

Teaching as Jesus taught: Why sermons alone are not enough

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Preacher: Susan Norman

- [0 : 0 0] We are very blessed today to have Susan Norman coming to speak to us again. Many of you know Susan. She is a pillar of learners and a pillar of St. John's.
- She has shared with us before about her work with international students and work on campuses, but today she is going to speak on something completely different, which I totally applaud.
- She said, she's a provocative, interesting woman. She said to me, do you think they'll let us put it in the bulletin?
- Sermons are not enough. And I said, yes, yes. Very, very, very intriguing topic. And I know that she will have great insight to share with us.
- So please join me in welcoming her and thanking her. Sorry, Jim. I'm sorry. Yeah, it's possible for us. Well, that's a good introduction.
- [1 : 0 0] Lauren Wilkinson one time quoted a poem, stumble and fall, stumble and fall. The sin of Adam comes to us all.
- I was about to apologize for being, giving you a provocative title. I'm not a provocative woman. I prefer to think of the title as edgy.
- Better? Edgy. I want to be very clear. Sermons are a very important way of teaching the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Proclaiming, expounding the word of God, declaring the truth to us. It's very important. And here at St. John's, we have exceptional preaching.
- I know you know that. It is powerful. It is effective. It is extremely well done. And we can all be deeply grateful for that.
- [2 : 0 5] But it's not quite enough. I'm sure you're familiar with the recent fad, WWJD.
- Is that right? I'm acronymically challenged. What would Jesus do? And it's used for everything. Would Jesus wear a fur coat in spite of animal rights if he lived in a cold climate?
- If Jesus got old and gray, would he dye his hair? Would Jesus drive a lexulus?
- And this is an important question. Lexus. Oh, is it? Lexus. Thank you. I'm also car challenged.
- Lexus. So, what is it? Oh, lexulus is a game I play online. Right. Yeah, yeah. Scrabble online. Very fun. But we don't so much ask the question, what did Jesus do?
- [3 : 1 7] And when it comes to teaching, we really need to ask that question. What did Jesus do? How did he teach? We know that he taught and he taught and he taught everywhere he went.
- And we know that he left his disciples with the teaching mandate. Go into the whole world. Make disciples. Teach them. In one way or another, all Christians are teachers.

So, it is ironic that we don't always look closely at how Jesus taught. At the turn of the millennium, which, unlike the students I work with, most of us remember, when 1999 became 2000 or 2000, Time magazine declared that Jesus was the most powerful, influential person, not only in the 20th century, but in the entire history of humankind.

And even when he is not acknowledged as the Lord of the cosmos, the Son of God, the King of Kings, he is acknowledged as an excellent teacher.

So, today we are going to look at some of the ways he taught. First of all, he taught everywhere he went.

[4 : 45] At weddings, at funerals, in the synagogue, beside the lake, in a boat, in the Pharisee's home, beside his friend's tomb, walking from town to town, he taught.

And even when he was dying a torturous death on the cross, he continued to teach. His prayer, for example, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do, is a profound example of one of the many things that he taught.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Jesus taught everyone. He taught educated people.

He taught simple people. He taught women and children, which is not insignificant. When Jesus let Mary sit at his feet in their home, that was actually a posture of a disciple.

She wasn't just a woman on the edge of the crowd. He invited her in to himself as her teacher. He taught religious leaders, prostitutes, outcasts, inner circle power brokers, tax collectors, and even a hated Roman soldier.

[6 : 07] If we are to look from an educational point of view at what were Jesus' teaching goals, it's pretty interesting.

First of all, he wanted people to think in new ways, to shift their perspective, to review what they'd always believed, what they'd always thought, and look afresh at ideas and ways of being.

He wanted people to change internally. His first proclamation when he came into his ministry as an adult was repent, turn, change, redirect yourself, reorient yourself, change inside.

He also, his goal was to help people know the kingdom of God and to live in it, to live in it with joy, with understanding, with love for God and love for human beings.

Those were his teaching goals. And he set about teaching in some pretty interesting ways. Everyone is familiar with probably the most common technique or teaching strategy that Jesus used, and that's parables.

[7 : 24] One scholar has said, Jesus not only spoke in parables and regularly insisted that what he was proclaiming could not be set forth in any way other than parables.

He was practically an ambulatory parable in and of himself. Forgive me when I talk about Hebrew and Greek with Dr. Packer sitting here and Harvey sitting there and scholars all over the place.

I sadly only know what I'm told about Hebrew and Greek. But the word that is translated into English as parable comes from the Greek word *parabole*, from which we get parallel lines and various other words.

And the Greek word means to place alongside, parallel lines, to place alongside. But in the thinking of the Jewish people, they would also be influenced by the Hebrew word *mashcha*, I don't know if that's how to pronounce it, which means resemblance or comparison.

