

STORYTELLING



- ◆ Human life is so bound up in stories that we are thoroughly desensitized to their amazing power to lure us in.

The Chronicles of Narnia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader by CS Lewis

- ◆ A little background:
- ◆ Edmund and Lucy Pevensy along with their bratty cousin, Eustace, are transported through a painting into Narnia where they join Prince Caspian on a voyage to the west. The children are tested on this voyage, and visit strange lands and encounter unusual creatures. Eustace is turned into a dragon, and then helped to return to human form by Aslan, the lion god.

- ◆ Before we begin.
- ◆ Make sure to pay attention to your surroundings—your chair, your hands, the sounds outside, the sounds in the room.
- ◆ Concentrate on those things.

- ◆ How many of you got caught up in the story?
- ◆ What did you hear?
- ◆ What was it in the story that inspires Christians?

- ◆ Jonathan Gottschall in his book, *The Storytelling Animal* insists that we were just given a test we could not pass.
- ◆ He insists that the “human mind yields helplessly to the suction of story. No matter how hard we concentrate, no matter how deep we dig in our heels, we just cannot resist the gravity of alternate world.”
- ◆ If ever there was an alternate world it is found in the Christian story, the witness of Christian life, the witness of Christian signs and wonders.

- ◆ The storyteller is not an all powerful architect of our listening experience.
- ◆ The storyteller guides how we will hear the story, but he or she does not determine it.
- ◆ The storyteller tells his or her story but by itself, it is lifeless.
- ◆ Every story needs a receiver of the story.
- ◆ A catalyst is needed to bring the story to life.
- ◆ That catalyst is the listener's imagination.

◆ **CONVERSION IS ALWAYS THE GOAL!**

Storytelling is about addressing the mind and the heart.

- ◆ **Storytelling means to find a language that creates emotional impact.**

- ◆ **Storytelling is about conveying a meaning.**
- ◆ **It is always moralistic and intentional**

- ◆ **Stories are a particular type of human communication designed to persuade an audience of a storyteller's worldview.**
- ◆ **The storyteller does this by placing characters, real or fictional, onto a stage and showing what happens to these characters over a period of time.**
- ◆ **Each character pursues some type of goal in accordance with his or her values, and either succeeds or fails according to the storyteller's view of how the world works."**

Storytelling is sequential and all about suspense.

- ◆ **Stories are experienced as a sequence of events linked by cause and effect.**
- ◆ **Without suspense, without tension there is no reason to follow the line of events.**
- ◆ **Effective storytelling puts events into an arc-of suspense.**

The graph reflects audience emotions during relating of events.



- ◆ Neuro-science suggests that a story without a dramatic arc has little influence on audience behavior.
- ◆ Stories provide intangible value that sells. Stories connect to other people emotionally, they convince and they convert.

- ◆ It is our job as catechists to give those God has entrusted to us something to imagine.
- ◆ (My story), God's story, another's story, story from literature.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- ◆ Past generations were analytical thinkers.
- ◆ Things have changed.
- ◆ People today learn best through the medium of story.
- ◆ People want the information—but they want it in a way that will hold their attention.

- ◆ It is always said that Jesus was a great Teacher because of the way he told stories.
- ◆ Primarily he was a great Teacher because he knew his audience—how they lived—how they thought.
- ◆ He adapted his teaching to his audience and their way of thinking.
- ◆ It is important that we have a sense of the people to whom we are speaking.

MEMORIZING

- ◆ Do not memorize.
- ◆ Tell your story freestyle.
- ◆ Memorizing limits flexibility.
- ◆ There will be times when you leave out something you thought was important.

Preparation

- ◆ Choose a story from your life, someone else's life or the Bible
- ◆ Consider your theme. Keep it in your consciousness.
- ◆ Quietly think through the story.
- ◆ Put yourself in the story.
- ◆ Imagine the surroundings for your story—time, place, feelings.
- ◆ Imagine all the specific details surrounding the story.
- ◆ Think about how this story can relate to other people's thoughts and feelings and what is going on in their lives.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE STORY

Preparation: Reflection Questions

- ◆ Close your eyes.
- ◆ Put yourself in the story.
- ◆ What do you see? Describe the people in your story.
- ◆ What sounds do you hear?
- ◆ What do you smell?
- ◆ What is the weather like?
- ◆ Describe the feelings, attitudes and moods of the people in your story.
- ◆ What are they thinking at various times in the story?

- ◆ The storyteller must thoroughly study the theme.
- ◆ One must know a lot to teach a little.
- ◆ Use your imagination to make the story come alive as you prepare. Give your characters personalities—even if you are the character.
- ◆ Live the story--know and feel the emotions...breathe the breath of life into the characters.
- ◆ If you are convinced so too will your listener. Don't just tell it, live it!"

- ◆ "As the suspense of your story builds, be sure to have some comic relief periodically. Approach the climax through ever increasing tension interrupted with periods of relaxation."

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD STORY

1. A single theme, clearly defined
2. A well developed plot
3. Style: vivid word pictures, pleasing sounds and rhythm
2. 4. Well crafted characters
5. Faithful to source
6. Dramatic appeal
7. Appropriateness to listeners

Important qualities in a Storyteller

- ◆ Salesmanship
- ◆ Sincerity--don't try to fake excitement, happiness, sadness. Be authentic!
- ◆ Wholeheartedness

Important qualities in a Storyletter

- ◆ Enthusiasm--this does not mean artificial or noisy excitement
- ◆ Animation--in your gestures, voice, facial expressions and most importantly be yourself
- ◆ Finer points of presentation include: emphasis, repetition, transition, pause.

