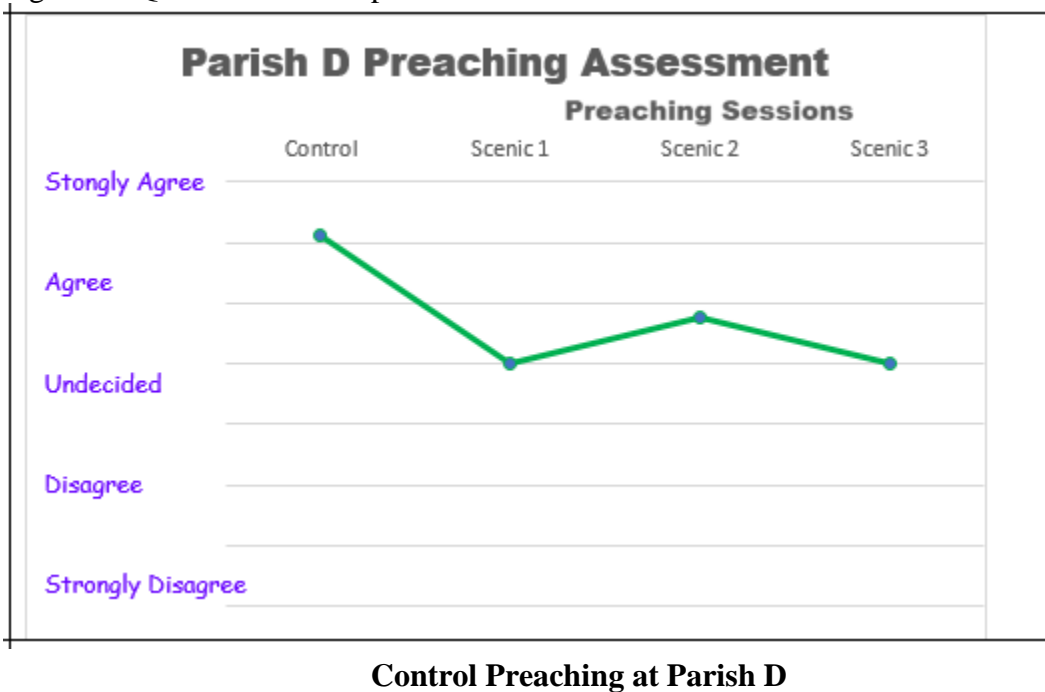
It is my observation as the researcher that a one-day workshop was not enough to teach everything about Scenic Preaching. So, I made myself available to give feedback to the preachers while they prepared their Scenic Homilies all through the three months of ministerial intervention. Some made up to three revisions with me before preaching. Unfortunately, because of his very tight schedule, apart from his first Scenic Preaching, I either did not see Deacon Wieczorek's Scenic Preaching before he preached, or I saw it

when it was too late to give any feedback. His humility, intelligence, and positive disposition toward me make it easy for me to continue the journey with him on how to add Scenic Preaching to his toolbox as we keep working together in the same parish.

### Findings and Observations on Parish D

Deacon Pete Johnson was the preacher at Parish D (Saint Pius X Parish). Mario Diaz was the Listeners’ Focus Group Facilitator. There were nine members on the Listeners’ Focus Group. In collating the responses from the listeners, I used the pseudonyms D1 to D9 to protect confidentiality.

Figure 7: Questionnaire Responses from Parish D



The first preaching was the pre-workshop preaching, which was for the Mass of the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, February 12, 2023. Deacon Johnson centered his preaching on the gospel passage, Matthew 5:17–37, part of the Sermon on the Mount. He invited his listeners to follow the higher standard of the law Jesus introduced.

The independent expert observed that two out of seven listeners indicated they

had a difficult time following the preacher when he changed topics. The other respondents indicated the preaching held their attention. One felt it was “right on point.” On the aspect of how the homily challenged them, four listeners said Lent was a time to be open to change. Two listeners were challenged to give alms. One listener highlighted making Lent a life-long commitment, not just giving up chocolate, but this phrase was not in the homily.

Furthermore, the independent expert noted that in terms of the memorability of the homily, one listener skewed the homily to say “Jesus came to abolish the new law.” One listener found the real-life story memorable. Another listener drew a personal general conclusion from the real-life story about beauty. One listener remembered the Beatitudes. For another listener, the congregation’s strong “Amen” at the end of the homily was most memorable. Three listeners found the real-life story most vivid. Two listeners found the description of the Sea of Galilee most vivid. One listener noted both as vivid. The homily challenged two to grow in Christ. Two listeners felt the challenge to be better people. Two listeners felt a greater commitment to grow closer to God, not just giving something up for Lent or showing up for Mass. There was no identifiable trend regarding hope in the listeners’ responses. The independent expert also observed, “The single real-life story used is not very theologically helpful to the gospel’s message, serving to obscure rather than hit home the message which is too multifarious to be very clear.”

### **First Scenic Preaching at Parish D**

The first Scenic Preaching at Parish D was for the Mass of the First Sunday of Lent, Year A, February 26, 2023. Deacon Johnson based this preaching on Matthew 4:1–

11, which narrates how the devil tempted Jesus in the desert. The preacher shared a story of his grandson and his (the Preacher's) garden. He highlighted how his grandson focused on the good that could come from the garden. Similarly, he invited his listeners to let the Holy Spirit lead them in their journey.

The independent expert observed that one of nine listeners had a problem connecting the garden to the desert. Other listeners assessed the homily as clear. The real-life story was compelling for one listener. One listener's interest lagged when trying to figure out how the two stories fit together. Six out of nine listeners found the light of Jesus as the central message of the homily. One listener identified trust in Jesus as central, and two listeners found the glass half empty or full as central to the homily.

On the question of what was memorable in the homily, the independent expert observed that three listeners noted it was the family story. One listener remembered the idea of a garden in general. Three listeners noted darkness and light, and one listener remembered the idea that God is near to us. Then, answering the question of what was vivid in the preaching, it was the rainbow for two listeners, the gardening story for three listeners, and the scene of Jesus being tempted in the desert for the rest of the listeners. The homily challenged three listeners to look for light in darkness and trials. It challenged two listeners to be more open and positive. And the remaining listeners felt the challenge to be better Christians. Four listeners found hope in the light dawning in their lives. One listener found hope in God's constant love and acceptance. And two listeners noted the garden, rainbow, and stars as signs of hope. The independent expert's impression was that the preacher made efforts to develop scenes in this homily, but it was difficult to see how the two scenes connected and their central messages.

### **Second Scenic Preaching at Parish D**

The second Scenic Preaching at Parish D was for the Mass of the Third Sunday of Lent Year A, March 12, 2023. Deacon Johnson preached on John 4:5–42, which talks about the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well. He shared his own experience of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which made the gospel passage come alive for him. He invited his listeners to meet Jesus at the well, which requires giving something up for something better.

