

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

TELLING THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: THE USE OF NARRATIVE IN THE  
SERMONS OF JOHN WESLEY AND GRANGER COMMUNITY CHURCH

ANDREA BROWN

Dr. Ava Cross

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## **ABSTRACT**

This case study examines the creative use of narrative in sermons within the United Methodist Church in light of the rapid decline in Christian church attendance. Using narrative theory, the study reviews sermons by John Wesley and the pastors of Granger Community Church for use of narrative patterns, mimesis, and diegesis. This study shows that both groups used narrative extensively but for different purposes. John Wesley employs narrative to shed light on the biblical text and to encourage his congregants' adherence to the principles outlined in the Bible. The pastors of Granger Community Church use narrative to create interest in the sermon's message and to establish a personal connection with congregants. Despite their different techniques, both John Wesley and Granger Community Church showcase innovation with their use of narrative in sermons.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

The evangelical church today has over 38,000 denominations (*World Christian Encyclopedia*, 1982) and many different styles of worship services. While their practices may be different, churches of all Christian denominations have experienced a rapid decline in attendance over the past few decades. In 1945, 60% of the Canadian population attended weekly church services. In the 1950s, church attendance rose to about 70% of the population attending church regularly. However, by 1975, church attendance had decreased to 30%. In 2000, the rate was 20% (Coggins, 2007). In Western Europe, only 10% of the population attend services and it is expected that church attendance rates in Canada will soon reflect this statistic. Some experts even predict that the Christian religion will no longer exist in Europe by 2040 (*The Independent*, 2000). One reason for this decline is that people who have grown up in the church are quickly abandoning the tradition. About 80% of this group cease to attend church in early adulthood and never return (Coggins, 2007). Some researchers point to increased immigration as the reason for declining church attendance rates in Canada. They theorize that since there are increasing numbers of immigrants to Canada who are from other religious backgrounds, this influx affects the rate of Christian observance in Canada (Coggins, 2008). However, immigrants to Canada are much more likely to attend church than native-born Canadians (Couto, 2011). It is undeniable that church attendance is sinking, especially among people born in Canada and people who grew up going to church.

This shrinking church attendance calls for a review of all aspects of a church's activities. One of these key areas is the sermon. A sermon is "the transmission of theological ideas" (Herman & Mooij, 2010) and is usually the heart of a church's service. Typically, a pastor or other speaker will choose a passage from the Bible and expound on its interpretation and application to Christian living. The sermon often sets the tone for the entire service. Many churches choose songs and responsive readings that reflect the sermon topic. As the main part of a church service, if the sermon fails to captivate listeners or be memorable, it is unlikely that other activities within the church will be enough to secure a congregant's permanent attendance.

Research shows that only one-third of congregants retain the core message of a sermon (Hermans & Mooij, 2010). Some pastors use creative tactics to increase interest in and memory of the sermon (Hermans & Mooij, 2010). Narrative is one of the methods that can be applied to sermon rhetoric to aid congregants in retention of the sermon topic (Whitehouse, 2004 cited in Hermans & Mooij, 2010). Narratives and stories are used in everyday conversation and help people to understand and relate to one another (Fisher, 1984). In the same way, pastors employ narrative to substantiate a point and increase the persuasiveness of their sermons (Hermans & Mooij, 2010). These narratives within sermons can inspire change in listeners, whether the change affects an attitude or an entire lifestyle (Merriam & Caffarell, 1999 cited in Carrell, 2009).



## PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to research how narrative has historically been utilized in effective sermons and determine if the same pattern exists now. To complete this study, I reviewed two sets of sermons within the United Methodist tradition. Both sets of sermons are from churches with rapidly growing congregations within the United Methodist denomination.

The study of creative elements such as narrative within sermons is important in today's church environment. Church attendance is on a rapid decline. Across Canada, church attendance in each province and territory varies widely. The only common trend is that all provinces have seen a decline in weekly church attendance since 1993 (Clark, 2003). There are many theories of why church attendance in the western world is declining so rapidly. One is that today's generation feels that churches are out of touch and irrelevant (Greene, 1998 cited in Jenkins & Cavan, 2009). While our culture has quickly changed and given rise to postmodernism, many pastors have refused to adapt their methods. Non-attendees also cite lack of time and that they disagree with the church's stances on ethical or political issues (Barrick, 2007). Even for people who attend church regularly, they report that services are boring and the content is not applicable to everyday living (Sparks, 2005). In order to have sermon content be relevant for everyday life, it needs to be accessible and memorable. The comprehension of a story involves many different memory processes, meaning that a story and its lessons can often be recalled for the long term (Kim, 1999).

I chose to study the use of narrative in the United Methodist tradition. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist tradition, preached thousands of sermons in his lifetime and was a well-known evangelist. Over two hundred years later, the pastors of Granger Community Church follow his example with passionate preaching and evangelism.

In studying the sermons of John Wesley and of Granger Community Church pastors, I considered the following questions: 1) How did John Wesley use narrative in his messages? 2) What forms does narrative take in the messages at Granger Community Church? and 3) Is narrative the same in the sermons of John Wesley and the messages by the pastors of Granger Community Church? How is it different? Through my research, I found that the use of narrative has always been an important factor in these sermons, but for very different purposes. Wesley limits the use of narrative in his messages, usually using stories only to reflect back on his biblical text. The pastors at Granger Community Church, on the other hand, use narrative extensively to illustrate points and vary the content of their sermons. Thus, a comparison of the two proves the effectiveness of narrative to strengthen sermons while also revealing different methods for the application of narrative.

#### INTRODUCTION TO JOHN WESLEY

The first set of sermons studied is from Methodist founder John Wesley. Wesley (1703 – 1791) was an Anglican priest, evangelical preacher and theologian (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2011). After a spiritual conversion experience in 1738, Wesley spent the rest of his life as an evangelist, preaching over 40,000

sermons (Oakes, 2004). John Wesley, along with his brother Charles Wesley, was part of a group of young men at Oxford University seeking spiritual growth (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2011). Collectively, they were known as the Methodists and spearheaded a spiritual paradigm shift across England. The movement focused on evangelicalism and also the need for the church to serve less fortunate members of society (Methodist Central Hall Westminster, 2011). After Wesley's death, the Methodist movement separated from the Anglican denomination. The new denomination was called Methodism.<sup>1</sup>

There are many different denominational sectors within Methodism. Two such denominations were the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church. On April 24, 1968, the two denominations were joined as one when Bishop Rueben H. Mueller of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and Bishop Lloyd C. Wicke of the Methodist Church united the two denominations with the prayer, "Lord of the Church, we are united in Thee, in Thy Church and now in the United Methodist Church" (United Methodist Church, 2008). The United Methodist Church now has over eleven million members around the world (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> There are now 70 million Methodist members globally. Methodism focuses on the importance of meeting together for Bible study, prayer and Holy Communion. The denomination also places high importance on reaching out to underprivileged members of society. The four aims of Methodism are as follows: "1) To increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love, 2) To help people to grow and learn as Christians through mutual support and care, 3) To be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice, and 4) To make more followers of Jesus Christ" (Methodist Central Hall Westminster, 2011).

## INTRODUCTION TO GRANGER COMMUNITY CHURCH

One of the largest churches under the United Methodist Church denomination today is Granger Community Church in Granger, Indiana. Granger Community Church is the source of the second set of analyzed sermons.

Founder and senior pastor Mark Beeson began the church out of his living room in 1986. Ten people attended the first service. Twenty-five years later, Granger Community Church has a congregation numbering 5,000 at its main campus in Granger (Shafer, personal communication, 2011). The church also has a congregation of four hundred in Elkhart, Indiana, a gathering of one hundred at a community centre in Monroe Circle, Indiana and over twenty at a local prison (Granger Community Church, 2011). The church now has sixty-nine employees, including five pastors who share preaching responsibilities (ibid).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Pastors' use of narrative in sermons is a natural extension of everyday conversation.

Alasdair MacIntyre wrote that, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (MacIntyre, 1981). A theorist who was greatly influenced by MacIntyre was Walter Fisher. Fisher describes narration as "a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them" (Fisher, 1984, p.2). Fisher writes that narrative theory can apply to both real and fictitious situations. He suggests that narratives are powerful and form people's perception of the world. To create this foundation, narratives compete with one another, and people select those they believe will form a foundation in their lives. Fisher also points out the importance of using narratives in religious rhetoric. He cites Goldberg's claim that,

A theologian, regardless of the propositional statements he or she may have to make about a community's convictions, must consciously and continually strive to keep those statements in intimate contact with the narratives which gave rise to those convictions, within which they gain their sense and meaning, and from which they have been abstracted. (Goldberg, 1982 cited in Fisher, 1984, p. 3).