- ◆ State the truth of your story out loud—what are you trying to teach or convey. Such as:
- ◆ “God can teach us profound life lessons in the least expected way.”
- ◆ This story invites us deeply into the the mystery of the cross. We pass through the cross to healing and wholeness.

FIND A MEMORY HOOK

- ◆ A phrase, concept, or attitude repeated in the story that helps make the story memorable.
- ◆ “I have a dream.” MLK
- ◆ “Slow down, girl.”
- ◆ We are there and it is now.”

PLAN YOUR FIRST WORDS.

- ◆ Pull the listener “in” within the first few sentences. Craft a great beginning.
- ◆ Do not spend a lot of time introducing your story.
- ◆ Never start a story by saying:
- ◆ Once upon a time.
- ◆ I want to thank Michele for inviting me to share my story with you today...
- ◆ Let me tell you about this amazing witness someone share with me at the parish fish fry last week...
- ◆ The story I am about to tell takes place at a supermarket in the year 2002.
- ◆ Bear with me I’m not a good public speaker....

PLAN YOUR FIRST WORDS.

- ◆ Instead...
- ◆ “It was a cold, wet, 40 degree fall evening. Rehearsal had taken far too long...the choir director was in a foul mood...”
- ◆ Eustace was an ill-tempered mean-spirited boy who always wanted things his own way. (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*)

PLAN YOUR LAST WORDS:

Consider the ending.
Make it punctuate your theme.

- ◆ Never say:
- ◆ And they lived happily ever after.
- ◆ And that is the story of Charles.
- ◆ The end.
- ◆ Thank you.
- ◆ Instead...be more creative. Let the ending highlight your theme without saying, “the point of this story is...”
- ◆ “In that instant a lightening bolt of conversion hit me in the face: if I am not willing to drink from this man’s cup, how dare I drink from the cup inside.”
- ◆ Then he caught hold of me...and threw me into the water. It hurt a lot—but only for a moment—Then I saw...I turned into a boy again.

RESEARCH

- ◆ Research information that will give you facts about your story: your point, your theme, the bible story you have chosen.
- ◆ Anything that will provide, color, interest and insight and that will enhance the final story.
- ◆ Use sparingly. Cultural customs, historical facts, family history are like seasoning—too much is way too much and spoils the food.

TIGHTEN UP YOUR STORY.

- ◆ Think of your story.
- ◆ Consider everything crucial to making your point.
- ◆ Cut everything not crucial.

Be picky when it comes to details!

- ◆ Your audience does not need to know every detail of your story.
- ◆ All the particulars of your story are not that important unless they set the stage or support your theme.
- ◆ Avoid things like who sat where, what they wore, who said what in what order, what day it was or precise sequence of events. Leave some of these details out unless they are necessary.

ADD DESCRIPTION

- ◆ Add enough description so the audience can see, hear, taste and smell everything happening.
- ◆ Keep in mind the language of poets.
- ◆ How can we speak of the awesomeness of creation without using the language of poets?

- ◆ You will be present at the threshold of dawn's first light, water's first flow, the star's first glimmer, the animal's first ravenous howl, the seed's agonizing rupture from earth's womb and humanity's entrance on the world's stage.

And so, with all the people of God, on that mother of all nights we will be able to say:

- ◆ *We are there and it is now* as we stand with Abraham and Sarah in their first eternal covenant of faith.
- ◆ *We are there and it is now* as we trudge though the parted waters of death, pursued and exhausted by Pharaoh's onslaught, only to be enfolded in the protective mantle of God's liberating providence.
- ◆ *We are there and it is now* as we call down that great and terrible day of the Lord's visitation, when sin comes to an end and we are gathered as one people to process majestically to the gates of the jeweled eternal city.
- ◆ (Mary Birmingham, Word and Worship Workbook, Year A,B and C, "Holy Week, Easter Triduum, The Easter Season: An Overview")

REPEAT PHRASES

- ◆ Where possible repeat phrases and invite others to repeat them with you where appropriate.
- ◆ “We are there and it is now.”

BODY MOVEMENTS

- ◆ Choose them carefully and sparingly. Let them tell the story.
- ◆ Hands by your side or right in front of you as much as you are able.
- ◆ When gesturing move hands up and out and then back down to the side.
- ◆ Do not gesture below the waist. (denotes lack of confidence)
- ◆ Gestures above shoulders convey excitement-panic, surprise, praise, worship. Save big and high gestures for those moments.
- ◆ Otherwise—keep gestures below the shoulders. (King and His Court)

PACE YOUR DELIVERY

- ◆ Slow down.
- ◆ Use effective pauses.
- ◆ Change the tone of your voice or use pauses and body movement to delineate characters.
- ◆ Let your facial expressions say more than your words whenever possible.
- ◆ Pay attention to the filler words you use: um, like, uh, you know...

NERVOUSNESS

- ◆ It is a gift.
- ◆ Keeps us on our toes.
- ◆ Humbles us.
- ◆ Compels us to prepare.
- ◆ Keeps the adrenaline flowing. Adrenaline sharpens the mind and senses.
- ◆ Give us extra energy.
- ◆ Thank God for it. It is his work after all!

BIBLE STORIES

- ◆ Use these same principles to tell a Bible story.
- ◆ Scripture in liturgy is formal, necessary proclamation.
- ◆ Scripture shared in story-form and free style in catechetical settings captivates the listener to hear it in a new way.

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY

- ◆ Pray your way through preparation.
- ◆ Ask God for the skill to tell stories as creatively as Jesus told them.
- ◆ Pray your way through the telling.
- ◆ Say to God, "More of you and less of me." "Give me a well trained tongue that I may worthily proclaim your praise!"