And so the New Testament writers used this Greek word infused with Hebrew meaning, which is something they did before, I think, to describe what was a very new emerging literary form.

[8 : 57] It's not exactly that Jesus invented the parable, but he took it to a whole new level. And so this is a very helpful definition, I find, of parables by another New Testament scholar named Dodd.

At its simplest, the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness and strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its use, its precise application to tease it into active thought.

Okay, so it's meant to puzzle us. It's meant to say, what? It's meant to surprise us. It's meant to upset us, to shatter our preconceived ideas.

Parables, quite interesting. They encourage active participation. The readers are drawn in. And of course, one of the ways that Jesus does that is by talking about things that are absolutely everyday, a lost coin or a lost sheep.

Ed and I have just moved into a new apartment. Everything is lost. Yesterday, we spent about an hour and a half looking for three notebooks.

[10 : 19] We found them. I was convinced they had disappeared into thin air. Jesus used the everyday things of life, yeast and sheep, to kind of draw people in to what he had to say.

And then, quite often, there's a twist. So, the rich fool has a bumper crop. He builds new barons. This is so exciting.

He's getting even richer. And then, he dies. A man goes down a well-traveled road to Jericho. And, what happens?

Well, the bad guy does something remarkably good. And the good guys walk right by and do nothing at all. The twist.

The upside down. The shake it up. The son of the rich father leaves home, full of confidence, full of excitement about his new life.

[11 : 29] And, he ends up where? In a pigsty? So, we can see how Jesus is teaching his people, his listeners, to think in new ways.

He's reorienting them to Jesus, to his own way of thinking. Shaking it up. So, the things of earth become the realities of the kingdom of God.

Light shining forth in the darkness. The open arms of the father welcoming home the lost son. The older brother's lack of forgiveness. And, he misses the party.

So, life in the upside down kingdom of God is held out. Rich, joyful, painful, full of light and love.

But, problems are, I'm sorry, parables are also problematic, right? First of all, they're hard to understand. I have a wonderful description of, Chesterton's description of parables.

[12 : 43] So, Chesterton said that if you gave people an analogy, sorry, an analogy, and they claim that they do not understand, you should graciously offer them another.

If they say they don't understand that either, you should oblige them with a third. But, from there on, if they still insist that they do not understand, the only thing left is to praise them for the one truth they do have a grip on.

Yes, you tell them, that is quite correct. You do not understand. So, they have also been, the parables have also been interpreted through the centuries in very weird and unbiblical ways.

They can mean just about anything at all. I don't know if any of you are familiar with a book that was published in the early 70s, which dates me thoroughly. It was called, it's called The Pooh Perplex.

Anyone familiar with that? Okay. So, it was about Winnie the Pooh. It was a pretend series of essays, literary criticism of Winnie the Pooh, which is a delightful children's book about a bear named Pooh.

- [14 : 01] And, so, this, the person who wrote this book pretended he was scholars from different, with different opinions, and some, you know, Freudian, some Marxist.
- Just a couple of the titles of the chapters. This is so much fun, I had to include it. The, one chapter, The Paradoxical Persona, The Hierarchy of Heroism in Winnie the Pooh.
- A bourgeoisie writer's proletarian fables. Poison Paradise, The Underside of Pooh. The Theory and Practice of Bardic Verse, Notations on the Hums of Pooh.
- It goes on. Oh, this is my favorite. A.A. Mills, Honey, Balloon, Pit, Gun, Tail, Bathtub Complex.
- So, the parables have suffered a similar fate by people who thought they knew better. And, yet, when we think about it, the parable is not about facts.
- [15 : 14] It's about, it's meant to be evocative. It's meant to puzzle us, to make us go deeper. It's meant to explore new ways.
- And, it's meant to make us feel. Most of all, it's meant to make us feel. Stories are about creating empathy. So, again, The Prodigal Son, which one literary critic has called the best short story in the history of literature.
- It's a story. It's meant to make us feel. So, we, Christians, we feel with the prodigal son, don't we? We feel like we've been in the pig pen and we need to go home to the Father.
- It's used in sermons all the time to call us back to God. But then, if we're truthful, many of us have felt like the elder brother. We felt that somehow we're missing out.
- Somehow, everyone else in the Christian community is more important than we are. And we get the, the, the, the leftovers of the Father's affection. Sometimes we feel that way.
- [16 : 28] And then, you know, especially if we have children of our own, we identify with the Father. We see his longing for his son. We share his joy when someone comes home.
- we're meant to feel. Questions. Everyone, I'm sure, is familiar with, in education circles, with the, the, the, the way of teaching entirely using questions.
- So, the teacher doesn't actually give out any information at all. The teacher asks questions. Socrates took this to a very high level. But it's widely used today in teaching all kinds of things.
- The questions make the learner curious. Leads them on to the next question, to the next one, to the next one. Jesus used questions in a very wide range of ways, not just to arouse curiosity.
- So, here are some, just a tiny few, four, of the questions that Jesus asked. First of all, in the story of the Good Samaritan, at the end of it, he said, which of these three, the Samaritan, the Pharisee, and the priest, which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the injured man?
- [17 : 59] I wonder, I wonder what was going through the mind of the person who had asked Jesus, who is my neighbor?
- Jesus called in that story and with that question, he brings the story into focus and asks his listener to change his perspective, to think in entirely new ways.
- So that was a question to probe, to probe accepted moral standards, social norms, to get below the surface.
- And then, there's an interesting question at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry when some of John's disciples saw him and said, look, the Lamb of God.
- And Jesus turns to them and says, what do you want? Now, on the surface, that's a pretty understandable question.