This quote from Goldberg reinforces Fisher's point that narratives can form a foundation in people's lives and, as a result, be a very powerful tool. Fisher also uses Goldberg's work to assert that narratives can help seemingly disconnected points and theology to flow together for easy comprehension. He includes the following quote from Goldberg:

Neither the facts, nor our experience, come to us in discrete and disconnected packets which simply await the moral principal to be applied. Rather, they stand in need of some narrative which can bind the facts of our experience together into a coherent pattern and it is thus in virtue of that

narrative that our abstracted rules, principles and notions gain their full intelligibility (Goldberg, 1982 cited in Fisher, 1984, p.3).

In order for sermons to be noteworthy and inspire change in listeners' lives, they must be memorable and also have points that will challenge previously held viewpoints. Fisher's argument is that this goal is best accomplished through narrative. He also contends that application of narrative can be used in any setting – from personal conversations to professional workplaces. He points out that the lasting impact of the Bible can be partly credited to narrative and quotes Hauerwas that, "The social significance of the Gospel requires recognition of the narrative structure of Christian convictions for the life of the church" (Hauerwas, 1981 cited in Fisher, 1984, p.3).

Michael Kearns, another researcher in narrative theory, asserts that in order for narrative to truly take shape, the act of speech is needed (Kearns, 1999). In the case of narratives in sermon rhetoric, Kearns' theory is that the narrative is only given meaning when interpreted by the members of the congregation since all narration is subject to the final audience. Stories do not have a prescribed meaning with the same effect on every person. With this view, Kearns is reflective of reader-response theory.

A key theorist in reader-response theory is Louise Rosenblatt. In *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, Rosenblatt suggests that narrative is subject to interpretation and transactions between people. She writes, "Each reader brings to the transaction not only a specific past life and literary history, not only a repertory of internalized 'codes,' but also a very active

present, with all its preoccupations, anxieties, questions, and aspirations” (Rosenblatt, 1978 cited in Davis and Womack, 2002, p. 55). Rosenblatt’s idea that a text’s interpretation depends on its audience’s background is one of the most important facets of reader-response theory. Since each person experiences narrative with a different history and background, a varied transaction will result. This idea certainly applies to congregants’ individual interpretations of sermons.

The importance of sermons being interpreted and understood is illustrated in Carrell’s “Communication training for clergy: Exploring impact on the transformative quality of sermon communication”. Carrell writes that 47% of Americans report that they listen to at least one sermon every week. This group includes people who attend a church service, experience a sermon through CD or DVD, or access a sermon online (Barna Research Group, 2007 cited in Carrell, 2009). Also, about 44 million people in the United States are members of one of the twenty-five largest Christian denominations (Lindner, 2007 cited in Carrell, 2009). With such a large audience, it is vital that church leaders and pastors are communicating effectively to their congregations.

Pastors’ use of narrative in sermons will fall into one of the two categories within narrative, mimesis and diegesis. Mimesis refers to showing a story by setting a scene and thus suggests that the narrative “evokes reality by staging it” (Herman & Vervaeck, p. 14, 2005). Mimesis usually includes a very literal portrayal of a situation, often including direct quotes from participants. A narrative that is told using mimesis will contain extensive dialogue and action (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005). The narrator of the story becomes secondary since the characters within the

narrative are presented with detail and direct quotes. Instead of the narrator guiding the story, he or she tells the story through the characters' interactions (Schaeffer & Vultur, 2005). First person narration is sometimes an example of mimesis since the narrator is telling an autobiographical story about an event that occurred in the past. This earlier self becomes one of the characters in the narrative (Jahn, 2005).

On the other hand, diegesis summarizes events and interactions and the narrator's voice is always evident (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005). As opposed to mimesis being a portrayal of the story, diegesis is characterized by indirect presentation or summary and is referred to as "the level above the primary story" (Shen, p. 107, 2005). In diegesis, the narrator's voice presents a "world which is not his own" (Berger, p. 411, 1994). While the audience's attention still focuses on the world created by the narrator, they are always aware that narrator is framing the story for them, rather than immersing them in the characters' interactions as is the case with mimesis (ibid).

These sources shaped how I reviewed the sermons for applications of narrative and what methods I used in my study of sermons within the United Methodist tradition.



## **METHODOLOGY**

To study narrative within the United Methodist tradition, I selected representative samples of sermons from John Wesley and Granger Community Church. In order to include a variety of content, I reviewed five of John Wesley's sermons and five sermons from Granger Community Church. The sermons selected form five comparative pairs. For each pair, there is one sermon from John Wesley and one from Granger Community Church. Both sermons are based on the same passage from the Bible, the holy book of Christianity.

Both Wesley and Granger Community Church preach sermons with the aim to declare that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.<sup>2</sup> The sermons also provide instruction on how to live a Christian life following salvation. I chose to focus only on sermons based on passages from the New Testament that dealt with these matters within the early church.<sup>3</sup> To find sermons for analysis, I first looked at Granger Community Church's video archives and made note of what passages the sermons were based on. I then reviewed archives of Wesley's sermons to determine if he had preached a sermon based on the same passage.

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<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament, salvation is "specially used with reference to the great deliverance from the guilt and the pollution of sin wrought out by Jesus Christ, the great salvation" (Easton's Bible Dictionary, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> The early church was a group of people who professed Jesus Christ as the Messiah and only source of salvation. The early church was led by Jesus' disciples. The term "early church" usually covers from the time of Jesus' resurrection (29 AD) to 325 AD.

The selected sermons can be summarized as follows:

John Wesley			Granger Community Church		
Title of Sermon	Biblical Passage	Date of Sermon	Title of Sermon	Biblical Passage	Date of Sermon
On Obedience to Parents, Sermon 96	Colossians	Published in 1872	The Good Life	Colossians	April 10, 2011
On the Holy Spirit, Sermon 141	2 Corinthians 3	1736	Picture This, week 2	2 Corinthians 3	February 13, 2011
Scriptural Christianity	Acts 4	1744	Picture This, week 1	Acts 4	February 6, 2011
On Dress, Sermon 88	1 Peter 3	Published in 1872	The Me I Want to Be	1 Peter 3	January 15, 2011
Of Evil Angels, Sermon 72	Ephesians 6	Published in 1872	Robin Hood	Ephesians 6	August 1, 2010

Transcripts of John Wesley's sermons are widely available in various collections. For my review, I retrieved five transcripts from the Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church website ([www.new.gbgm-umc.org](http://www.new.gbgm-umc.org)).

Granger Community Church posts both video and audio versions of all sermons on the church website ([www.gccwired.com](http://www.gccwired.com)). The five selected sermons were transcribed for review.

The sermons sets are based on Acts 4, 2 Corinthians 3, Ephesians 6, Colossians and 1 Peter 3. Acts 4 is part of the story of the foundation of the early church in about 29 AD. The book is the continuation of Jesus' ministry, carried out by his disciples as they proclaim Jesus Christ to be the fulfillment of prophecies about the Messiah. 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians were written by the apostle Paul. Earlier in his life, Paul had been a persecutor of Christians until he surrendered his life to Christ.<sup>4</sup> He became committed to building the church and

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 9:1-18

sharing the message of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of his life, he completed three missionary journeys and was imprisoned twice for preaching the Gospel (Witmer, 1983). During his life, Paul wrote many letters to churches that he had encountered during his ministry. These letters, or epistles, contain encouragement, correction and instruction for holy Christian living. 2 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians are three of the thirteen biblical epistles authored by Paul (Witmer, 1983). 1 Peter was written by Simon Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. Peter is described in Acts 4 as a passionate preacher of the Gospel. Peter wrote to instruct Christians but his letter in 1 Peter takes a very different tone than that of Paul's letters. Peter was writing to Christians undergoing persecution for their faith, giving them advice but most of all encouragement (Raymer, 1983).

All sermons were studied for the following elements:

- Narrative patterns
- Differences between Wesley's narratives and those of the pastors of Granger Community church
- Mimesis
- Diegesis

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<sup>5</sup> The Gospel usually describes the contents of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) that detail Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The term can also be applied to the central belief in Christianity that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and the only source of salvation.

## **ANALYSIS: SERMONS BASED ON ACTS 4**

The first set of sermons analyzed is based on Acts 4 in the New Testament. The book of Acts details the life of the church following the death and resurrection of Christ. Throughout his ministry, Jesus Christ worked with and mentored twelve disciples.<sup>6</sup> Following his death and resurrection, Christ continued to guide the disciples for forty days. He reassured them that he would send the Holy Spirit to guide and instruct them as they endeavoured to share the Gospel with the world. After Christ ascended into heaven, his disciples met together to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit's arrival. This waiting period is where the book of Acts begins. The Holy Spirit's coming is recorded in Acts 2.