The independent expert observed that the preaching was unclear to one of the eight listeners who wondered where the “personal scene” was leading. The homily was compelling to all except one respondent. According to five listeners, the central theme was Jesus offering living water. Five listeners found the real-life story to be memorable. Six listeners found the details of the personal travel story most vivid. Three respondents sensed the challenge to walk more closely with Jesus, and the homily challenged two listeners to avoid judging others. Three listeners found hope in Jesus, who is always there for us. Furthermore, the independent expert noted, “My personal impression is that the homilist did a bit better this time in using ‘scenes’ in his homily, though it was a bit cluttered, with unnecessary details and words which diluted the impact; the central message seemed rather vague.”

### **Third Scenic Preaching at Parish D**

The third Scenic Preaching at Parish D was for the Mass of the Second Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy) Year A, April 16, 2023. Deacon Johnson centered his preaching on the gospel passage, John 20:19–31. He told the story of his friend Michael in a healthcare facility. His friend was not a Christian. He eventually became Catholic



and received his First Holy Communion on the day of this preaching. Deacon Johnson compared his friend's faith journey with that of Thomas the Apostle in the Upper Room, who came to believe in the resurrection after doubting. He concluded by inviting his listeners to thank God for Thomas, Michael, and all who come to the faith.

The independent expert observed that four of six listeners noted they lost the thread especially when the homilist jumped from one story to another. The central message for two listeners was touching Jesus in the Eucharist. Two listeners mentioned searching for Christ as the central theme. For one listener, mercy is greater than sins was the central message, and for another listener, the central message was the need to trust Jesus (gathered more from their sense of Divine Mercy Sunday than from the homily). Four listeners found the real-life example as the most memorable part of the homily. Two listeners mentioned the call to faith in God as the most memorable, while one listener had trouble following the thread. Regarding what was vivid, three listeners assessed the real-life story to be most vivid. One listener found the tomb to be vivid. One listener found Mary's faith to be vivid. One found the Eucharist as the way we touch Christ to be vivid. In the area of challenge, all the listeners mentioned different parts of the homily that challenged them.

Furthermore, the independent expert noted that one respondent found hope in Divine Mercy. One respondent focused on the Eucharist as a source of hope. One respondent highlighted the gospel story of the day as a source of hope, while one respondent found hope in the homilist himself. The independent expert said, "The parallel real-life story and the gospel story were really good, especially ending it with the Eucharist as 'touching' Jesus, but too many references to many other gospel moments

tended to cloud the parallel to the gospel of the day.” The independent expert added, “Pacing was good, phrasing was good, but [the homilist] needs to edit it more, and let the final line about ‘touching Jesus’ include an invitation to us to touch Jesus ourselves in that Eucharist.”

### **Preachers Feedback and My Observations**

Deacon Johnson responded to some questions from the independent expert observer and shared that his usual style of preaching is similar to Scenic Preaching. He described himself as “a very visual person ... so painting a picture with words is something [he] enjoy[s]). One strong point of Scenic Preaching which he noted is that a preacher can create a vivid scene about his own life, which can be a strong point of connection with the listeners. Deacon Johnson could not identify any negative point against Scenic Preaching except that not all scripture passages lend themselves to Scenic Preaching.

In my observation as the researcher, creating a scene in a homily was easy for Deacon Johnson. However, he needs to work more on knowing what details may be distracting as he paints his scenes. Since he was already doing something close to this method of Scenic Preaching, it was a bit challenging for him to know what aspect of his usual style may not be helpful to this method of Scenic Preaching. Regarding his position that not all scripture passages lend themselves to scenic preaching, I have a slightly different view. I believe all scripture passages lend themselves to Scenic Preaching but to different degrees. There is always a narrative surrounding every event and every subject. Even if the passage does not immediately appear as a narrative, a close study and reflection will reveal the scene behind the passage.

## **Learning and Future Opportunities**

This thesis project has been a great learning opportunity for me. I have identified six areas of further growth for me in my preaching ministry and my teaching of Scenic Preaching to preachers. One, a one-day workshop was insufficient to train preachers in Scenic Preaching. The feedback from the preachers reveals many aspects of Scenic Preaching that need clarification. For example, there are different kinds of Scenic Preaching, and Scenic Preaching does not preclude teaching in a homily.

Two, applying the Clinical Pastoral Education approach of action, reflection, and new action, would be helpful. Using this approach would increase the workshop from one day to at least three days to ensure a more complete understanding of Scenic Preaching.

Three, in line with the feedback from the preachers, I will be organizing periodic workshops on Scenic Preaching for those in formation and for the ordained.

Four, one of the preachers expressed reservations about Scenic Preaching before the workshop. His preaching and the listeners' feedback reflected he was uncomfortable. In the future, I plan to devote more time to understanding the reservations of such preachers and to journey with them more compassionately in their practice of Scenic Preaching.

Five, after viewing the video recordings and transcripts of the homilies, as the researcher, I observed that all the preachers struggled with attaining a climactic ending in their preaching. For this reason, I plan to complete additional research on how to teach preachers the craft of tying up the loose ends of the message and attaining a climactic and memorable ending. I will also continue to study the art of storytelling, emphasizing creating vivid scenes.

Six, in addition to organizing workshops on Scenic Preaching and various online presentations, I hope to publish a book on the use of Scenic Preaching in Catholic Liturgical Preaching. The book will be a resource for the post-ordination homiletic formation of priests and deacons in the Diocese of San Diego and other dioceses.

### **Conclusion**

All four preachers in this ministerial intervention found Scenic Preaching a worthwhile approach.<sup>10</sup> However, they added that, as a technique, Scenic Preaching requires more time and practice. They appreciate the fact that Scenic Preaching asks the homilist to reflect on his experience of the gospel situation and first personalize the message before preaching it to others. This practice aids the spiritual growth of the preacher. Generally, they noted the method helped them plan their homily more carefully.

Furthermore, most of the homilists said their listeners shared how they saw themselves in the preaching due to its vividness. This kind of feedback reinforces that Scenic Preaching engages listeners in a more personal way.