- [19 : 11] You know, you're talking about me, what do you want? But when you think about it, it's really inviting a deeper thought. What is it that you don't have that you think I can give you?
- What is it that you need to know that your current teacher is not teaching you? And, so, they answer with another question, where do you live?
- Again, stupid question. What does that have to do with anything? The Lamb of God. that. But, they were, I think, that they were nervous.
- The great teacher is talking to them and he's asking them a question and I think that they just, first thing that came into their head, well, where do you live?
- Where we live is important and it says something about us. So, but because of Jesus' question, their question, Jesus said, come and see and they spent the day with him.
- [20 : 17] That was the beginning of their participating in another of Jesus' teaching strategies, apprenticeship. They became his disciples. They followed him, they lived with him.
- I'm not going to talk about apprenticeship, but I just had to throw that out there. So, he drew them in with this fairly simple question with an undercurrent, with another level.
- Another time, Jesus healed a man's hand and of course, I think it was on the Sabbath, yes it was on the Sabbath and the Pharisees objected and he said, what is lawful?
- To do good or to do evil? To save life or to kill? There's only one answer to that question.
- But, he was probing their religious understanding of what is good. He was probing their understanding of the law.
- [21 : 22] He was calling them to look beyond the letter of the law, to the spirit of the law. His question was meant to probe, to begin the process of change.
- Then, there was Peter, the question that Jesus asked Peter at the shore of the lake. This is a post-resurrection appearance and they have been the disciples have been out fishing.
- That was their default activity and they come into shore where Jesus is making breakfast for them. And, Jesus says to Peter, well, first of all, what he didn't say to Peter, he didn't say, Peter, have you got it all straight?
- You're the leader of the church. I'm leaving it all to you. The future of the cosmos rests on you, Peter. Have you got the instruction manual I gave you?
- Have you taken the right courses? Are you ready? And, instead, he says, Peter, do you love me? And then, he says, Peter, do you love me?
- [22 : 38] And, a third time, Peter having assured him that he did love him, he says, Peter, do you love me? Three times, Peter had denied knowing Jesus.
- Three times, Jesus says, Peter, do you love me? But, my favorite question that Jesus asked is at the house, I don't have a clock.
- Okay, oh, there it is, good, okay, got to talk fast. The third question was, thank you, was when Simon, the Pharisee, invited Jesus to his house and big, probably quite a big dinner, rich house, bright lights, you know, and a woman, a prostitute, comes in off the street pours ointment on Jesus, weeps tears of repentance, and Simon, of course, is horrified, and Jesus asks him the question about, you know, who's forgiven?
- I mean, who is forgiven the most? I forget the wording, sorry, but, but, but, Simon answers the question correctly, the person who sinned the most is the one who loves the most?
- Anyway, you know the one I mean, and so, and then, Jesus says to Simon, Simon, do you see the woman?
- [24 : 22] what a stupid question. The woman was so obvious that everyone saw her. She had made a spectacle of herself.

Of course, everybody saw her. What was he really asking? He was asking, Simon, do you see how hospitable that woman has been?

You didn't do your duties as a host. She did. Simon, do you see how she loves and honors me? Simon, do you see how faith is transforming this woman's life?

That's what he was asking Simon, all summed up in that one question. Simon, do you see this woman? Questions are very powerful.

Sometimes I think we teachers should speak less and ask more questions. Another fascinating teaching strategy that Jesus used is silence.

[25 : 38] Now, generally speaking, we're afraid of silence, particularly in a teaching situation. When a teacher asks a question and nobody answers, the silence is uncomfortable. uncomfortable. The teacher thinks, oh, am I not a very good teacher?

Have I asked the wrong question? Have they not done their homework? Have they not heard a word I've said? And the pupils are equally uncomfortable and they think, oh dear, dare I say what I think?

I'm afraid I might have the answer wrong. Nobody else is speaking. Maybe I've got it all wrong. So silence can be very awkward. But several interesting essays have been written on the use of silence in teaching.