Acts 4 describes disciples Peter and John's activities immediately following the Holy Spirit's arrival. The Holy Spirit empowered Peter and John to boldly preach the message of the Gospel in Jerusalem. They were so bold in their preaching that listeners questioned if the men were drunk (Acts 2:13). The Holy Spirit also enabled the men to speak in other languages so that all hearers could understand their message (Acts 2:6). In addition, the disciples performed many miracles (Acts 2:43). As a result of their preaching and of miraculous signs, Peter, John and the other disciples attracted large crowds.

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<sup>6</sup> "These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (Mark 3:16-19).

The priests, temple guard and Sadducees<sup>7</sup> became alarmed at the disciples' preaching of Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 4:1-2). Peter, John and the other disciples were fully aware of the dangers of preaching the message of Jesus Christ but continued to proclaim it anyway (Acts 4:20). As a result, they were imprisoned overnight (Acts 4:3). When questioned before a group of political and religious authorities the next day, the Holy Spirit once again gave Peter boldness to share the Gospel message (Acts 4:5-8). Peter proclaimed that "Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12, New International Version).

In 1744, John Wesley preached a sermon based on this passage entitled "Scriptural Christianity". The United Methodist denomination's transcript of Wesley's sermon is seven pages (approximately 7000 words in total). Wesley spends two-thirds of his sermon explaining the biblical text and its context. He discusses the impacts of the Holy Spirit's arrival on the early church, particularly with the spiritual gifts of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness and goodness.

Wesley also notes that the Holy Spirit's arrival meant rapid growth in the Church's numbers. Immediately after the Holy Spirit descended on Christ's followers, the apostle Peter began to preach in the street. Hearing Peter's message, many people repented of their sins and committed their lives to Christ. These new Christians became known for their sense of community, care for the poor and unwavering devotion to Christ. As these new Christians continued to spread the

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<sup>7</sup> Religious leaders

message of Christ, the church grew rapidly. Acts 4:4 records that even after Peter and John were imprisoned, about 5,000 people heard the Gospel message and believed Jesus Christ to be the Messiah.

Wesley's challenge to listeners of this sermon revolves around the state of Christianity in 1744. Wesley urges his congregation to follow the example of the early church in the areas of love, service and evangelism. Just as the Church of 29 AD prayed and spent time together, Wesley stresses that his congregation should also be strong in their commitment to one another. Wesley encourages his congregants, "I entreat you to observe, that here are no peculiar notions now under consideration; that the question moved is not concerning *doubtful opinions* of one kind or another, but concerning the undoubted, fundamental branches (if there be any such) of our common Christianity" (Wesley, 1744). Most importantly, Wesley questions if the Christians of his day are filled with the Holy Spirit as are the members of the early church in Acts 4:

Where does this Christianity now exist? Where, I pray, do the Christians live? Which is the country, the inhabitants whereof are all thus filled with the Holy Ghost? --are all of one heart and of one soul? Cannot suffer one among them to lack anything, but continually give to every man as he hath need; who, one and all, have the love of God filling their hearts, and constraining them to love their neighbour as themselves; who have all "put on bowels of mercy, humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering?" Who offend not in any kind, either by word or deed, against justice, mercy, or truth; but in every point do unto all men; as they would these should do unto them? With what propriety can we term any a Christian country, which does not answer this description? Why then, let us confess we have never yet seen a Christian country upon earth... Brethren, "I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak." Let me ask you then, in tender love, and in the spirit of meekness, Is this city a Christian city? Is Christianity, scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, considered as a community of men, so "filled with the Holy Ghost," as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of that Spirit? (Wesley, 1744).

In “Scriptural Christianity”, Wesley’s use of narrative is interspersed throughout his message. However, instead of using his own examples, his illustrations are all directly from the Bible. Wesley opts to use diegesis for his narratives, remaining a constant voice in the telling of the stories.

Wesley opens his sermon with a narrative about a person’s first experiences after converting to the Christian faith. Instead of creating the story with his own insights, Wesley describes the individual through scriptural references:

And, first, let us consider Christianity in its rise, as beginning to exist in individuals. Suppose, then, one of those who heard the Apostle Peter preaching repentance and remission of sins, was pricked to the heart, was convinced of sin, repented, and then believed in Jesus. By this faith of the operation of God, which was the very substance, or subsistence, of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1,) the demonstrative evidence of invisible things, he instantly received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he now cried, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Now first it was that he could call Jesus Lord, by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:3), the Spirit itself bearing witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God (Rom. 8:16). Now it was that he could truly say, "I live not, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). (Wesley, 1744)

This point in the sermon is an example of diegesis because Wesley describes the life of a believer but does not enter into the story with creative dialogue or detail. Instead, it is a summary using biblical text as support through references to Hebrews 11:1, Romans 8:15-16, 1 Corinthians 12:3, and Galatians 2:20.

Wesley’s narrative includes several tools to increase his audience’s involvement in the story. As he begins the narrative, Wesley invites his listeners into the story with the phrase “let us consider”. This phrasing gives the impression that Wesley wants his audience to experience the story along with him. He also uses this tactic when he invites his congregants to “suppose” the reaction of the person who decides to put his or her faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Wesley also includes his audience by including references that they would most likely be familiar with. For example, Wesley describes the Christian faith as the “the very substance, or sustenance, of things hoped for”. This expression comes from Hebrew 1:1 and would be familiar to a churchgoing audience.

Wesley also keeps his audience’s attention with creative descriptions of the new believer’s emotions. For example, rather than simply citing his subject as being convicted of sin, Wesley instead says that he is “pricked to the heart”. This imagery is a method to showcase feeling and vividness without using rich dialogue as found in mimesis.

Wesley also creates interest with his description of the new believer’s relationship with God. Instead of simply mentioning that the new Christian prayed, Wesley suggests that, instead, the new believer cried out with “Abba, Father”. This inclusion implies the love that the new believer has for God since “Abba” is the Hebrew word for “Daddy”. This phrase would conjure comfortable images of a father and child for listeners and give further insight into the feelings of the new believer.

Wesley continues “Scriptural Christianity” with descriptions of how members of the Church were transformed through their worship, fellowship and learning of Christ’s work. He concludes this first section of his sermon with this narrative:

Such was Christianity in its rise. Such was a Christian in ancient days. Such was every one of those who, when they heard the threatenings of the chief priests and elders, "lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and were all filled with the Holy Ghost. The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:" So did the love of him in whom they had believed constrain them to love one another! "Neither said any of them that aught of



the things which he possessed was his own but they had all things common:" So fully were they crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them! "And they continued steadfastly with one accord in the Apostles' doctrine, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). "And great grace was upon them all; neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles' feet: And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:31-35). (Wesley, 1744)

Wesley opens the narrative with several sentences that begin with "Such was". This repetition effectively summarizes Wesley's earlier points about the growth of the early Christian church, characteristics of the first Christians and the threats that people in the early church lived with daily. The repetition is also used for Wesley to capture his congregants' interest and draw their attention to the unity displayed by the early church that he wants them to emulate. Reading the transcript, one can almost hear Wesley's voice rising with excitement as he proclaims each "such was" statement.

Since part of Wesley's challenge to his congregants was to display the kind of love the members of the early church showed for one another, he makes a point of including specific instances such as sharing possessions, having all things in common, eating together, praying for and with one another, and helping those in need.

Wesley again uses descriptive words and phrases in this narrative to make the story memorable. For example, Wesley notes that the members of the early church were discouraged by the chief priests and elders from speaking about Christ. Instead of merely mentioning this fact, Wesley uses the word "threatenings" to describe the extent to which the authorities tried to intimidate the early church.

Wesley's word choice of "threatenings" to describe the chief priests and elders' warnings also stands in stark contrast to the early Christians' response. Instead of displaying fear over the warnings not to preach the Gospel, the members of the early church made a practice of praising God together. Wesley notes that the members of the early church "lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Wesley, 1744). Wesley highlights the contrast between the "threatenings" of the religious leaders and the early church's response by placing these descriptions close together. The early Christians' reaction to the dangers of following Christ showcases their strong faith and confidence in God.

One of the most effective word choices in Wesley's narrative comes when he describes how the church should be separated from the world. He notes of the early church, "So fully were they crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them!" (Wesley, 1744). Wesley shows the stark difference between the church and the secular world by using "crucified", a common means of capital punishment at the time of the early church. Wesley's audience would also understand that this verb choice also referenced how Christ died. Since Christ's death and resurrection is at the heart of Christians' salvation message, Wesley's use of this word is very effective. Not only is he encouraging listeners to be separated from secularity, Wesley is encouraging them to become more like Christ.

Wesley uses a similar pattern of diegesis when describing Peter and John's efforts in sharing the Gospel message and their subsequent arrest. Instead of delivering the story with paraphrased dialogue and action, Wesley summarizes the passage from Acts 4 by using various passages from the Bible for insight.