According to Timothy Keller (1950–2023) who was the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City,

In the end, preaching has two basic objects in view: the Word and the human listener. It is not enough to just harvest the wheat; it must be prepared in some edible form or it can't nourish and delight. Sound preaching arises out of two loves—love of the Word of God and love of people—and from them both a desire to show people God's glorious grace.<sup>11</sup>

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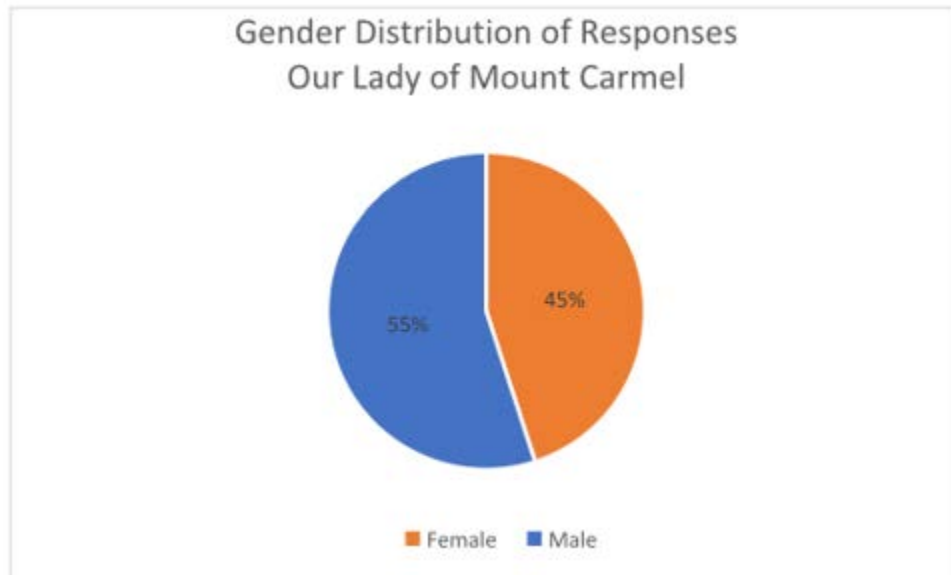
<sup>10</sup> Since there were different groups of listeners for different preachers, there was no objective way to compare one preacher to another. I only compared a preacher's control preaching to his Scenic Preaching.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 14.

This project was a product of my love for the Word of God and my love for God's people. I hope I have helped the preachers who participated in this project. I look forward to training additional preachers to utilize Scenic Preaching as an expression of the love of God's Word, and the love of God's people.

## Appendix 1<sup>1</sup>

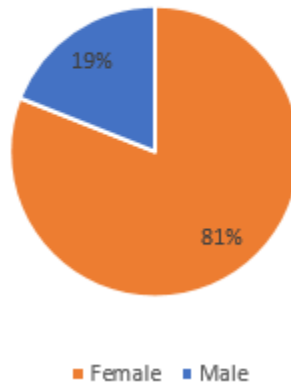
### Demographic Representations of Responses from Each of the Four Parishes



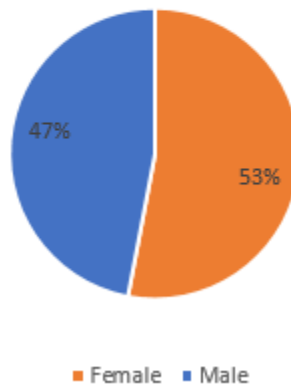
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<sup>1</sup> The pie charts from both the survey overall and these individual parish charts tally the distribution of the responses, not the respondents, precisely because some respondents did not reply every time. All the other analyses of preaching impact also focused on the responses, not the respondents themselves.

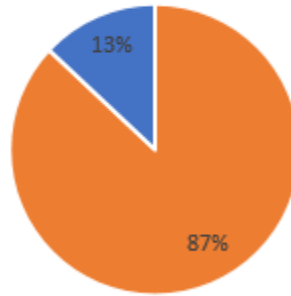
Gender Distribution of Responses  
St. Mary Magdalene



Gender Distribution of Responses  
Sacred Heart



Gender Distribution of Responses  
St. Pius X



■ Female ■ Male



## Appendix 2

### Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Preachers (Homilists)

My name is Fr. Emmanuel Ochigbo. I am a student at Aquinas Institute of Theology (St. Louis, Missouri) conducting doctoral research for my thesis project in pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching. My cellphone number is 619-549-1863. My research advisor is Fr. Jay Harrington, OP, PhD, STD. His office phone number is 314-256-8872. You may contact either of us if you have questions about this study.<sup>1</sup>

My research tests the effectiveness of Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie's preaching style, *Scenic Preaching*. I will be training five preachers (three priests and two deacons in the San Diego Diocese) in this preaching style. I am inviting you to be one of the preachers in this study.

If you consent, you will attend an eight-hour workshop in which I will share and teach this *Scenic Preaching* method. After the workshop, you will preach at three Sunday Masses in your parish using your learning from the workshop. You will select ten parishioners reflecting the demographics of your parish. They will meet after each Sunday Mass during the study to answer a post-preaching questionnaire and to discuss their experience of your homily. You will submit to me, the text of your preaching, a video recording of your preaching, and a one-to-two-page reflection, sharing the steps you took to prepare your preaching and your preaching experience for each preaching. Before the workshop, you will also submit your homily on a Sunday that I will communicate to you, and have your ten parishioners meet and discuss after the Mass.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no risk associated with your role in this research. Your involvement in this research may improve your preaching. I will utilize pseudonyms for the parishioners (listeners) to protect participation confidentiality in my report. In addition to fulfilling the degree requirements, this project will be offered to the Diocese of San Diego as a resource for the post-ordination homiletic formation of priests and deacons. After graduation, I will be available to deliver talks and workshops on preparing and delivering impactful homilies. I may choose to publish a book or books based on this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Harrington was the research advisor at the time this and related invitation letters were sent out and for the initial stages of my DMin thesis project (from the approval of the proposal until the early stages of Chapter 2). The Rev. Dr. Kay Lynn Nortcutt, Adjunct Professor of Preaching and Evangelization at Aquinas Institute of Theology, subsequently became my research advisor (after reviewing my proposal and the first two chapters).

If you agree to be part of this research as one of the preachers, please, fill out the following:

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Facilitators**

My name is Fr. Emmanuel Ochigbo. I am a student at Aquinas Institute of Theology (St. Louis, Missouri) conducting doctoral research for my thesis project in pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching. My cellphone number is 619-549-1863. My research advisor is Fr. Jay Harrington, OP, PhD, STD. His office phone number is 314-256-8872. You may contact either of us if you have questions about this study.

As part of my doctoral research, Fr. Kizito Ndugbu, SMMM, will be preaching at St. Mary Magdalene Church, San Diego on four Sundays. I am inviting a focus group of ten of your parishioners to attend the four Sunday Masses and share your feedback on his preaching. I am also inviting you to serve as facilitator for the focus group.

If you consent, you will attend a one-hour Zoom training with four other facilitators. You will also attend four Sunday Masses where Fr. Kizito will preach at St. Mary Magdalene Church. After each Mass, you will meet with the listeners' focus group of ten parishioners. You will facilitate a discussion based on their experience of the day's homily. You will submit a one-to-two-page report of your experience of the preaching and the focus group's discussion to me. You will also submit a video recording of each preaching, and an audio recording of the discussion each Sunday.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no risk that I know of that is associated with your role in this research. I will utilize pseudonyms for the parishioners (listeners) to protect participation confidentiality in my report. In addition to fulfilling the degree requirements, this project will be offered to the Diocese of San Diego as a resource for the post-ordination homiletic formation of priests and deacons. After graduation, I will be available to deliver talks and workshops on preparing and delivering impactful homilies. I may choose to publish a book or books based on this research.