And one scholar has used the phrase that silence can bring students to a point of excitement born of possibility.

possibility. Silence opens up space for possibilities. The same educator says that when a teacher allows silence in the room, he or she is actually relinquishing power.

[27 : 01] There's always a power dynamic between a teacher and the students. Silence reduces that power imbalance and gives people their own possibility of learning without words.

Twice Jesus used this. Once was when he was before Pilate. And I'll just read it to you.

Pilate asks, Are you the king of the Jews? You have said so, Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, Aren't you going to answer?

See how many things they are accusing you of. But Jesus still made no reply and Pilate was amazed. Jesus didn't need to answer the question to defend to defend himself because everybody knew that the accusations were false.

The witnesses had been somehow made a god by the leaders to tell lies about Jesus.

[28 : 26] Pilate knew that they were lies. Jesus knew that they were lies. Everybody in the court knew that the accusations were false. Jesus' silence gave people the opportunity to remember that, to realize what that meant.

Did it work? Did people learn? Pilate went ahead and handed Jesus over to be executed. it. Another time that Jesus used silence was when the woman taken in adultery was brought before him.

And the Jews said, she's been taken in adultery, the law says we must stone her, what do you say? Jesus didn't answer.

What he did in the silence that followed was he handed the decision about whether to stone her or not back to the men who had brought her forward.

[29 : 46] He made them make the decision. He allowed space for cooling of anger and for sober reflection. But most of all, he made space for them to think about themselves and their own sinfulness.

How could they cast the first stone if they thought with any degree of honesty and self-reflection about their own sins? things? Apparently, they learned what Jesus wanted to teach them in the silence.

And they walked away from the situation. One of the most interesting things about the story, I find, is that as these accusers walked away, John says, the oldest first.

Interesting, isn't it? So, were they wiser because they were older? Or had they had more opportunity to sin through their lives than the young guys?

We don't know. but in the silence, Jesus brought truth out, taught them about their own sinfulness.

[31 : 21] Let's see. Okay. I'm losing my notes here, along with everything else in the house. Okay. Now it's eye-rolling time.

Okay? Some of you may roll your eyes metaphorically or literally. I want to talk about poetry and Jesus' use of poetry.

Poetry was a very commonly used teaching strategy in years gone by, before the internet, when memory was important and you couldn't just look it up on Google.

people. It is a very powerful teaching tool. It does aid memory. In rhythm and rhyme, help us to remember.

Learning a poem is easier than learning a dialogue or a discourse. course. It's being used to teach skills from one generation to another.

[32 : 29] Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning. time. I was recently, even though I sometimes can't remember my own phone number, I realized that I remembered in its entirety in Flanders fields where poppies grow beside the crosses.

I could recite it to you right now. I checked on the internet, of course, to make sure I was remembering it correctly. And I was. I learned it as a child. It's there in my head.

poetry puts feelings into words. It clarifies emotions and gives them shape and form.

The, I have some here, a couple interesting comments about poetry.

After 9-11, someone said this, the poems pasted on buildings all over New York after the terrorist attack, a test to poetry's power to communicate the essential, to ease the pain, to ask questions, and to bring comfort.

[33 : 47] Around the same time, a poet wrote this. This is a, I had to throw in a hockey reference for one of our beloved members, who will be anonymous, who loves hockey secretly.

So this is for that person. It's not, it's not Ed. He's not a closet hockey fan. The goalie in hockey stands, oh, he's talking about a poet, what a poet is, the status of a poet.

The goalie in hockey stands apart from others, marginalized. When all the skating and sliding around on the ice begins to fail us, the goalie is the poet.

Eugene Peterson, in his book on Revelation, Reverse Thunder, says that poetry, which he finds extensively in the book of Revelation, is not a language of objective explanation, but a language of invitation.

Poetry invites us in, again, to feel, to see things differently, to acknowledge complexity, to express what we feel deeply and can express for ourselves.

[35 : 15] when I was preparing this, I was thinking about that aspect of expressing what we can't say for ourselves. And this is a sentimental story, so those of you who hate sentiment can turn off your ears.

When my father died, and I was flying back to Nova Scotia for his funeral, going through my head was the first lines of Tennyson's poems, break, break, break, break, on the cold grey stones, O sea, oh, that my tongue could utter all the thoughts that arise in me.

I wanted to be able to express what I was feeling, and that poem seemed to be the only way to do it, but I couldn't remember the rest of it, despite what I've just said about memory, and I had to wait until I could look it up in a book and read the rest of it.

Yes, yes, yes, that's a description of grief, that's what I'm feeling. It both normalizes and individualizes our feelings. Was Jesus a poet?