And (the apostles') labor was not in vain in the Lord. His word ran and was glorified. It grew mightily and prevailed. But so much the more did offences prevail also. The world in general were offended, "because they testified of it, that the works thereof were evil" (John 7:7). The men of pleasure were offended, not only because these men were made, as it were, to reprove their thoughts ("He professeth," said they, "to have the knowledge of God; he calleth himself the child of the Lord, his life is not like other men's; his ways are of another fashion; he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness; he maketh his boast, that God is his Father" Wis. 2:13-16;) but much more, because so many of their companions were taken away, and would no more run with them to "the same excess of riot." (1 Pet. 4:4.) The men of reputation were offended, because, as the gospel spread, they declined in the esteem of the people; and because many no longer dared to give them flattering titles, or to pay man the homage due to God only. The men of trade called one another together, and said, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth: but ye see and hear that these men have persuaded and turned away much people; so that this our craft is in danger to be set at nought" (Acts 19:25ff). Above all, the men of religion, so called, the men of *outside* religion, "the saints of the world," were offended, and ready at every opportunity to cry out, "Men of Israel, help! We have found these men pestilent fellows, movers of sedition throughout the world" (Acts 24:5). "These are the men that teach all men everywhere against the people, and against this place" (Acts 21:28).

Thus it was that the heavens grew black with clouds, and the storm gathered again. For the more Christianity spread, the more hurt was done, in the account of those who received it not; and the number increased of those who were more and more enraged at these "men who thus turned the world upside down;" (Acts 17:6) insomuch that more and more cried out, "Away with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that they should live;" yea, and sincerely believed, that whosoever should kill them would do God service (Wesley, 1744).

Wesley repeats previous patterns of using rich descriptions in his diegesis. First, Wesley describes the rampant growth of the Gospel, "And (the apostles') labor was not in vain in the Lord. His word ran and was glorified. It grew mightily and prevailed" (Wesley, 1744). In this instance, Wesley applies action verbs to describe growth in the church. The use of "the word" is also another instance of Wesley including references that would be familiar for a church audience. In John 1, Jesus Christ is described: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father,

full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Wesley’s use of the term “the word” reflects the fact that the message of the Gospel is rooted in Jesus Christ.

Wesley also uses action verbs to describe the offences that were being carried out against the members of the early church. Wesley says that the offences prevailed and then goes on to direct examples from the Bible of how people became offended at the message of the disciples.

Although Wesley uses summary in the narrative, he makes sure to captivate his audience with descriptions like “the heavens grew black with clouds, and the storm gathered again”. This rich imagery is a stylistic device to captivate his audience and provide some context, even without using the immersion techniques that would be found in a story told with mimesis. This description also emphasizes that although Acts 4 describes the early church’s rampant growth and fellowship, they also experienced hurt, persecution and anger from the secular world.

Mark Beeson of Granger Community Church uses a very different strategy with his use of narrative in his message based on Acts 4 entitled “Picture This, Part One”. Beeson’s theme in the sermon is following Christ wholeheartedly and he encourages congregants to visualize what such a life would look like. Beeson enlists his sermon title, “Picture This”, in his opening comments,

Well, picture this. People of the world in turmoil and strife and difficulty, facing heartache, hungry, wounded, feeling all alone. People wondering if there’s any help or any hope discover that God Almighty has not left them to despair.... Picture this: that God would come in His own Son Jesus Christ, that God would take on flesh, Emmanuel, God with us and that God would dwell among us... Picture this: that anyone who trusts Christ, that anyone who comes to Him, anyone who turns from a life of selfishness and sin and decides to submit to Christ and His kingdom cannot only have life and forgiveness forever but peace and joy and hope... Picture this: that you are

called right now to make what may be the most important decision that you've ever made and it is simply that you submit your life to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Beeson, 2011).

Beeson outlines what submission to Christ means in the daily life of a Christian. He then acknowledges the hesitancy of submitting to Christ and uses a narrative to illustrate. He also ties in the title of the sermon "Picture This" with this example,

You may say, "I'm not sure about this Jesus, I don't know that I know Jesus. I've heard his name mentioned but usually it's not in praise. I've had some friends name his name but I don't think they were thankful for anything, they were just mad. So this Jesus, I don't know him, I don't know God, I don't know what God even looks like, why would I give my future to God if I can't even picture him?"

Well it's like the little boy who was furiously drawing at home and as he was scribbling away with his crayons, his mother couldn't help but ask, "What are you drawing?" He didn't even look up but with more energy, he drew and drew and he said "God! I'm drawing God!". And his mother said, "Oh honey, no one knows what God looks like." He just kept drawing. "Not yet they don't," he said.

Wouldn't it be something if people could see the love of God in your life? Picture this: a life well lived, a life that has such significance and purpose that adds so much value that the world sits up and says, "this is a picture of the kingdom of God." Picture a life like that (Beeson, 2011).

This opening narrative is an example of Beeson's use of mimesis. He first enters into the story from the perspective of his listeners, crafting a creative inner dialogue. Similar to Wesley, Beeson is trying to showcase the heart and thoughts of a person new to the Christian faith. In Beeson's case, he includes the inner turmoil that can make a new believer question or doubt their decision to follow Christ. Beeson also ties in the title with the question, "Why would I give my future to God if I can't even picture him?"

The mimesis continues with the example of the little boy who is drawing a picture of God. Beeson stages the story with description and dialogue between a mother and her son. Although the story is short, Beeson completely envelops his audience in it. He describes the little boy as “furiously drawing” and “scribbling” over his artwork. Immediately, the audience can picture the scene. Beeson takes the image further with the conversation between the boy and his mother. By setting up the scene so well, the audience can practically hear the little boy proclaiming, “God! I’m drawing God!” and his smug comment that everyone will know what God looks like once his drawing is complete. The story also evokes thoughts of a cozy relationship between a boy and his mother. In this way, it is reflective of Wesley’s use of “Abba” in “Scriptural Christianity to depict a comfortable relationship between God and a new believer.

Beeson goes on to use extensive narrative as he continues with his sermon. He relies heavily on mimesis, using personal stories and examples from his own life to support his points. After reading Acts 4 directly from the Bible, Beeson uses the following story to frame his sermon and its application points:

You may know that about a year ago I traveled to Egypt. I had the opportunity to go with some friends from Granger Community Church and travel the route of the Exodus. It was a great experience for me.

Of course, preparing to go, it seemed right that I should read and study all about Egypt. So I read everything! I read books by historians, I read archeologists, I read religious leaders and tried to glean their thoughts about Egypt. I read about history, the past, the present and what some called the future of Egypt and I knew about Egypt. I knew everything there was to know about Egypt!

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever read a book about marriage before you got married only to discover that shortly after you got married, that the book somehow was incomplete? You read it, you understood it, you thought you were ready and somehow, about two years

into your marriage, you're like, "NEW INFORMATION! THIS WASN'T CLEAR IN THE BOOK!"

I read all the books and went to Egypt. I knew all about Egypt from the books I'd read and I arrived there in Cairo and I met Izad. Izad was a Christian – still is! – he lives in Cairo and we spent several days with Izad and he would teach us and train us and guide us and show us the various places. The more I listened to him, the more impressed I was with his knowledge. It seemed that he knew everything about Egypt, things that I had never understood. Finally I asked him, "Izad! How is it that you know so much about Egypt?" And he looked at me and said, "Well, I've lived here all my life."

How many of you know that there are more ways of learning than studying in books? Book learning is in fact a poor substitute for first-hand experience (Beeson, 2011).

This story is an example of mimesis. By describing this past event, Beeson reflects Jahn's statement that one's past self can become a character in mimesis. Beeson provides background detail of his reading in preparation for his trip to Egypt and also includes dialogue. Through his narrative, Beeson's audience captures a very clear idea of his preparation for the trip and some of his experiences with his Egyptian host, Izad. It is also through his host that Beeson realizes there's a gap between his knowledge and that of Izad. Flabbergasted by Izad's extensive knowledge, Beeson questions him about where he learned all of the facts he's been sharing with the group. Izad's reply of "I've lived here all my life" allows the audience to enter further into the study but also lends itself to Beeson's point. He suggests that there is a world of difference between book learning and experience. He maintains that a relationship with Christ is no exception. Beeson encourages his audience to truly know Christ and build a relationship with him, not simply rely on second-hand knowledge of others.