If you agree to be part of this research as a group facilitator, please fill out the following:

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

## Appendix 4

### Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Listeners' Focus Group Members

My name is Fr. Emmanuel Ochigbo. I am a student at Aquinas Institute of Theology (St. Louis, Missouri) conducting doctoral research for my thesis project in pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching. My cellphone number is 619-549-1863. My research advisor is Fr. Jay Harrington, OP, PhD, STD. His office phone number is 314-256-8872. You may contact either of us if you have questions about this study.

As part of my doctoral research, your Priest/Deacon, \_\_\_\_\_, will be preaching in your parish on four Sundays. I am inviting you to be one of a group of ten parishioners to attend the four Sunday Masses and share your feedback on his preaching.

If you consent, you will meet with other members of your group for about thirty to forty-five minutes after each Sunday Mass to answer a questionnaire and discuss your listening experience. There will be an audio recording of the discussion, which your group facilitator will submit to me. Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no risk associated with your role in this research. I will utilize pseudonyms to protect participation confidentiality in my report. In addition to fulfilling the degree requirements, this project will be offered to the Diocese of San Diego as a resource for the post-ordination homiletic formation of priests and deacons. After graduation, I will be available to deliver talks and workshops on preparing and delivering impactful homilies. I may choose to publish a book or books based on this research.

If you agree to be part of this research as a member of the listeners' focus group, please fill out the following:

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name:

## Appendix 5

### Listeners' Post-Preaching Questionnaire

*Thank you in advance for participating in this survey.*

\* Required

**1. Your Name\***

---

**2. Your Age Group\***

*Mark only one oval*

18–25

26–35

36–45

46–55

56–65

66–75

Over 75

**3. Your Gender\***

*Mark only one oval*

Male

Female

**4. Your Parish and Preacher\***

*Mark only one oval*

Sacred Heart, Ocean Beach – Dcn Mark Wieczorek

- St Mary Magdalene – Fr. Kizito Ndugbu, SMMM
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel, San Ysidro – Dcn Tim Schulz
- St Pius X, Chula Vista – Dcn Pete Johnson

**5. Today's Date\***

---

*Example: January 7, 2019*

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Please read each statement carefully and fill-in the response which best describes your experience of the homily you heard today. (Wherever there is a range from 1–5, your choices are: 1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Undecided, 4= Disagree, and 5= Strongly Disagree). There are no right or wrong answers.

- 6. CLEAR:** I found the homily clear and easy to follow.\*  
Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

- 7.** Was there any point where you lost the logical thread? If so, where? \*

---



---

- 8. COMPELLING:** The homily gained and maintained my attention from beginning to end.\*

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5   
Strongly Disagree

9. Was there any point at which your interest lagged? If so, where? \*

---

---

10. **MEMORABLE:** The homily was memorable. I retained the central message of the homily.\*

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

11. In a sentence, what was the central message?\*

---

---

12. What will you remember most about this homily?\*

---

---

13. **VIVID:** The homily contained vivid scenes that helped me connect Scripture to life.\*

Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree



14. Which scene(s) or image(s) spoke to you most and why?\*

---

---

15. **CHALLENGE:** The homily challenged me to think, feel, and act differently.\*  
Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

16. In what way(s) did the homily challenge you to think, feel, and act differently?\*

---

---

17. **HOPE:** The homily offered me an experience of hope and grace.\*  
Mark only one oval.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

Strongly Disagree

18. What aspect(s) of the homily contributed most to your experience of hope and grace?\*

---

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## Appendix 6

### Workshop for Preachers on *Scenic Preaching*

**Venue:** Rectory Conference Room, Sacred Heart Church of Ocean Beach, 4776 Saratoga Ave, San Diego, CA 92107

**Proposed Date:** Saturday, February 18, 2023

**Time:** 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

#### MORNING SESSION

**Welcome:** 8:00 a.m. to 8:15 a.m.

#### House Keeping

- Snacks available at the back. Snack at will.
- Restroom next door. A second one next to the living room.
- This is a safe space. Feel free to stop me at any time to ask questions.
- Question box with plain papers also available for questions. I will attend to the box after lunch.

**Opening Prayer:** 8:15 a.m. to 8:20 a.m.

*All pause for self-centering.*

**All:** “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7).

Come, Holy Spirit, strengthen us, enlighten us, encourage us, and make us faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Father, God, forever and ever. Amen.

**Self-Introductions:** 8:20 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.

Name, Place of Origin, Year of Ordination, Present Ministry, and Something unique about you.

#### Agenda

- Review of Consent Form / Opening Remark
- An overview of the New Homiletic Movement
- Introduction to Scenic preaching
- Short Break
- An example of scenic preaching by Dr. Alyce McKenzie
- Lunch (Provided)
- Q & A / Group Presentation of Scenes
- Recipe for Preparing a Scenic Homily
- Rubrics for Grading a Scenic Homily
- In groups of two or three, come up with suggestions for preaching based on 1st Sunday Lent Year A 2023 (First Post-workshop Preaching)
- Present group discussion outcomes to class

- Feedback to Me/Announcement
- Closing Prayer / Announcement

**Review of Consent Forms / Opening Remarks:** 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

A study by the Pew Research Center in 2016 shows that when Americans choose a new church or house of worship, the first item they consider is the quality of sermons.<sup>1</sup> This is what the graph shows: (On the slide)

Yves Congar, OP (French Dominican Priest who was widely recognized in his lifetime as one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), observed that the faithful “complain that preachers are too bookish in their expressions, [and] that they are overly concerned to use canonical formulas or to pass on passages of official documents (where they often betray a merely superficial reading).”<sup>2</sup> Congar’s critique of the preachers of such sermons is that “they talk like licensed dealers of orthodox formulas that sound impersonal and fixed.”<sup>3</sup>

In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis highlights the fact that many people have expressed their concerns about the preparation and delivery of homilies. We must not ignore these concerns.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Pope Francis expressed his concern about the length and boringness of homilies. He described such a homily as “disaster.”

**Video of news about Pope Francis’ advice to priests regarding long and boring homilies.**

Rome Reports, “Pope Francis Warns Priests to Avoid Long, Boring, Homilies, ‘They are a Disaster,’” Google, accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.romereports.com/en/2023/01/24/pope-francis-warns-priests-to-avoid-long-boring-homilies-they-are-a-disaster/>.

The Vatican did not release the images of Pope Francis’ meeting where he described the homilies of some priests as “a disaster.” During a meeting with students in a liturgy course, the Pope asked priests to be careful with their homilies, without turning them into philosophy classes and to keep them brief. This is not the first time Pope Francis has said something like this. But it is the first time he used the word “disaster.”

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship/>.