Was Jesus a poet? Well, the interesting thing about this is that nobody thought much about that until in the year 1925, a New Testament scholar translated the Gospels from the English translations of the Greek back into Aramaic, which is probably the language that Jesus spoke, very close to Hebrew.

[36 : 55] And there, through this translation, it was discovered that Jesus actually made extensive use of poetry, particularly parallel construction, which is the main poetic device of Hebrew poetry, not the only one.

There was also rhythm and rhyme, which nobody had noticed before. So, the scholars have since discovered that, in fact, there are five kinds, different kinds of parallel construction recognized in Hebrew poetry, which are present in the teachings of Jesus.

When I was writing my thesis on this topic, I read a book on Hebrew poetry, and I wrote a description of this parallel construction, four of the forms, which I sort of understood because I have a background in English literature, but the fifth form of parallel construction, I just didn't get it.

I couldn't see it. So I left it out of my thesis. And when I sent that section to my committee, none of whom was a biblical scholar, they were all adult educators, one of my professors wrote back and said, what about the fifth form of parallel construction?

I thought nobody in the world would know that there were five, not four. So I had to go back to the book and figure it all out. So there's synonymous, antithetical, synthetic, step or climactic, and I can never pronounce this word, a chiasmatic, chiasmic, C-H-A-I-A-S-M-I-C.

[38 : 46] That's why I couldn't understand it. I can't even pronounce it. There is, there are examples of it all. Sometimes the antithetical is one statement followed by a contrary statement.

Sometimes it's synonymous. Hebrew poetry and parallel construction uses a lot of repetition. Interestingly enough, on Friday, I was working with an Iranian student.

I was helping him get into more polished English, a letter of intent that he was sending in order to get into a new program. And when I said, cut this out, it's just repetition, he looked at me and he said, in Farsi, the language of Iran, we use repetition a lot.

He said, we could talk for hours saying the same thing over and over again. And he said, in English, you don't do that. I thought, hmm, that is so true.

We have no room in our fast-paced culture for repetition. So I let him leave in his repetition. And it was a reminder to me that we're enculturated.

[40 : 05] We're enculturated to relegate poetry to the feminine, to the sentimental. we don't see it as powerful.

A way to teach. So it helps with memory, it expresses the inexpressible, it invites us in, it comforts, it teaches hearts, not just minds.

And Jesus used poetry extensively. extensively. I'm at six, there is seven, we're getting there.

Here we are. Okay. You will be glad to know, I hope, that Jesus used puns. How many people like puns?

Hey. Whether we're good at them or not, they're kind of fun. So, the obvious pun that Jesus used was Peter's name, Peter the rock.

[41 : 13] When we look at that superficially, it seems just like a little word play. But actually, he, Jesus gave Peter a name.

Names usually reflect the person's character or so on. But Peter gave, Jesus gave, Simon, the name Peter the rock, which by the way is the same in Greek as well.

In order to challenge him, encourage him, help him to change, to be, to live into the name that Jesus was giving him.

Peter the rock. Peter the rock. I expect it was quite a joke, not just because it was a pun, but because of the thought of Peter being stable and solid and reliable.

Probably the disciples thought that was quite a joke. Remember, this happened later, of course, but at the last supper, when Jesus was washing his disciples' feet, feet, and Peter said, no, no, no, Jesus, I don't want you to wash my feet.

[42 : 30] And Jesus explained what he was doing, or explained why, and Peter said, okay, not just my feet, all over. That's Peter. Like, not the unchangeable rock yet.

the other interesting use of puns, and again, this came to be understood when the Greek was retranslated into Aramaic.

The gnat and the camel. When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, criticizing them for not loving grace and or mercy and truth and justice, he said, you strain for a gnat and you swallow a camel.

The Pharisees would use a strainer when they poured wine, say, into a cup, so that in case there were any insects, because insects were unclean.

You don't want insects in your wine. You don't anyway, but if they're unclean, yeah, you strain. And he said, you do that, but then you swallow a camel.

[43 : 42] Now, that's a funny image, isn't it? You know, imagine like a leg sticking out here and a hump sticking out here and you know, kind of what's happening down here as we swallow the camel.

It's funny, but it's also a pun, because in Aramaic, the two words camel and gnat are four-letter words, same letters, different arrangement for those letters.

letters. So, it is, they sound similar. That's not, this is not an Aramaic expert talking, but it's true.

So, he was, with this pun, jolting their complacency, making them laugh, yes, I'm sure they thought it was funny, yes, even in English, it's funny, but he is really asking them to look at themselves, at what they do, what is this law all about, what does it really mean to follow the laws of the food laws.

Jesus used hyperbole, which is a way of painting an exaggerated picture to amuse, to make people laugh.