Beeson then discusses the parallel of Izad's comment with the experience of Peter and John. While Peter and John were not educated scholars, they had spent

three years with Jesus. Their first-hand experience was what allowed them to speak so boldly, even when confronted and threatened. Beeson explains the commonality in this narrative:

The truth is, if you really want to get inside a subject or you really want a subject to get inside of you, you may need to live with it, live in it. That's what was so striking about Peter and John. There's no doubt in that day, in that community, that rabble-rousers of some sort or another had been dragged before the Sanhedrin on a number of occasions. The truth is, most of those folks, troublemakers in general, probably had nothing to say when confronted directly. But Peter and John were different. They clearly had not been through a Levitical school to study the scriptures. In that Judean society, people knew who the up and coming bright young students were who were going to be Rabbis. These guys were just not that type. They were untrained, they were ordinary men. Now they had just made shrewd use of one of the Psalms, something you might expect of someone who had been to class and had studied in the Levitical schools and studied different interpretations of the scriptures – but they hadn't been to the Levitical schools! Like Izad who had lived in Egypt and knew Egypt well, they knew a secret and that secret allowed them to run circles around some of the book learning that they were facing. You see, the difference was they had lived with Jesus (Beeson, 2011)

Like Wesley's analysis of the biblical text, Beeson's is also characterized by diegesis. He summarizes the story of Peter and John in Acts 4 and provides good detail but doesn't use direct quotes. His own voice is evident and this is a predominant feature in diegetic narratives (Shen, 2005). It is important that Beeson take on the role of the narrator at this point in the sermon. In order to drive conviction into his audience and have the challenge be memorable, he needs to have his audience's confidence. By telling the biblical narrative himself instead of having the characters at the forefront, Beeson can easily intersperse his own insights such as, "The truth is, most of those folks, troublemakers in general, probably had nothing to say when confronted directly. But Peter and John were different... In that Judean society, people knew who the up and coming bright young students were who were



going to be Rabbis. These guys were just not that type” (Beeson, 2011). By establishing his credibility, Beeson captures his audience’s confidence and trust and he positions himself to challenge his congregation. Beeson’s use of diegesis also allows him to build a relationship with his audience. He uses down-to-earth language and has an approachable style with his interpretation of the text.

As his sermon continues, Beeson uses a combination of personal examples and biblical text. In this example, he describes his own experience of driving in a snowstorm. With extensive detail of his own feelings and surroundings, Beeson uses mimesis to describe the situation. He then continues to use mimesis in restaging the biblical text and paraphrasing Peter:

Not too long ago, we had a huge snowstorm. I was crazy and decided to drive in it. Snow everywhere, whiteout, it was just fantastic! Drifts and everything cancelled and snow and wind! I went out to the little shed by our house to get some things to bring into the house. Howling, blowing wind was taking the shed door back and forth and I reached out to grab it. I wasn’t wearing any gloves – fourteen below zero, thirty mile an hour wind – why would I wear gloves? I’m a man! My hand stuck to the door and the howling wind is blowing the door back and I’m trying to close the door. Have you ever tried to close the door on a howling wind? How are you going to close that up? How are you going to keep that wind from blasting it open?

I tell you, that’s how those folks in the Sanhedrin must have felt. Think about it – anyone who has found any name that will enable sick people to be healed is very unlikely to stop using the name no matter what the authorities say – and even if they forbid it. So Peter answers them in a way that’s not just pragmatic but the truth is, his answer is theological. It forms the basis of all Christian resistance to the powers of this world from that day to this. Peter says, “You’re the judges around here? Very well then! Give me your legal judgment. Render your opinion on this one! If we’re standing here in the presence of Almighty God, should we then obey God or should we obey you? Judge that!” And of course, Peter then answers his own question and says, “You can answer any way you like but as for me and my friends, we are not going to stop speaking the name of Jesus. And we won’t stop talking about what God has done through Him. You’re not able to close this door” (Beeson, 2011).

Despite the lightheartedness of his narratives, Beeson's application point returns to submission to Christ. He speaks passionately about a vibrant relationship with Christ but points back to the disciples' experience to point out that following him can be costly and lead to trials. His final use of narrative in this message is an example of a difficult circumstance taken from current events:

A photographer in Egypt took these pictures yesterday. These are pictures of Christians holding hands and facing outward – their hands joined in a circle to protect their neighbors and friends in Cairo from their attackers. They have joined their hands and they are standing between their Muslim neighbors as they pray and those who would do them harm. I see this and I think, "Naming the name of Jesus is a costly thing isn't it?" And I look at it and I think, "Where would I be? What would I do? What am I doing?" Seeing the image, it's like I am invited into the reality of the turmoil to stand one way or another and I've been asking myself, "Where will I stand? Where do I stand? And how will I stand? How do I do it?" (Beeson, 2011).

This narrative is an example of diegesis. Beeson's description of the events in Egypt is from an outside perspective. Beeson summarizes the situation and therefore applies diegesis. He establishes distance immediately with the narrative's opening sentence, "A photographer in Egypt took these pictures yesterday." The distance is important because the point of the sermon is not to think about the political situation in Egypt. Beeson wants his audience to focus on their own lives and on Beeson's encouragement to live wholeheartedly for Christ. At the end of this narrative, Beeson adds his own insight and involves the audience in the moment when he saw these images for the first time. He reveals his own inner dialogue but remains a dominant narrator in the story. He also emphasizes his point with the questions, "Where will I stand? Where do I stand? And how will I stand? How do I do it?" (Beeson, 2011). These questions are ones that Beeson has posed to himself but indirectly, he is asking them of his congregation through this story.

Both Wesley and Beeson use significant narrative to preach on the events portrayed in Acts 4. While Wesley focuses only on biblical narratives and Beeson uses a combination of biblical and current stories, they reinforce Fisher's view that narration can add meaning for an audience. In these sermons, Beeson and Wesley use narrative to substantiate the claims and application points made in their sermons.

Beeson and Wesley use many examples of Peter and John throughout their respective sermons. Their extended use and retelling of the biblical narrative reflect Hauerwas's assertion that the church must embrace the "narrative structure of Christian convictions" in order to be effective. By retelling a familiar biblical narrative with new detail, both pastors raise new points and use the narratives as a platform to encourage their congregations to live wholeheartedly for Christ.

### **ANALYSIS: SERMONS BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS 3**

The sermons in the second pair are derived from 2 Corinthians 3. 2 Corinthians is a letter from the apostle Paul to members of the early church in Corinth. His letter contains some continuations of the themes within 1 Corinthians but is also a defense of his leadership of the church. After his first letter, the church in Corinth questioned Paul's authority and accused him of inconsistencies and skewed motives (Peterson, 2002). In this particular chapter, Paul writes of the ultimate authority, the Holy Spirit, and the freedoms that are granted to all Christians through him. In particular, Christians are able to approach God with their prayers and requests freely without use of a high priest because of the gift of the Holy Spirit's intercession.<sup>8</sup>

John Wesley's sermon based on this passage is entitled "On the Holy Spirit" and it was preached at St. Mary's, Oxford in 1736. Since the passage is a letter of guidance and instruction from Paul, Wesley's style in presenting his sermon is very different than in "Scriptural Christianity" where his reference contained a story. Wesley's narratives in this sermon take the form of biblical examples illustrating the Holy Spirit's presence.

Wesley opens his sermon with a reference to the apostles' work, one example of which is contained in Wesley's "Scriptural Christianity" sermon. This narrative also gives an account of Christ and Wesley again takes his descriptions from biblical references.

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<sup>8</sup> "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

The Apostle had been showing how the gospel ministry was superior to that of the law: The time being now come when types and shadows should be laid aside, and we should be invited to our duty by the manly and ingenuous motives of a clear and full revelation, open and free on God's part, and not at all disguised by his ambassadors. But what he chiefly insists upon is, not the *manner*, but the *subject* of their ministry: "Who hath made us able ministers," saith he, "of the New Testament: Not of the letter, but of the Spirit: For the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Here lies the great difference between the two dispensations: That the law was indeed *spiritual* in its demands, requiring a life consecrated to God in the observance of many rules; but, not conveying spiritual assistance, its effect was only to kill and mortify man, by giving him to understand, that he must needs be in a state of great depravity, since he found it so difficult to obey God; and that, as particular deaths were by that institution inflicted for particular sins, so death, in general, was but the consequence of his universal sinfulness. But the ministration of the New Testament was that of a "Spirit which giveth life;" -- a Spirit, not only promised, but actually conferred; which should both enable Christians now to live unto God, and fulfill precepts even more spiritual than the former; and restore them hereafter to perfect life, after the ruins of sin and death. The incarnation, preaching, and death of Jesus Christ were designed to represent, proclaim, and purchase for us this gift of the Spirit; and therefore says the Apostle, "The Lord is that Spirit," or the Spirit (Wesley, 1736).

This opening narrative is an example of Wesley's use of diegesis. While he uses direct quotes from Paul, Wesley takes on a definitive role as narrator. For example, he adds his own commentary when discussing the differences between the law and the gift of the Holy Spirit, "Here lies the great difference between the two dispensations: That the law was indeed *spiritual* in its demands, requiring a life consecrated to God in the observance of many rules... But the ministration of the New Testament was that of a "Spirit which giveth life;" -- a Spirit, not only promised, but actually conferred" (Wesley, 1736).