<sup>2</sup> Yves Congar, *At the Heart of Christian Worship: Liturgical Essays of Yves Congar*, trans. and ed. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, “Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii gaudium*,” par. 135 (24 November, 2013), (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2013), accessed February 3, 2023, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

**POPE FRANCIS:** *Your words should be simple. Words that everyone can understand. Don't give long homilies.*

**POPE FRANCIS:** *Your homilies should not be boring. Your homilies should reach people's hearts, because they come from your heart.*

**POPE FRANCIS:** *A professor I had would say that a homily should have internal coherence: an idea, an image and an emotional effect, so that people go home with an idea, an image and something that moved their heart. FLASH Allow me this one meanness. The applause was started by the nuns, who are victims of our homilies.*

But Pope Francis has said this advice is not for priests in situations where it is difficult to attend Mass. For example, in some parts of the world, families have to travel for hours or days to receive the Eucharist. In those cases, the Mass is often more intense and the homilies longer than usual.

For the most part, Catholic Priests and Deacons are well educated. But based on feedback from our audience, our preaching seems to lack something when it comes to connecting with our audience. This led me into seeking a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri, where I took a course on a method of preaching called, *Scenic Preaching*.

The aim of this workshop is to train you in how to prepare and deliver *Scenic Preaching* in the context of the Sunday Liturgy. You will help me to test this method of preaching in your various parishes, and your focus group's responses will help me to know its effectiveness on the listeners in terms of engagement and memorability.

#### **What is a Homily? 9:00 a.m. to 9:10 a.m.**

What is a homily to you? How would you explain this to a 4th Grader? (Questions directed to participating preachers to be answered during the workshop).

I see a homily as a story-shaped event in which a preacher engages listeners. An effective homily is the meeting point of many stories, including the biblical story, the liturgical story, the community story, the preacher's story, and the stories of individual worshippers. I believe a homily can be boring to parishioners when the homilist does not treat it as a story-shaped event.

#### **An overview of the New Homiletic Movement**

Preaching has not always been understood as a story-shaped event. In the past, preachers and listeners understood preaching as an event in which the preacher was active, and the listeners were passive. Over time, preachers came to realize the office of preaching required engaging listeners as active participants rather than passive spectators. Preachers and teachers of preaching spent many years brainstorming how to meet the goal of engaging listeners as active participants. They have studied a range of strategies to meet this goal.

One of these strategies was **story-filled preaching** in which the goal was to tell stories as illustrations while preaching. This approach to preaching sometimes departed from scripture and, other times, was more entertaining than transformative. Over time, some preachers moved from story-filled preaching to story-shaped preaching.

The New Homiletic Movement facilitated the transition from story-filled preaching to **story-shaped preaching**. The New Homiletic Movement was born in the 1970s. Dr. David James Randolph (May 13, 1934 – February 26, 2022) coined the name

“New Homiletic” while teaching homiletics at Drew School of Theology in 1965.<sup>5</sup> The New Homiletic promoted “the inductive, narrative, experiential approaches to proclamation,”<sup>6</sup> and breathed “new life into an ailing pulpit.”<sup>7</sup>

### **The three interrelated approaches of preaching of the New Homiletic Movement**

9:10 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

The New Homiletic Movement promoted the inductive, the narrative, and the experiential approaches to proclamation. Three members of the New Homiletic, namely Dr. Fred Craddock, Dr. Eugene Lowry, and Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie, were/are key contributors to these three interrelated approaches. Craddock unpacked the inductive approach. Lowry presents the narrative approach. McKenzie introduces the experiential approach.

#### **Inductive Preaching**

Dr. Fred Craddock identified deductive and inductive as the basic directions of the movement of thought. In deductive preaching, the conclusion is applied to the lives of the listeners. But in inductive preaching, the concrete experiences of the listeners form and direct the movement of the sermon to a general logical conclusion. As a result, the listeners, from the beginning of the preaching, identify themselves as stakeholders in the preaching, which keeps them engaged until the end. Deductive preaching failed to engage listeners and generate transformation. As a response to this failure, Craddock recommended inductive preaching.<sup>8</sup> He argued the inductive method empowers the listeners to take ownership of the preached message and apply it to their lives.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Narrative Preaching**

According to Eugene L. Lowry, “A narrative sermon is any sermon in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot involving a strategic delay of the preacher’s meaning.”<sup>10</sup> He argues sermons should utilize a narrative structure.<sup>11</sup> All sermons need to function as narratives, moving “from conflict to resolution, or from itch to scratch.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> He delivered a paper at the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in which he referred to this approach to preaching as a product of the New Hermeneutic.

<sup>6</sup> O. Wesley Allen, Jr., ed., *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, Revised and with New Sermons (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons Are Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2012), 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form: Expanded Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 14.

This narrative preaching form is called the “Lowry Loop.”<sup>13</sup>

Lowry’s Loop has five steps. First: Upset the listeners’ equilibrium by developing some ambiguity that needs to be resolved. Step one is sometimes referred to as “create the itch.” Second: Ask questions to deepen the ambiguity. Third: Give a clue to the resolution. Fourth: Offer the Good News. Fifth: Give a closure. Here, the preacher closes by presenting a future expectation or resolution that emanates from the previous four steps. A good example of the fifth step is in Romans 8:31 where St. Paul writes, “What then shall we say to this?” The closure offers the expectation of the emergence of a new being in each listener. By using these five steps that define a narrative style of preaching, the sermon mirrors the plot of a story, which moves from a specific beginning to an identifiable end.

### **Experiential Preaching (Scenic Preaching)**

Dr. Alyce M. McKenzie, a newer generation scholar of the New Homiletic, adds to the New Homiletic by proposing an experiential approach to preaching. This approach involves creating vivid scenes using scripture, personal experience, the experiences of others, and events in society. It is an approach that promotes “Show and not Tell” while preaching. McKenzie describes this experiential approach to preaching as *Scenic Preaching*. By making a scene in the pulpit, the homily moves from the preacher’s show to a community experience.

McKenzie’s method of *Scenic Preaching* responds to contemporary challenges in preaching. Visual media now defines the transmission, reception, and decoding of information. Modern day attention spans are shorter than those of previous generations. The proliferation of electronic/communication gadgets makes people partially present in many places simultaneously. How can preaching be engaging and relevant at a time like this? McKenzie invites preachers to harness scenes and craft scenic sermons in which listeners recognize themselves and experience the preaching in a way that is transformational.

### **Scenic Preaching 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.**

**Ice Breaker:** In one minute, each preacher will describe something that they experienced in the last 24 hours. (Scenes are around us. What made this one memorable? Why did you remember that? Why did you choose that out of many things that happened?)

### **What is a Scene?**

McKenzie defines a scene as “the action that takes place in one physical setting in more or less continuous time.”<sup>14</sup> In the same way, Sandra Scofield, an American novelist, essayist, and editor, defines scenes as “those passages in narrative when we slow down and focus on an event in the story so that we are in ‘the moment’ with characters in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Alyce M. McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit: Vivid Preaching for Visual Listeners* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 2.

action.”<sup>15</sup> A scene is not the same as a story. It is a story event within a story.<sup>16</sup> The Story of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11–32), for example, has about six scenes or story events: (1) the boy asking for his inheritance, (2) his squandering it in various forms of excess, (3) his decision to return home as he sits with the pigs; (4) his trip home rehearsing what he will say to his father, (5) his father’s greeting; (6) his father’s encounter with the older son.<sup>17</sup>

### Other Scenes in the Bible<sup>18</sup>

Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37); Jeremiah’s trip to the potter’s house (Jer. 18); Account of Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus (1 Cor. 15:3–8; Gal. 1:11–16; Acts 9:3–9); and the woman with the hemorrhages (Matt. 9:20–22).