[44 : 55] So, the listener believes a reality, because the teacher is depicting a greater falsehood. So, if I say to you, you know, I was picking berries on the north shore and a bear came out of the woods, and I tell you that bear was three stories high, and that's a hyperbole, it's a gross exaggeration, bears aren't three stories tall, but by putting it that way, I, I help you to feel my fear, the exaggeration does that, I'm telling you a truth, the bear was large and frightening, but I'm using an obvious falsehood in order to help you to see that, that's hyperbole.

The, it shifts you from one groove, disbelief that I actually saw a bear on the north mountain while I was picking berries, to, oh my goodness, what a terrifying experience, shifts, helps you to feel, helps you to live into.

Another use of hyperbole is that you, you, um, are eager to take the speck out of your brother's eye, but you've got a piece of lumber coming out of yours.

It's kind of funny, you can imagine it as a cartoon, but it helped them to see the truth about their own behavior. irony is, um, interesting, there can be, uh, where the outcome is different from the expectation.

Again, the rich fool, it's kind of black humor, isn't it? This rich man getting more and more and more, and suddenly, it's all over.

[46 : 43] He's dead. They can't take it with him. That's irony. And then there's that, um, incident when, uh, Jesus was again, uh, responding to the criticism of the Pharisees, and he calls them wisdom's children.

He had just told them that they were foolish, and then he calls them wisdom's children. The contrast between how they think of themselves is very, very wise, and how they actually are is funny, but it's also provocative.

I'm going to leave lots of time for questions. Um, the interesting, um, I'm, I'm not going to talk about several other teaching strategies.

Um, I'm not going to talk about Jesus' use of, at least, here I am talking about it. I'm sorry. I'm not going to talk extensively about Jesus' use of, um, of, um, um, goodness, my words, they've gone the way of the lost coin.

Um, reenactment. Uh, reenactment is, uh, a teaching tool where you encourage learners to live into a part, to interact with others in a history, from a historical scenario.

[48 : 18] So, uh, a Christmas pageant is a reenactment of the story of Jesus' birth. Um, and reenactment is, is very powerful because it involves all the census.

So, I'm just mentioning that because the, one of the teaching strategies of Jesus that has survived besides the sermon is reenactment or which we call Holy Communion.

So, the reenact, the communion is a reenactment of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, which was a Passover meal, which is a reenactment of the, um, meal in the story of Exodus, the great liberation narrative of the Jewish people.

Um, and this was Jesus, um, using, uh, teaching technique to help people through time and through space and distance.

How was Jesus, the great teacher, going to teach us? Two thousand years later, different hemisphere. What, what could he do to teach us?

[49 : 37] And he chose reenactment, uh, to help us to know him, uh, to learn what he had to teach. The, um, so I, um, I think that that's just another possibility for us.

Our communion has been ritualized, um, and may not always help us to live into that Passover meal.

Maybe there are some ways that we can think about that. Okay, so, um, I would like to reiterate my deep wholehearted belief in the importance of sermons.

Jesus used them, although it would be fun to look at his sermons and see how lively they were, how interactive, and how willingly he allowed his sermons to be interrupted by questions by people needing healing.

That's a topic for another day. Um, most of all, in this, this morning, I would like us to see that Jesus used different strategies because people learn in different ways.

[50 : 53] This is a fundamental reality of anyone who is in education. Different people learn in different ways. Some people learn through words, some people learn through pictures, some people learn through reenactments, some people learn through body movement.

The more the senses are involved, the more of our senses are involved in the educational experience, the more we learn. The retention is greater.

So again, communion, all of our senses are involved. Hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, they're all there in that experience. And so that is why I believe we need different ways to teach.

And Jesus teaching again, helping people to think in new ways, helping them to change eternally, to turn to God, helping them to live harmoniously in the kingdom with joy and love.

Now, you get your turn. Questions? Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Just from an apologetics point of view, I found that statement translated to what I read earlier about the Gospels translated back into Aramaic, ending up in poetic form.

[52 : 15] Because, of course, one of the arguments is, well, how can people have remembered what Christ said without distorting it? But if you can say it's poetry, and much more easily, it's pretty hard to distort poetry.

It is. It's a significant passion. Yeah. Yes? That's what you said. It's very interesting on several different levels. I have a slightly different question.

I'm thinking about the world that Jesus was in. It was part of the Roman Empire, of course, a very large, sophisticated empire.

the Gospels spoke Aramaic, but they also were, for the most part, Jews, not all of them, speaking Hebrew, and they were currently exposed to Greek and Latin.

But you're assuming, without taking away from anything you said, you're assuming that people were reading, or were literate, or at least many of them were.

[53 : 21] and so there's another dimension here which is very interesting and quite different, and that's the world of the non-literate.

Right. So, at one level, Jesus goes to the temple, he speaks Hebrew, he speaks to the Roman officer in Latin, and both of them are literate and capable of handling anything he has to say.