Wesley uses another narrative that also describes the work of the Holy Spirit, this time using Adam and Eve as examples:

Our first parents did enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit; for they were created in the image and likeness of God, which was no other than his Spirit. By that he communicates himself to his creatures, and by that alone they can

bear any likeness to him. It is, indeed, his life in them; and so properly divine, that, upon this ground, angels and regenerate men are called his children. But when man would not be guided by the Holy Spirit, it left him (Wesley, 1736).

Again, Wesley uses diegesis. Wesley is telling the story from Genesis from an outside perspective and takes on the voice of a narrator. Wesley outlines the creation story and how in the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with God. However, this relationship was broken when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment.<sup>9</sup>

Wesley then outlines how Christ's life, death and resurrection provide the way for people to again enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. The remainder of his sermon is instruction for how to live a holy life guided by the Holy Spirit. He admonishes his listeners not to allow bitterness, anxiety or anger to be defining characteristics but instead to be meek, discerning and hard working (Wesley, 1736).

Wesley presents his narratives in "On the Holy Spirit" from "the level above the primary story" (Shen, 2005). Since 2 Corinthians 3 is theological discussion, Wesley's use of short diegetic stories and brief summaries allows for a change of pace in the sermon without the need to go into deep detail with mimesis.

Like Wesley, Beeson's approach in presenting 2 Corinthians 3 through his message "Picture This, Part Two" is varied from his approach when preaching on Acts 4. Instead of relying on large amounts of narrative, Beeson too focuses on the instruction of the text. His first narrative of the sermon leads into discussion of the passage itself:

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 3:1-7

God is offering a new covenant, a new relationship, the opportunity to enter into his family, his kingdom, to walk in his light with his love. It's a new covenant.

Now a covenant is a contract – some of you know what a covenant is from when you moved into your neighborhood and you had to sign the neighborhood covenant that said, “Put a fence around your swimming pool and do not let your dog run around”. The covenant of the neighborhood is that you shovel the sidewalk in front of your house. This is what a covenant is according to the dictionary: it's usually formal, solemn and a binding agreement or pact. A written agreement or promise usually under the seal of two or more parties especially for the performance of some action. Now any time you enter into a covenant community, you understand that you're choosing it – you choose to go into covenant and you want it, you long for it. So it is when you come to God or rather, when God comes to you. And you say, “That's what I want! I want to walk in the light! I'd love to be in a covenant community where there's trust and honor and people help each other and there's forgiveness and grace and mercy! I would love to be in that kind of covenant community!” And God says, “That's the kind of community that I want, I want to be your God and you can be my people!” Don't you want that?

And our covenant God has invited us to understand the covenant! God says, “Look, if you want to walk in the light and live in the light and be in covenant so that there's trust and joy and hope and confidence in each other, deep rich friendship, then there's a few things you're going to want to know about how we live together and what covenant looks like.” So from the time God called Abram until God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, God establishes covenant and God invites us in and He says, “There's a way to live and it works!” (Beeson, 2011).

Beeson's opening narrative provides an example of both diegesis and mimesis. First, Beeson describes God's covenant as “a new relationship, the opportunity to enter into his family, his kingdom, to walk in his light with his love” and explains that a covenant is a type of contract. Immediately after this explanation, Beeson goes into the personal example of a neighbourhood contract. This explanation is a way to change the pace of the sermon, keep his audience's attention but also to give a more approachable example. He provides a third party narrator's view of the neighbourhood contract. However, when describing God's setup of a covenant, he

uses mimesis, adding creative dialogue to the narrative so that his congregation will clearly understand his point. He provides the voice of a person entering into the new covenant, “That’s what I want! I want to walk in the light! I’d love to be in a covenant community where there’s trust and honor and people help each other and there’s forgiveness and grace and mercy! I would love to be in that kind of covenant community!” and also provides God’s response, “That’s the kind of community that I want, I want to be your God and you can be my people!” This dialogue is a use of mimesis.

Like Wesley, Beeson continues his sermon by describing what a Christian’s life looks like when he or she chooses to live under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Beeson stresses again the importance of the covenant he illustrates at the beginning of the sermon. If a Christian is living in a true covenant relationship with the Holy Spirit, he or she shows complete submission to the Holy Spirit’s leadership. Likewise, this submission showcases itself in the church as a whole. Beeson stresses this point and adds in a short narrative to ensure that his listeners remember his point about leadership within the church as a whole and within Granger Community Church specifically,

Just so no one is confused at Granger Community Church about who is leading, I want to get very clear. You should not wonder who the leader is of the church. You shouldn’t wonder about who’s leading the work, who’s responsible. It says in Mark 8, Jesus said, “Anyone who intends to come to me and come with me has to let me lead.” So in the covenant community, who is leading? Jesus! There’s no doubt about it, no one’s vying for the position, he is the sovereign leader, sovereign Lord of the covenant community, Jesus is our leader. Remember when you’re in first grade in Sunday School? Every question the teacher asked, the answer’s Jesus. In first grade Sunday School, you could count on that. And not just in first grade Sunday school, it’s pretty good when you think about it all your life. The answer to almost any question is Jesus. He is our leader! (Beeson, 2011).



Beeson again showcases the mix of mimesis and diegesis. First, when he points to Mark 8, Beeson uses mimesis by paraphrasing Jesus' words. Beeson wants to stress the importance of Christ's leadership so the use of Christ's command emphasizes its importance. When Beeson moves to the example of the Sunday School class, he uses diegesis to describe the situation briefly. By using diegesis, his brief narrative doesn't detract from his point that the leader of the church is Jesus Christ.

Beeson continues his focus on the importance of Christ's leadership by pointing to another passage, this time in Matthew 28:

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (Matthew 28:18). Why? Because he's the leader! He's the one! "Therefore, Jesus said, 'Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:19).

Jesus says that this is our cause, this is our mission. This is our leader and our mission is clear. Jesus says we're going to love God and love others. Jesus says we're going to go wherever we go and wherever we are, we're to do the work of the kingdom! He is the leader, not us; he is the driver; not us – follow me, stay with me.

This retelling of Jesus' final instructions to his disciples is another example of mimesis. Beeson again uses Christ's words directly from the Bible and inserts them into a creative telling. This style allows for emphasis on Christ's words while also garnering attention by framing them creatively.

Beeson's style varies from the long examples of mimesis he showcases in the first "Picture This" sermon. His narratives are shorter and more directly related to his challenge to the congregation that they fully commit themselves to the Holy

Spirit's direction. In this case, Beeson is reflecting Goldberg's belief that narratives can develop convictions and challenge a listener's previous worldview.

## **ANALYSIS: SERMONS BASED ON EPHESIANS 6**

Ephesians 6 is another of the apostle Paul's letters, this time to the Christians in Ephesus. The ultimate theme of the passage is reconciliation, the idea that Jesus Christ is working all situations together for God's glory (Peterson, 2002). However, Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus not to rely on their own ability to rectify difficult situations. Their power ultimately came from the Holy Spirit and they needed to make sure that they depended on him to overcome evil forces in the world.

Wesley uses a mix of both biblical and personal narrative in presenting this passage in his sermon "Of Evil Angels". Wesley begins by describing the origin of evil spirits:

With regard to the First, we cannot doubt but all the angels of God were originally of the same nature. Unquestionably they were the highest order of created beings. They were spirits, pure ethereal creatures, simple and incorruptible; if not wholly immaterial, yet certainly not incumbered with gross, earthly flesh and blood. As spirits, they were endued with understanding, with affections, and with liberty, or a power of self-determination; so that it lay in themselves, either to continue in their allegiance to God, or to rebel against him.

And their original properties were, doubtless, the same with those of the holy angels. There is no absurdity in supposing Satan their chief, otherwise styled, "Lucifer, son of the morning," to have been at least one "of the first, if not the first Archangel." Like the other sons of the morning, they had a height and depth of understanding quite incomprehensible to us. In consequence of this they had such knowledge and wisdom, that the wisest of the children of men (had men then existed) would have been mere idiots in comparison of them. Their strength was equal to their knowledge; such as it cannot enter into our heart to conceive; neither can we conceive to how wide a sphere of action either their strength or their knowledge extended. Their number God alone can tell: Doubtless it was only less than infinite. And a third part of these stars of heaven the arch-rebel drew after him (Wesley, 2011).

This description of Lucifer's and his followers' rebellion against God is told as a diegetic narrative. Wesley's choice to use third person narration is logical at this point in the sermon as his credibility is strengthened by maintaining the voice of the narrator. Through his use of an active voice within the narrative, he reinforces the fact that he is well-studied in his subject and this credibility is needed with a difficult and often taboo topic like evil spirits. Wesley goes on to depict the existence of evil spirits as recorded throughout the Bible. At one point, he condenses several instances into a single short narrative, "Thus he 'entered into Judas,' and confirmed him in the design of betraying his Master; thus he 'put it into the heart' of Ananias and Sapphira 'to lie unto the Holy Ghost;' and, in like manner, he has a share in all the actions and words and designs of evil men" (Wesley, 2011). This short narrative points to various undeniable instances of evil in the Bible. Its effectiveness, though, is in tying these biblical examples with the fact that evil spirits were behind every harmful action and word in Wesley's time.