### Characteristics of Effective Scenes<sup>19</sup>

- 1. Pulse:** An effective scene evokes emotion such as fear, anxiety, happiness, etc. in the audience. With Pulse, the audience relates and can empathize. Important questions to ask at this point include: (a) Does the scene have emotional energy? (b) Is tension being built or resolved? (c) Do you care about anyone in the scene?
- 2. Purpose:** There are various reasons why a part of the larger story (scene) is given in detail instead of summary. These reasons include: (a) To introduce new plot elements; (b) To reveal something about a character; (c) To set up a situation that will be important in a later scene; (d) To offer information needed to move the plot forward.
- 3. Plot:** This is the structure, which includes a beginning, a middle and an end. The plot entails “a situation at the beginning, a line of action, and a new situation at the end.”<sup>20</sup>
- 4. Point of View:** A scene can be presented either from the preacher’s perspective, or one of the characters’ perspective. An effective scene helps the listeners to experience the scene from a specific perspective. Choose one and stick to it.
- 5. Memorable Imagery:** McKenzie defines imagination as “the ability to experience that which is not immediately before us.”<sup>21</sup> In defining image in the context of preaching, Barbara Brown Taylor says, “For preachers, imagination is the ability to form images in the minds of their listeners that are not physically present to their senses, so that they find themselves in a wider world with new choices about who and how they will be.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sandra Scofield, *The Scene Book: A Primer for the Fiction Writer* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 35.

<sup>17</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–79, 98, 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, “Preaching the Body,” in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 213.

**6. Concrete Significant Detail:** When telling a story, if there is too much insignificant detail, the theme and power of a scene are lost. At the other extreme, if there is not enough detail, if it is not concrete, it becomes difficult or impossible for the audience to enter into the scene.

**7. Show, Don't Tell:** A successful scene does not pass judgment, it shows the actions, and leaves the job of passing judgment to the audience. For example, instead of saying, Joe was angry, you can say, "Joe made a fist, hit it on his desk and yelled, "Enough of that!" Instead of saying, "Joe was excited," you can say, "As soon as Joe heard the news, he jumped out of his chair, rolled on the floor, and he kept saying, "I made it, I made it!" So, a well presented scene shows characters' emotions through physical signs.

*At this point, I will make the participants give a list of emotions, and for each emotion, I will make them list different actions that could express such emotions.*

Another way to obey the "show, don't tell" rule is to present information in terms of dialogue, that is, as much as possible, put words in people's mouth. So, instead of "Evi told her grandma that she was hungry," you say, "Evi came to her grandma and said, 'Grandma, I am hungry.'" Such dialogues make it easier for listeners to visualize the scene, and they bring the audience one step closer to the scene.

### **8. Effective Opening**

(a) An African adage says, "The morning shows the day." The opening of your scene tells the listeners whether to take you seriously or not. There are several ways to open a scene. One way is to use an **image** that is part of the setting.

(b) Another way to open is what Jordan Rosenfeld, a freelance writer, calls "**Action Launch**."<sup>23</sup> Here, you grab people's attention from the very beginning by jumping into the middle of the scene. For example, you can begin the scene this way, "He woke up in the middle of the night and began to scream, 'Who did this to us? Who did this to us?'" This opening will keep the listeners wondering, "Who is he? What did they do to them?" You take advantage of their curiosity to fill in the information they need as the actions move on in the scene. This requires proper timing. If the preacher delays the information for too long, the listeners may get confused and lose track of the message.

(b) **Character Launch** is an opening that shows the most immediate desire of the character. It shows what is at stake for the character. It could be the desire of a young man to propose to his longtime friend. A scene is memorable if there is something at stake for the character.

(c) **Narrative Summary Launch** lays the groundwork, it is like a brief description of the scene.

(d) **Familiar Phrase Launch** opens the scene with a word or phrase from an earlier scene or a familiar scene in the scripture, another text, or in life generally. For example, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

(e) **Setting Launch** opens the scene with comments on some aspects of the setting or the event.

**9. Effective Ending:** The ending of a scene should be the "aha" moment. It should

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<sup>23</sup> Jordan E. Rosenfeld, *Make a Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Book, 2008), 15.



linger in the listener's memory as that is the point that things begin to add up and make sense. There are different kinds of endings:

- (a) **Summary ending:** this summarizes what just happened in the scene.
- (b) **Dialogue ending:** This ends with a dialogue that is significant to the scene.
- (c) **Cliff hanger ending:** This ending leaves the listeners in suspense.
- (d) **Ending with a Question:** This ending keeps the listeners engaged even after the speaker stops speaking.
- (e) **Conclusive ending:** This ending does not leave the listeners in any doubt or suspense. It is a powerful closing statement.

**10. Delayed Punchline:** An effective scene delays the punchline until the end. If the listeners gets the punchline too early, they can easily disengage.

### **Good Reasons to Preach in Scenes**

- (a) In a distracted world characterized by lack of patience for long stories, when preachers invite people into palm-sized segments of the larger story of salvation, the people will easily move from there and connect to the larger story.<sup>24</sup>
- (b) Not everybody has the gift of presenting the narrative of their life experiences, but almost everyone loves to share specific moments of their lives. Scenic preaching caters to how people experience and process life.<sup>25</sup>
- (c) Preaching in scenes aids memorable sequence, so it makes it easier for the preacher to internalize the message and preach it with minimal or no notes.<sup>26</sup> Fulton Sheen shared about an Irish Woman who said of her Bishop, "He doesn't even remember what he is going to preach; how does he expect us to remember and practice what he is preaching?"
- (d) It enables preachers to employ pauses, gesture, and passion.<sup>27</sup>
- (e) Scenes create experiences since they are vivid and include sensory details. They invite the audience into the setting to identify with the character.<sup>28</sup>
- (f) They serve as ethical simulation chambers for dealing with real-life challenges. They make us identify with characters, undergo changes with them, and we take that change into the real world.
- (g) Scenic preaching helps to communicate the word of God in a way that makes meaning in the lives even of the simplest of people.

**10 Minutes Break** 10:30 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.

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<sup>24</sup> McKenzie, *Making a Scene in the Pulpit*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 109

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

**An Example of Scenic Preaching by Dr Alyce McKenzie 10:40 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.**  
**SCENIC SERMON 9: SINGLE-SCENE SERMON THAT USES A BIBLICAL SCENE AS ITS HOME SCENE<sup>29</sup>**

*Sermon Title:* "Locked in a Room with Open Doors"

*Sermon Text:* John 20:19–23

*Occasion:* Second Annual National Young Preachers' Festival, a gathering of high-school, college, and seminary students interested in exploring ministry as a vocation. The two-day event featured sermons, keynotes, and workshops related to preaching.