On the other hand, Jesus goes up as the son of a carpenter and a lot of illiterate, ordinary people who can't cope.

And, so that's in the mix too. My major point here is that illiterate people, especially those who don't have direct, ongoing exposure or need to know written language of whatever kind, have a very different logic, and it's much closer to what you describe as your process of remembering post-poetry, although it's much more elaborate than that, and it's quite different from the way we approach language, many different languages, as literate people.

Well, first of all, I agree that many of Jesus' listeners would not have been highly educated. However, in the Jewish tradition, like today, education was very important.

[54 : 59] All boys were educated, no matter their status in the Jewish tradition, and girls were also taught to read because they would become the gatekeepers of the dietary laws.

So, there was a surprising level of education in that culture, but the parables are for everybody.

They begin with ordinary things, and they're punchy, they tell a good story, they draw people in, so perhaps that is one of the reasons why Jesus used them extensively.

But the other part is that in that society, among the educated, the scribes, the Pharisees, that group of people, yes, intellectual debate back and forth was very much part of it.

And Jesus engaged in that when he was speaking with the scribes and Pharisees. So, in other words, I think what I have wanted to say is that Jesus had teaching strategies or ways to talk to all kinds of people across the board.

[56 : 12] And so, we can't just use one way that privileges the educated. We can't, and on the other hand, we have to be able to speak with people who are well educated if God puts us in that kind of setting.

So, yes, Sheila. Thank you for this, Susan. This has been such a neat summary of different ways of approaching it. I was attracted to your title because I came from a tradition which relied very heavily on the sermon.

You know, the minister had to be a good preacher, and the rest was kind of supportive of that role. And one of the things that appealed to me about coming to an African church was the liturgy, because we are more participatory in our services.

My other comment is about repetition. Excuse me. Repetition is actually a reflection in education of the method called indoctrination.

And it has a good side and a bad side. The bad side is Hitler and the big lie, you know, telling the same lie over and over again, or saying, you know, the press are liars.

[57 : 28] We've heard that one more recently, I think. And it's said over and over and over again. But the other thing that is said over and over again is the liturgy. And the whole of the gospel is said every morning several times with anybody who comes here to a service.

All of it is there in the words that we are repeating. And I think even people who don't understand all of what some of those phrases mean are getting a message about that just in repeating the liturgy.

I think that's a very good point. It's interesting when you think about all of these things I've talked about it. They have a good side potential for deep learning and they have a problem side.

Parables can be misunderstood. Questions can just lead to more questions and no answers. what I've called reenactment deliberately to avoid that sense of liturgy being just mindless repetition.

Liturgy is wonderful amazing. Probably most of us are here partly because of the liturgy at St. John's. But it can be mindless and repetitious. So in all of these things I think what matters is the intention of the teacher using the best possible resources and tools and strategies for a particular time and place and group of people.

[59 : 03] And to perhaps be unafraid to use surprises to help people, to jolt people out of complacency in letting it all become mindless repetition.

yes. Something that struck me about Jesus' responses, you know, somebody would ask him a question and he would answer in a way that at first it would seem like, oh, he's not answering the question, he's going to a totally different place.

And I see that again and again in him. And I think that's kind of tied to what you just said, is that he's trying to kind of unbalance people, take them out of their usual equilibrium so they have a chance, because they're out of balance, to take a new step, not the habitual step.

And it's just brilliant sometimes how he does that. One of the scholars who wrote extensively about Jesus' use of questions was actually a UBC professor named Angus Gunn, who died fairly recently.

Did you know him, Sheila? Yeah. And he says that what we need to do to understand Jesus' questions, and exactly that, what, where did that come from, is to ask what is his purpose, given what has happened before.

[60 : 32] What is he doing with this question? What does he want to achieve in the people he's questioning? And I think that can help us get at that.

those connections. But definitely the disconnectedness was also part of what he was doing. Thank you. Louise. I'm curious.

When someone was describing what you were talking about today, it was a little bit, not quite described what you were actually speaking on. And what it's made me wonder is these things that you've talked about, how does it help you or does it help you in your approach or your work with unchurched university students?

You might think of my own unchurched nieces and nephews and young people that I find it easy to connect to on a more superficial level but hard to connect to another way.

Does some of this, any suggestions or thoughts on how it helps you engage? I think it does.

[61 : 43] First of all, it has changed my, so all of this is from my master's thesis at UBC a few years ago. It changed the way I teach in general.

I was teaching at the region at the time. I was teaching academic writing, giving information. Academic writing, giving information. What's wrong with plagiarism and how can you avoid it? And so I was learning all this stuff and I thought, I've got to change the way I teach.

So the next term, I fortunately had a small class because big classes, big crowds, the lecture method is more appropriate. I had a smaller group and we sat around a table and I tried to make it totally interactive.