Wesley then moves to the second point of his sermon. He describes the work of evil spirits and how their ultimate goal is to make Christians stumble in their efforts to follow Christ. Wesley points out that Christ himself was tempted while on earth,

They are (remember, so far as God permits!) governors of the world! So that there may be more ground than we are apt to imagine for that strange expression of Satan, (Matt. 4:8-9,) when he showed our Lord "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me'." It is a little more particularly expressed in the fourth chapter of St. Luke: "The devil showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." (Such an astonishing measure of power is still left in the prince of darkness!) "And the devil said, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: For that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will, I give it" (Matt. 4:5, 6) (Wesley, 2011).

While Wesley uses Satan's words to showcase his character in the narrative, he continues to use diegesis. Wesley's own insights as narrator are evident in this example. He adds them as the narrative progresses, at one point noting that that evil spirits are "governors of the world" but also reminding his audience, "remember, so far as God permits!" He also enters into the story along with his audience, describing Christ as "our Lord". This simple inclusion portrays that Wesley is learning and growing along with his congregation, not simply passing along knowledge.

Wesley cautions his listeners not to be deceived into thinking that these evil spirits existed only in biblical times. To illustrate this point, he uses a personal anecdote:

Many years ago I was asking an experienced physician, and one particularly eminent for curing lunacy, "Sir, have you not seen reason to believe that some lunatics are really demoniacs?" He answered, "Sir, I have been often inclined to think that most lunatics are demoniacs. Nor is there any weight in that objection, that they are frequently cured by medicine: For so might any other disease occasioned by an evil spirit, if God did not suffer him to repeat the stroke by which that disease is occasioned" (Wesley, 2011).

At this point, Wesley's use of narrative becomes mimetic as he describes a past situation in detail with full dialogue. At this point in the sermon, Wesley has provided a biblical overview on the subject of evil spirits and can now enter fully into a current narrative to reinforce his points. A narrative using mimesis is the most effective way to illustrate and also captivate the audience.

Wesley's use of both biblical and current narratives is reflective of Goldberg's work that pointed to narratives as a means to make seemingly disconnected theology flow together to ease an audience's understanding. By combining many biblical examples, Wesley shows the existence and actions of evil spirits throughout

the Bible. However, Wesley's desire is for his congregation to be aware of evil spirits and their prevalence. By showcasing a narrative from his day, Wesley uses narrative to urge his congregation to remain strong in their faith to resist temptation by evil spirits.

Granger Community Church's analysis of Ephesians 6 is within a series of sermons based on popular films. For this particular sermon entitled "Robin Hood", Pastor Rob Wegner uses the current film version of Robin Hood starring Russell Crowe as his basis. However, he first uses a personal narrative to share his initial encounter with the classic story:

The first time I ran into [the story of Robin Hood] was when I was elementary school-aged. I grew up in the south side of Chicago and on Sunday afternoons, on channel 9, there was this show called *Family Classics*. Has anyone seen *Family Classics*? I bet right now there is this warm affection rising for Frasier Thomas, am I right? He was like a grandfather to all of us. He was the host of the show – a warm, yet stately man. The show would begin with this classical music and he would be standing in front of this big bookshelf and there were all these leather-bound volumes and these were symbolic of the family classics. Frasier Thomas came up with this canon of movies and he would pull one down and let you know which one you were going to watch. And our whole family would gather on Sunday afternoons – we'd go to church in the morning, we'd eat lunch together and then we would gather around Frasier Thomas and the *Family Classics*.

Now, you've got to remember this was back before there were VCRs or DVD players or Blu-Ray players so you couldn't go out and watch a movie so this was a big deal! So if you wanted your classic movie fix, he was the only dealer on the block that could get you the crack that you needed – he was the only guy! So we really looked forward to it (Wegner, 2010).

Wegner's opening narrative provides context for the story of Robin Hood and also serves to capture his audience's attention. While he doesn't use any direct dialogue, Wegner immerses his audience in the scenes. First, he describes the Family Classics set in detail, citing Frasier Thomas's appearance and his surroundings of the big bookshelf with the leather-bound volumes. Wegner also describes the weekly rituals

of church on Sunday morning, lunch as a family and then gathering around the television for *Family Classics*.

Wegner also captures his audience's attention with humour. By describing Frasier Thomas as "the only dealer on the block" who could provide "the crack (classic movies) that you needed", Wegner ensures that he has the audience's full attention and can introduce the story itself with this narrative,

Now there was a set amount of movies in the *Family Classics* canon so you knew which ones were coming and he played a lot of them at the same time of the year and my two favorites were *War of the Worlds*... and then the other one starred Errol Flynn and it was called *Robin Hood*. How many of you have seen that old classic version? As a kid, this was two hours of action-packed adventure and it was one of my favorite movies. But I have a confession to make – I watched it about ten or fifteen years later when I was in my early twenties and by this point in time, I'd been corrected by all the action stars of the 80s like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold so when I watched it, I was completely underwhelmed and disappointed. I liked Errol Flynn but he was a skinny guy wearing tight pants and a green birthday hat, you know? And the whole time, he pranced around kind of like a ballet dancer. So it's a good thing Errol Flynn isn't the only leading star to take this role. Over the years, lots of different actors have strapped on the green tights. You've got Kevin Costner and now you've got Russell Crowe. And it's interesting with the story because it has such longevity. It's been around for hundreds and hundreds of years and it has been retold over and over again but that really made me stop and think: What's the staying power of Robin Hood?

Here's what I'm proposing – I think Robin Hood was developed at just the right time in literature and in civilization where he became this iconic symbol for the underdog. He became this ultimate symbol of seeking justice for those that are downtrodden and oppressed and pushed down – Robin Hood emerged in this world where there were these feudal lords and they were oppressing the peasants and basically using their power for personal benefit. Yes, Robin Hood was this outlaw vigilante but only because those who were supposed to uphold the law were so corrupt that to obey the law was actually unlawful in itself. So he became this rebel philanthropist who stood up for the average person and said "NO! You can't just grind these people under your feet." He was the one who drew the line in the sand over a corrupt monarchy and said, "That's it and no more!" He did what he needed to do to stand up for the underdog (Wegner, 2010).

Wegner once again engages his audience with detailed descriptions about his childhood memories of *Family Classics* and more specifically, his first impression of the Robin Hood story. This detailed description is another use of mimesis. However, when Wegner talks about the impact of the Robin Hood story, he switches to diegesis. Wegner notes, “I think Robin Hood was developed at just the right time in literature and in civilization where he became this iconic symbol for the underdog”. With this introduction, Wegner takes on the guiding voice of a narrator, inserting his own thoughts of why the Robin Hood story has been so powerful and captivating for so many generations. Wegner uses rich descriptions for Robin Hood like “outlaw vigilante” and “rebel philanthropist” to provide creative insight into the character. The switch to diegesis is also appropriate at this point because Wegner comes back to these insights later in the sermon when he provides the sermon’s challenge for the Granger congregation.

Since his sermon is framed around a story, it’s appropriate that Wegner uses a great deal of narrative in this sermon. After using Ephesians 6 and pointing to God’s opinion of injustice and evil, Wegner again uses narrative. This time, he draws parallels between Robin Hood and the Old Testament character David<sup>10</sup> in order to present David as a hero,

So I’m going to go through a list and I want you to tell me who you think this biblical character is. Like Robin Hood, he was a crusader for his people, for the underdog. Like Robin Hood, he was chased by a corrupt king. Like Robin Hood, he had an accuracy with flying projectiles. Like Robin Hood, he put together his own band of ragtag warriors, his own group of merry men who

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<sup>10</sup> David was the second king of Israel. Despite many mistakes and difficult situations over the course of his life and reign, David is described as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22).



had a fierce loyalty to him. Like Robin Hood, his story is one about standing up against a giant of injustice, against the odds, simply because it's the right thing to do. Who's the original Robin Hood? David!