*Location:* United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas.

### **Introduction to Scripture Reading**

In 1969, Presbyterian preacher and author Ernst Campbell (1923–2010), then senior minister of Riverside Church in New York, preached a sermon titled "Locked in a Room with Open Doors."

Dr. Campbell began his sermon with a story about a family that had two brothers. The younger one, for whatever reason, had a fear of open doors. The older one would taunt the younger brother with this threat: "Someday I'm going to lock you up in a room with all the doors open."

Dr. Campbell's sermon was based on Deuteronomy 30:19. Mine, today, is based on the events that happened Easter eve. But I give credit and thanks to Dr. Campbell for a great title (*read John 20:19–23*)!

### **Scene One: Me Looking into the Upper Room**

They have boarded up the windows, but they missed a spot, and through it I can see that they are all in there, all but Thomas, who seems to be missing. I'd like to go in and talk with them about what happened earlier today, but the door is locked, and I can't get anyone's attention. Seems like it's time for them to get out and start spreading the news instead of hiding in a panic room. I wonder what is stopping them.

### **My Memory of a Bear Pacing His Nonexistent Cage**

They remind me of something I saw years ago when my kids were little, and our family went with my older brother Wade and his family to the Philadelphia Zoo. Wade is 6'5", with a shock of copper-colored hair, blue eyes, and the family nose. He and Sharon brought their two children. Murry and I brought ours. I opted out of the reptile house opportunity and wandered off on my own, in a reflective mood, toward the bears. There I saw the tall red-haired man standing at the rail and went and stood next to him, leaning against him in a sisterly way, my attention focused on the bears. Many zoos have moved away from cages and confinement to freer, open habitats. There were the younger bears, strutting around, being bears, enjoying their free and open space on a fresh Saturday afternoon. But back in the far corner, there was a lone bear, an old bear, a mangy bear, with tufts of fur missing. Even from a distance, I could see that he had an odd look in his eyes. And he was pacing in a strange way, over and over again: walk five paces to the right, shake a leg, turn, walk five paces to the left, do the weird leg shake, walk back to the right. We'll leave him pacing his nonexistent cage for now.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 164–69.

### **In the Upper Room with the Disciples**

Come now and stand with me outside the upper room. What are you thinking as you look in at the disciples? I realize that, in a way, I've been locked in a room with open doors at several points in my life. I've paced plenty of cages.

#### *A Cage of Vocational Doubts*

Called to ministry in my teens, despite my introversion and dislike of public speaking, here I am, age twenty-one, sitting in a borrowed preaching robe in the unairconditioned sanctuary of Page Memorial UMC in Aberdeen, North Carolina. It's the summer before I start seminary at Duke Divinity School. I have not yet had a preaching course. I am looking out at the congregation, thinking, "Why me? Why not Mr. Hinson the pharmacist? Why not Ms. Davis, the reading specialist? You're both older and wiser than I am. Come up here and help me out!"

I thank God Christ came in and said, "Peace be with you," calling me to step out of the cage and step up to my vocation.

#### *A Cage of "Never Enough"*

I see myself in there with the disciples pacing the "never enough" cage. Am I a good enough wife, mother, pastor, teacher, author, preacher? Am I doing enough? Is it good enough?

I thank God Christ came in, and called, and said, "Peace be with you," calling me to step out of the cage of "never enough" and into the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in every arena of life.

#### *Congregational Cages*

Are you in there with the disciples? We all have experienced some rooms in our lives with very heavy doors and very rusty hinges. It's not as easy as just opening the door and walking out into the sunshine when we are:

- Locked in an abusive relationship.
  - Locked in an addiction.
  - Locked in by physical disability, or mental deterioration, of someone we love. And you sit before your loved one, who you know is in there somewhere, even though she no longer recognizes you.
  - Locked in loneliness that seems to know no bounds.
  - Locked in by discrimination on the basis of race, sexual orientation, or gender.
  - Locked in by poverty, with so much to offer and so little opportunity to offer it.
- Some of these are heavy doors with rusty hinges. Lots of people are locked in. Who can break them out? Who can break them out? Who can break us out?

### **Jesus at the Door**

I just noticed him standing next to us, looking in at the disciples with us. I wonder if he's going to reenact that lovely painting by Warner Sallman, "Christ at Heart's Door." It's based on Revelation 3:20: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." The lesson I've heard in many sermons is that the door has no handle (as in the painting), and so we must open it to him from within. That is not the biblical scenario of John 20, however. First of all, the Jesus I see standing next to us, looking in at the disciples, doesn't resemble the Jesus of artist Warner Sallman's painting. He doesn't have

shoulder-length auburn hair for one thing; he doesn't look patient for another. I wonder what he is thinking to himself as he stands there.

Now, I would never presume to know, but I can't help wondering if it was something like this: "How is huddling in a panic room an example of following my directions? In none of the Gospels did I or an angelic messenger instruct you to, "Go find a safe house with a panic room and lock yourselves in for an indefinite period of time!" That's it, I do not have time to watch you pace your cages anymore."

### **Jesus Going In**

And suddenly, he's not standing outside anymore. He's in the panic room with them. Look at the expressions on their faces!

*What an entrance!* Where did he learn to come to where people are hurting and break them out like that? Well, he is the Son of a Father who has lots of practice passing through locked doors and setting prisoners free:

- Joseph at the bottom of a pit (Gen. 37:24)
- Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego in the furnace; God sends an angel to protect them (Dan. 3).
- Daniel in the lion's den; God's angel shuts the lions' mouths (Dan. 6)
- The Israelites in bondage in Egypt; God opens a way through the waters for them to pass through (Exod. 14)
- Hagar and Ishmael dying in the desert; God provides a well of water (Gen. 21:8–21)
- Elijah hiding from Jezebel in a cave; God calls him out with a still, small voice (1 Kgs. 19)
- Lazarus dead in the tomb, starting to stink; Jesus calls him forth to live again (John 11)
- Paul and Silas in jail in Philippi; God provides an earthquake to break them out (Acts 16:16-40)
- Jesus in a prison of pain, trapped on a cross; death does not have the last word.

### **Today, It's Our Turn. Today Is Your Day!**

Today the Risen Christ has found your safe house, has breached your panic room. *What an entrance!* He passes through locked doors and stands before you in

- Your apartment
- Your bedroom
- Your breakroom
- Your classroom
- Your conference room
- Your cubicle
- Your hospital room
- Your kitchen
- Your living room
- Your office
- Your cell ... wherever you have locked yourself in so you can pace your cage

*What an entrance! And what a greeting!* He stands before us, not with a "Hi, how ya doing? Or "Have a nice day." This is no ordinary greeting. This is not a wish. This is

statement of fact: “Peace be with you” (John 20:21b). Jesus, through the power of God, is Peace in Person, here to still our storms.

