

Slide 1 – cave painting

Human beings are story tellers and we always have been. Whatever we experience, whatever happens, we tell the story of it to someone else.

We might keep it brief, we might exaggerate and make a whole epic out of it; either way we all tell our stories.

When we meet someone new we swap stories as we look to connect with one another. Storytelling is a common currency because we all do it.

Slide 2 – Jesus teaching

Teachers throughout the ages have used stories to communicate. And Jesus taught virtually everything through parables and stories

Story-telling was embedded in the Jewish faith. The Passover festival every year re-tells the story of the time Israel was in slavery in Egypt.

The annual Jewish festival of Purim celebrates the Jews escape from annihilation and the whole OT story of Esther is read aloud. It becomes pantomime like, so that every time the name of the villain Haman is mentioned the children shake rattles and blow trumpets.

Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God with stories, some long, some really short but all of them colourful pictures designed to connect with first century Jewish culture.

Sometimes we miss the nuance and the humour and the controversy of the stories because we are not 1st century Jewish people.

But the stories are pictures even we can recognise.

A tiny seed growing into something large.

Yeast working through flour to make dough.

Slide 3 - attic

And who hasn't imagined winning the lottery?? Or finding buried treasure. Which of us wouldn't like to buy a house and then discover a hidden box of treasure in the attic???

Some of Jesus short stories leave us wondering what it all means.

Slide - Maze

Jane quoted Tom Wright in her sermon a fortnight ago – the stories are like a maze and we puzzle about how to get to the heart of it? What does it mean?

Slide - pearl

The merchant who sold everything to own a pearl of great value. More questions than answers in that story. If he sold everything to own it, where did he live? What did he do? How did he survive? What was the point of doing that? What on earth is SO valuable you must have it???

Slide – Jesus teaching

The stories are scenes the people would instantly recognise – fishermen sorting the edible fish from the “bad” fish of no value.

Some of the stories are so real to us and so rich in truth that we forget they are stories.

The Good Samaritan was a story. The Prodigal Son is one of the most valuable resources for teaching and discovering the heart of Father God. It's a story.

What is your story at the moment? Is it short with an odd twist or a bit of an epic? And what is God saying to you, and what stories is he using to say it?

I was thinking about the real and fictional stories that have had an impact on me.

Slide – novels.

As a teenager I read "One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich" by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. For the first time I understood the repression of Stalinist Russia. It's fiction – but utterly true to experience.

I also read Paul Brickhill's "The Great Escape" which was true account of the famous breakout from Stalag Luft III.

Slide – film stills

Fictional stories in films like Castaway and The Truman Show, Terminal and Bruce Almighty all have enormous potential to say more to us than perhaps the film maker intended.

Slide - Jessica

Katherine was much taken by the true-life film of Australian Jessica Watson who sailed solo around the world.

Slide - Charles Mackesy

If you haven't yet come across the book and the film The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse, then you have a treat waiting for

you! With sincere and beautiful vulnerability, Charles can speak deep truth through his simple pictures and few words. He is never overt about his faith, but it shines through his art and story.

Slide - Jesus

I think the point is proved, we tell and listen to stories, stories are a wonderful resource for learning, Jesus taught virtually everything through stories (parables) stories can stay with us shaping our lives.

How might that be of value to us day by day?

Here is the proposition. God wants to speak to us.

Of course God speaks through his word (if we are reading or hearing it.) Also through Psalms and Spiritual Songs as Michael reminded us last week. We can hear God speaking through someone else speaking into our lives, deliberately or inadvertently.

But we can only devote so much time to reading the bible or listening to music, to worship and fellowship. What we spend most of our time doing is living out our ordinary lives. Walking the dog, commuting to work, washing and ironing, remembering to take the right pills at the right time.

If we are open to God speaking, then there is no limit to the number of parables and stories and events and occurrences every day by which God can connect with us and speak to us.

And because all of us are used to taking an ordinary event and telling the story of it to someone else, it's not too hard a step to be alert to God speaking through ordinary events.

Those of you who are on the daily church prayer whatsapp group will know I learned some things while walking on holiday – here is the prayer from July 11th.

Slide - walking

Further lessons from walking on painful feet. The distance and the weight of your pack makes you question everything you are carrying. The spiritual application is obvious. Maybe I'm carrying thoughts and habits and ways of being that used to keep me safe or help me accomplish the task of living. But that was then. This is now. The first step is to ask the question. The second is to find stillness and silence. The third is to let the Holy Spirit take time to reveal to you what it is. The fourth is to unpack it, leave it and move on.

Jesus - teaching

The stories of Jesus were memorable pictures taken from the ordinariness of everyday life.

A lost coin. A bright lamp. A narrow gate. A compassionate stranger. The return of a wayward child.

If we are determined and with a little practice, the ordinary stuff of everyday is transformed to become the means by which God is speaking.

Why don't we practice?

I'm going to show you a picture.

Don't force yourself to jump to an interpretation. Just look. Let it be. Does it say anything to you?

Slide



I'm not going to tell you what it says to me, but afterwards at coffee, you are welcome to chat about what it said to you. Or that it didn't say anything at all. Or that God speaks into your life in a completely different way.

There's a story we share and we're going to sing about it, a hymn full of biblical images. It's the central story, the essential story, Its reason why we are here. Before we sing let's pray.

Lord Jesus, like Samuel of old we are listening. We want to hear you speak and pray that by your Spirit we are alert to what you can show us moment by moment, day by day. May the stories of our lives be the means by which you speak. Amen.

237 – I will sing the wondrous story

Rev. Jon Hutchinson, 30/7/23