

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Sermon Title: "Teaching Through Stories – The Jesus Way!"

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Let us pray. Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Can you think of the first story you ever remember being told to you? Perhaps it is the first book that you can remember being read to you? This is a hard question because, for many, the first stories that are read to us happen when we are yet a baby. Still, try and think back to your earliest memory of a story being shared with you? As I have been pondering this question, I find myself remembering a book that my grandmother read to me when I was maybe 5 or 6. For a period of time around that age, whenever I would be spending a weekend with my grandparents, my grandmother would always tuck me in at night and would read a book to me – one that I got to choose from a stack of children's books in bedroom. And for a number of visits, I would always choose the same book over and over again. Now, while the full content of the story is not something that I vividly recall, after a little digging on the internet and connecting the dots of what I do remember, I found that it was a children's book called "The Flying School Bus". From what I did remember, it was a book about a school bus that was beloved by the children and yet, when it broke down, it was decided that a new school bus would be purchased and this made the children sad and the school bus sad. Yet, in the end, the school bus flies away in the sky and is very happy. My memory is a little foggy on these details, but there we go – the first story I remember being read to me!

Now, for me, the memory of that story really has less to do with the literary content or an ultimate meaning in the narrative, I don't remember ever considering what this book was trying to teach us, and looking back on it, it actually seems to have a little something to do with death and dying. But again, that was not something that I was aware of in the story. Rather, the memory has more to do with the experience. I remember that book being read with some vague details retained, but the vivid part of

my memory of hearing that book is being tucked in tight to a warm bed at my grandparent's house, having the soft glow of a desk lamp on as a nightlight and it had a sheer covering over it to soften the light, and I remember having my grandmother sitting on the edge of my bed reading. It was a safe feeling – that is my memory of the first story I can recall. And the memory of that story is not just about the words on the pages, but it is about that moment shared as the story was told.

When we think about Jesus speaking in stories, in these parables which are captured in our gospel texts, one of which is in our reading this morning, we often jump into the analysis of it. What does it mean? – which is a question that the disciples ask from time-to-time. We often begin to look for the lesson, to dissect it, to figure out the metaphor so that we can apply it to our life of faith – a task which, in and of itself, is not easy for many of these parables truly have layer-upon-layer of message for us. We often jump into that moment of figuring out the message, which is certainly of importance and value, no doubt about it. Still, I wonder what message we may miss if we don't just take a moment to think about the hearing of these stories. For example, in our reading today, we have this very familiar parable of the sower and how different soils produce different results. We even have Jesus, a little bit later on in the same chapter of Matthew, explaining it to his disciples. Still, I don't want us to overlook the moment and the telling of the story, for it is important.

Before this parable, Jesus is in a house where it seems he is teaching his disciples with others crowded in and still others standing outside. Then as Jesus exited the house, he encounters larger crowds by the sea, perhaps crowds with folks who have yet to hear him speak but long for it. Perhaps with folks who have a deep need which they are hoping that Jesus will be able to fill. Some may be there because of their curiosity, others because of their questions. Some may be there to see what the big deal is about this teacher who is gaining so much attention and following. Now, so that more people can hear him, presumably with his voice being able to travel well across the waters, he gets in a boat with the whole crowd gathered on the beach and he spoke to them. What

do you suppose that moment of hearing this story brought to the people- not the words themselves but the moment? Did it bring a sense of hope? Did simply seeing him bring about joy? Would they always remember how Jesus tried to address them all, not just a few who would be near the front of a crowd if Jesus had just spoken from the shore but from a boat so that all could theoretically hear and see him from the beach? Did the steady movement even of the waters and gentle rise and fall of the boat as Jesus spoke bring a sense of calm? And even if some of them couldn't hear the words he was saying, what did that moment still mean to them by simply sharing in it when the story was told?

We obviously know that the parable of the sower was heard, that it was impactful, and passed down because it has something to teach us – and it is found in our scriptures because it was remembered. However, it was not only the parable that got passed forward and which ended up in our scriptures. It was also the narrative of how the story was told which got passed on. This is important because it tells us that the moment of hearing the story, of Jesus on the boat and all of the details surrounding the moment of telling, that this moment were important to the people who were there. It wasn't just about the story and the meaning within – it was about the experience of it.

We know that stories are important to our development as people and to our faith. Not only as children but as we grow, stories remain with us as we read ourselves, as we watch shows which tell stories, as we remember the stories of our faith, and as we read and tell stories to others and to the little ones in our lives. Yet, as our reading today reminds us, it's not only about the words and the lessons, but it is in the sharing of the stories and the experiences of them where we also find meaning and value.

I have been thinking a lot about this as we come to today, because stories have been an important part of Ms. Colleen's time with us. In her ministry and service among us over these past three years, she has used books and stories to teach our children, stories to accompany the scripture text, and stories to help them grow in faith and love. Yet it is not only the text and the meaning of these words which have had an impact on our

children. The impact is also found in the sharing of them. It has been through Ms. Colleen's presence, her care, the ways she created a culture of openness and exploration which will too forever touch the lives of our children. While our Church School kids may not remember the text or the message of every story shared with them over these last three years, I am confident that they will remember the experience as Colleen has nourished them and their spiritual journeys with such commitment, grace, and guided by her own profound faith. Stories and the experiences of them are so very important.

Beloved People of God, may we cherish the stories of our faith and the stories which teach us lessons from our God. May we give thanks for the impactful ways in which stories have been shared with us. And, as we share these stories, may we be mindful of the impact that we too can have – an impact not found solely in the words but in the moments of telling and the moments of hearing. For stories are indeed powerful and so are the moments of sharing them. So be it and may it be so. Amen.