*What an entrance. What a greeting. And what a gift!* This gift can come only from someone who is one with us in our sufferings and also one with God in presence and power. This One is fully divine; he can pass through walls. This One is fully human; he shows us his hands and his side. This One knows what it’s like to be bullied; sexually humiliated; discriminated against for whom he loves and how he has loved them; tased face-down on the pavement, though he holds no weapon. This One, on a Friday not long ago, was torn up, nailed up, and torn down. This One stands before us and breathes on us the Holy Spirit. He told us he was leaving. He told us he would be back. Now he’s back, breathing on us the forgiveness and power of the Holy Spirit, the assurance of his personal, pervasive, permanent presence in our midst.

*What an entrance! What a greeting. What a gift. And now, what an exit!* After the Risen Jesus offers the gift of peace, he says, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (v. 21c). Then he breathes on them and us the Holy Spirit.

And now it’s time to exit the panic room, to unlock the doors from within, to realize our cage has no bars. Today is the day that he has come in to call us out, to go with him where he is going next: to scenes of suffering; places where his beloved children are locked in by addiction, loneliness, prejudice, and violence; to proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free.

### **Back to the Bear**

Now back to the bear. I stood there mesmerized by his endless pacing in his nonexistent cage. I elbowed the tall, red-haired man against whom I was leaning, companionably, and pointed to the bear.

“He kind of reminds me of me,” I said. And then I looked up at him.

Right hair, right height; wrong nose ... green eyes ...

“Yeah,” he said, “I know what you mean. Don’t you kind of wonder what will ever make him stop?”

**Lunch** 11:50 a.m. to 12:40 p.m.

**Ice Breaker: In groups of two or three, come up with a scene of not more than 2 mins and present to the class.** 12:40 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**Recipe for Preparing a Scenic Homily** 1:00 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

**Note:** Begin your preparation for next Sunday’s homily as soon as your last preaching for this Sunday ends.

**Prayer:** Begin with an invocation of the Holy Spirit to inspire you in your preparation and your delivery. Pray also that God may open the ears and hearts of your listeners.

**Initial Reading:** Read all the texts for the day: the scripture readings, and the liturgical prayers. Write down the images, emotions, thoughts, key words, and scenes that you observe in the text. In the case of a non-narrative text, imagine a scene or scenes that could be behind the text. For scripture text, find out the location of the scene and where it stands in relation to the rest of the book and the rest of the Bible. How does your knowledge of the position of the text influence your view of its significance?

**Setting:**

- In the text, what can you taste, smell, touch, see, and hear?
- Compare and contrast the biblical scene with its contemporary form.
- What seems odd or intriguing to you about the scene?
- What do you like and what do you dislike about the scene?
- What images in the text would make for vivid preaching?
- What is the agenda of the author?
- What is the background or situation of the original audience to which the work was directed?
- What aspects of the scene would you like to research about in commentaries?

**Plot:**

- What is the conflict behind the scene or in the scene?
- Who has power, and who doesn't?
- What is at stake? Who wants what?
- Where do you see similar conflicts in life within and around you in your community and world?

**Characters:**

- Which character do you identify with most?
- Which character would your congregation identify with most?
- What are the motivations of the characters for the way they act in the scene?
- How is each character admirable or flawed?
- How are our actions similar to the characters?
- Whose voice seems absent in the scene?

**Application:**

- Where does the scene fit into your current life context?
- How does it invite you in to find clarity, comfort, or challenge?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes from your own life?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes from the lives of those around you?
- Does the scene remind you of scenes in the larger world?
- Does the scene remind you of historical scenes?

**Theology:**

- Who is God, as portrayed in this scene?
- Who are human beings?
- What changes does God ask of us?
- What are we to believe and do as a result of entering into this scene?

**Theme:**

- There are many options for themes.
- The best practice is to stick to one theme.
- Decide on the theme by asking yourself: What is the general theme here? What question does this scene address? What challenges does this scene pose? In what way does this scene provide comfort? What answer does this offer.

**Impact of the Scene and Homily:**

- What comes after the scene, and what impact do I envisage it to have?
- What is the next scene in the book?
- What scene comes next for you?

- What scene comes next for your listeners as they leave the liturgy and enter the world?

**Commentaries:** At this point, you may consult commentaries with questions and hunches to fine tune your ideas.

**Rehearse:** After your first full draft of homily, record yourself (audio or video), listen to yourself. Move ideas around, and delete whatever does not fit the theme. Share with a friend or family member for feedback. Continue to revise until your message becomes as vivid as possible.

**Rubrics Developed by Dr Alyce M. McKenzie for Assessing a Scenic Homily**

1:45 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

<b>SERMON RESPONSE RUBRIC</b>	Unacceptable	Needs attention	Fair	Good	Excellent
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Central Message</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The preacher developed a clear, weighty, and relevant existential concern for the hearers.					
The preacher addressed the existential concern clearly and effectively.					
The message was theologically sound.					
The message offered the hearers an experience of God's good news.					
The preacher invited the listeners to respond to the message in a clear and compelling way					
<b>Presentation of Exegetical Results</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The preacher conveyed a central claim of the text in the sermon					
The preacher drew a meaningful and appropriate analogy between the text and the situation/needs of the hearers					
The preacher maintained for the hearers a consistent identification with a character, audience or author in/behind the biblical text					
The theological category of the sermon matched that of the text.					
<b>Sermonic Form</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The sermon was a unity without extraneous, tangential or distracting content					
The sermon flowed smoothly from beginning to end, from itch to scratch.					
The sermon ended climactically.					
<b>Language &amp; Imagery</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The preacher used imagery that was relevant and weighty					
The preacher used imagery effectively to offer hearers an experience of the existential concern of the sermon.					
The preacher used imagery effectively to offer hearers an experience of God's good news as addressing the existential concern of the sermon.					
<b>Delivery/Embodiment</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The preacher's delivery/tone was appropriate to the topic, conversational, had passion, and was engaging.					



The sermon was well articulated, could be heard easily (in terms of volume) and had varied intonation & pace				
The preacher maintained engaging eye contact				
The preacher's body language enhanced, and did not distract from, the delivery.				

## COMMENTS

### Central Message

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### Presentation of Exegetical Results

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### Sermonic Form

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### Language & Imagery

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### Delivery/Embodiment

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### Summation of Strengths and Areas for Growth

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**First Post-workshop Preaching: 1st Sunday of Lent Year A 2023** 2:15 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.

In groups of two or three (break out session), come up with suggestions for preaching a scenic homily based on 1st Sunday of Lent Year A 2023 (First Post-Workshop Preaching).

**Presentation of Groups' Discussion Outcome to Class** 3:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

**Announcement** 3:45 p.m. to 3:55 p.m.

**Closing Prayer by One of the Preachers** 3:55 p.m.

**Dismissal** 4:00 p.m.

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