And there was a girl from Czechoslovakia, as it was then, there and she said, I've never taken a class like this.

For her, the ability to be sitting with the teacher, no power differential and difference, I mean, and not taught down, interactive, share, that was all new to her.

[62 : 58] So yes, it affected my teaching in general. With people who aren't Christians and I have a Bible study and it's an ESL Bible study with scholars, mostly from China, but who know nothing about Christianity.

And I think it makes me want to ask more questions rather than just give information. It makes me let's see, how can I put this?

It makes me want to be a better learner as well as a better teacher. It makes me open to different ways of doing things.

Every Bible study I do is different. Same basic ideas, but it turns out differently. Being responsive to learners, which is a huge thing in adult education, means that we have to respect our learners and respect where they're coming from and asking the good questions to help them see things in new ways.

ways. I wish I could be more specific about that. But I think thinking about it helps. Yes? In your research for your thesis, did you come across, is there anything in the Jewish tradition that speaks to this rhetorical, if that's the right word, asking a question?

[64 : 34] As you gave your lovely talk, I kept thinking of, the creator says to Adam, Adam, where are you? I am. Which is, of course, a nonsense question. I have to say, oh, you're tricky, you know where I am.

But I take it, Adam is supposed to get to know Adam. Ask yourself this question, Adam. Why are you hiding? Again, does the rabbinic tradition or anything, do they ever talk about the rhetorical questions in Hebrew scripture?

Have you not known Israel? Have you not been taught, the prophets will say? Is that there, or is that just... Not that I particularly noticed.

It's more about imparting information, or that's imparting good information, rather than drawing out from people.

But it is interesting in the Old Testament, those kinds of questions, the questions Job asks, for example. And the David, and the, the you lamb, is the parable of the lamb, to make David understand, feel what he had done, in, and very, very powerful.

- [66 : 00] So there are, through the Old Testament, certainly indications of this being a way to go with teaching. But I'm sorry, I don't know enough, really, about the rabbinic tradition.
- Beth. I'm interested in that, the use of silence. It made me think, a long, long time ago, I was with a group of Quakers, and they use silence in conflict situations.
- situations. But I also think of it in, in our, whether it's quiet in our liturgy, or, it's, you know, we're so, as a society, we just kind of fill space.
- And I think it's, like in group situations, it's, it takes a lot of courage in Bible study to allow silence, so that people can kind of process.
- So I think it's a very powerful tool, but it's hard to use it. Mm-hmm. I, I have only once heard a sermon that had silence in it.
- [67 : 25] And it was in, in South Carolina. Uh, the, I can't remember if it was the Bishop of South Carolina, was it, who preached at the cathedral, and in the middle, he stopped talking and stood there.
- And it, it was pretty shocking. Uh, I don't know how people felt about it. Probably they had many different feelings. Um, but it, it was powerful.
- What, what is this? What am I supposed to think? I'm not a very good thinker. I'm likely to think, what am I making for lunch? What, what do I do with this?
- Um, when I, when I wrote in my thesis, when I wrote about silence, I said, a silence in church is like a blank space in the middle of a thesis.
- And I left a blank space. Everybody who, what, who, who read it from the university commented on it. And at the very end, when I took my thesis into final, final, you know, stamp of approval, that she flipped through it and she said, what's this?
- [68 : 41] And pointed to the blank space. And I said, it's about silence and it's about empty space. And she just looked at me like I was from another planet, which in a way I am.
- Uh, and, uh, and she kind of, oh, well, her, her committee's passed it. I guess they know what they're doing. Yeah. Yeah. It's strange. Yeah.
- Um, and you were talking about the, how we don't have, you know, poetry isn't, um, very stressed in our society anymore and we can't remember anything.
- We go to Google and everything, but I'm really struck by two songs by Bob Dylan that are very well known. They both ask a question and they have repetition and they rhyme and one is, um, uh, how many rows, you know, some one in the wind and the other is where are you going?
- My blue eyed son, which is the one that he used for his, my bell. He's somebody else beside the page. The whole point is that he's from an Orthodox Jewish background and he was really captivated by, uh, ballads and these sorts of things.
- [69 : 48] And those are well known to many, to several generations now. So it's really interesting. Yes. Well, even as I was preparing that, I was thinking about, about this and I think that it is in songs, uh, that's the last remnant of poetry in our society that's commonly known.
- So, uh, I was at a graduation ceremony recently, uh, where our new president of UBC, Dr. Ono, who was a Christian man, um, quoted a popular song.
- Um, I didn't know it. I'm not good. Latest pop music. Um, it resonated with the, with the students. I saw lots of people nodding.
- It is partly the music, but it's also partly the poetry. Thank you. I just want to, uh, join, please join me in thanking Susan and thank you. Thank you so much.
- Thank you.