We know the story of David and Goliath. This story creates a kind of equilibrium – it creates a feeling inside of us that symbolizes something powerful and beautiful. Let me illustrate – most of us who are parents in this room are not going to let our kids sit down and watch a movie that features small children decapitating adults. It's just not going to happen. And yet, those same parents, myself included, have a children's Bible at home that has a picture of David with Goliath's head in his hands. Now, why is that? There's something much deeper going on. This isn't just about some kind of battle that involved simply geopolitical nations and it stopped there. It wasn't about revenge – much deeper! (Wegner, 2010)

Similar to Wesley's strategy at the beginning of "On Evil Spirits", Wegner maintains a third party narrator stance in this narrative. Using diegesis, Wegner is able to easily move from having his audience look at the similarities between Robin Hood and David to an overview of the story of David and Goliath. Wegner's use of clues and having the audience guess the biblical character he is referring to is another tactic that Wegner uses to engage his audience. Once Wegner reveals that the biblical character is David, he offers some creative insights on the famous David and Goliath story. Wegner notes, "Most of us who are parents in this room are not going to let our kids sit down and watch a movie that features small children decapitating adults." This graphic example is a way to have the audience look at the story in a new way. Instead of a simple biblical story, Wegner is setting up the David and Goliath story to contribute to his points about injustice.

Immediately after this narrative, Wegner continues his sermon with examples of injustice from the Bible. His use of diegesis is effective with this narrative so that Wegner can easily move from narrative to application points without a change in voice from a character in the story to pastor.

He continues this strategy when pointing back to a previous speaker at Granger Community Church and comparing him to David,

I think of Judge Miller... He talked about reading the newspaper one morning and he sees this picture of a homeless veteran who's sleeping at below freezing level. He was sleeping in a box that looked just like a coffin. He said something snapped and that's all he could stand. He wasn't going to let that giant roam in his town... A lot of guys his age would have been thinking about a comfortable retirement. But Judge Miller stood up and he grabbed his sling and he ran to the battle. And I want to say, what kind of thing gets that kind of response out of you friends? What is it?

Look at David's response: "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David realizes that there's something deeper going on here. In other words, there's a battle going on between the serpent, the corrupt king, and the King of kings. He realizes that he's at the right place at the right time and no one's doing anything! Maybe I'm the right one. Maybe I'm the giant slayer (Wegner, 2010).

Wegner again uses diegesis and maintains the voice of a narrator. With this example, his style is effective when presenting a challenge to the congregation. He also ties his earlier narrative about David and Goliath into this new story about Judge Miller. Wegner describes the injustice of a veteran sleeping on the street as "that giant" and that in response, Judge Miller "grabbed his sling and he ran to the battle." In addition to adding vivid imagery to his story, this tactic also allows for Wegner to once again return to the story of David and Goliath and draw comparisons. Wegner then presents these verses from Ephesians 6:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Wegner continues his challenge to the congregation to look at their own lives and what battles they find themselves in. Wegner points out many everyday examples of injustice and draws parallels between these daily battles and the stories of both David and Robin Hood.

To draw the sermon to a close, Wegner again uses a similar strategy to Wesley's and begins to wind down the sermon with a personal story. Wegner calls his story "The Wet Wipe Warmer Incident" (full version in Appendix A) and explains:

My youngest daughter was born in December 2003 and we had one of those wet wipe warmers... a couple weeks after our youngest was born, it just up and died on us. So my wife sent me on a mission to retrieve a new wet wipe warmer. So I went to the local pharmacy, got in line where there was only one cash open so it was kind of a long line. This lady pulls up behind me... As we're standing there, she asks, "What is it that you have there?" And I'm standing holding the wet wipe warmer thinking, "This is going to be awesome because I am a super dad and I'm going to be perceived as a nurturing dad who is so loving to his newborn baby". So I turn around and tell her it's a wet wipe warmer and it's for my new little girl. She doesn't look happy and asks, "Can I see that?" and at this point, there should have been warning bells in my head. But I hand over the wet wipe warmer and she turns it over and reads the back then hands it back, locks eyes with me and says, "What's that for?" ... And she launched into a tirade. She yelled, "That is the most obtuse, appalling appliance I have ever seen!" ... And then there was this pause and everyone in line was watching and it was my moment to have a clever, cunning comeback so I looked at her and I said, "Uhh, it's a wet wipe warmer." I couldn't think of anything else to say... But on the way home, I thought, "Wow, she wanted a fight." And it almost didn't matter who it was (Wegner, 2010).

Wegner's story is an example of mimesis because he recreates the scene of the pharmacy, describes the people involved and delves into the dialogue. This light-hearted example brings Wegner to his final closing point of being able to recognize instances of injustice, actions that can be taken and not wasting energy on the wrong battle.

Wegner returns to his earlier strategy of using diegesis to reinforce his point with his final narrative and closing remarks,

I read about an experiment that was done at the University of California, at Berkeley. This scientist took an amoeba – perfect life, perfect temperature, perfect nutrients and they made it a stress-free environment. And you know what happened to the amoeba? It died. It had all this safety and security and comfort and it died. And you know, that illusion of building a castle, looking out for you and your own – it will kill your soul. You know when you really come alive? When you, like David, realize that you're the right person at the right place at the right time and you're being invited to be a giant slayer. You pick up your sling and look evil in the eye and you fight for all that you're worth. At that moment, you will feel the power of God surge through you like never before and when you find the battle, you will come alive. And that's what I'm praying for you.

It is important that Wegner maintains his voice as narrator in this story because at this point, he delivers his challenge to the congregation. He draws a parallel between the amoeba and a person who lives their life comfortably and unconcerned about injustice or the wellbeing of others. Instead, Wegner urges his audience to run into the battles that they encounter in everyday life, just as David bravely encountered Goliath. Wegner reinforces the story and his point with a promise, "you will feel the power of God surge through you like never before and when you find the battle, you will come alive".

The respective stories of David and Robin Hood could easily be construed as disconnected. However, like Wesley, Wegner combines stories of a differing nature to bring his congregation to the application point of his message. The discussion of both David and Robin Hood reveals the commonality of social justice. By combining these seemingly unrelated stories to deliver a challenging application, Wegner reflects Goldberg's idea that narratives can provide connections between our experiences. Wegner could have easily struggled with a sermon topic that urges

people to go past their comfort zones and be active in social justice. However, by using a variety of captivating narratives, Wegner holds the congregation's attention, uses the stories to build reassurance and delivers a captivating call to action.

## **ANALYSIS: SERMONS BASED ON COLOSSIANS**

The next pair of sermons is based on the book of Colossians. The book of Colossians is another letter by the apostle Paul. In his letter to the Christians in the town of Colosse, Paul urges them to keep Christ as the centre of their lives. He writes, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (Colossians 1:21-23). Paul then goes on to write about specific scenarios that the Christians in Colosse were facing such as false teachers, legalism, and mysticism. Paul also comments on healthy relationships between slaves and masters, husbands and wives, and parents and children (Geisler, 1983).

John Wesley’s sermon based on Colossians is entitled “On Obedience to Parents”. Wesley begins his sermon by talking about the various interpretations of children obeying their parents and how such obedience may be displayed. Wesley also cites the following encouragements from Ephesians 6 for children to obey their parents: “for it is right”, “this is acceptable to the Lord” and “that it may be well with thee, and that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” Wesley then focuses on what is meant by “Children, obey your parents in all things” (Colossians 3:20).

First, Wesley endeavours to explain the intentions behind this instruction. At one point, Wesley discusses how long children are expected to obey their parents. He notes,

I never understood it so in my own case. When I had lived upwards of thirty years, I looked upon myself to stand just in the same relation to my father as I did when I was ten years old. And when I was between forty and fifty, I judged myself full as much obliged to obey my mother in everything lawful, as I did when I was in my leading-strings [or hanging-sleeve coat] (Wesley, 1872).

Wesley uses diegesis in this short narrative. He maintains the position of narrator as he reflects back on his own relationship with his parents. However, he does let his congregation be privy to his own thoughts that he was “as much obliged to obey my mother in everything lawful, as I did when I was in my leading-strings [or hanging-sleeve coat]”. This short narrative is the only one that Wesley employs in this sermon. After examining the fact that obeying one’s parents is a reflection of obedience to God, Wesley’s message turns to practical instruction and advice to both children and their parents. He challenges children to consider their submission to their parents, “Have you ever considered the extent of that obedience to your parents which God requires? ‘Children, obey your parents in all things.’ No exception, but of things unlawful. Have you practised your duty in this extent? Did you ever so much as intend it?” (Wesley, 1872). Wesley also advises parents, “Train them up to obedience in this one instance, and you will easily bring them to obey in others. Why should you not begin today? Surely you see what is the most excellent way; best for your child, and best for your own soul” (Wesley, 1872).

At Granger Community Church, Pastor Jason Miller uses a very different approach when preaching on Colossians in his sermon “The Good Life”. He begins his sermon with a narrative,

On Thursday night, I was at a debate at Notre Dame and it was a full house, tickets were sold out, it was at a big performing arts centre on campus. The debate was between one of the most well-published, well-known atheists in

the world right now... On the other side of the debate, we've got super smart Christian apologist dude... The question at hand was specifically, "Is there a basis for morality in a world without God?" So if you can conceive of a universe where there is no God, is what's right and wrong up for grabs and completely subjective or can we come to some sort of agreement subjectively if we don't believe that God's the one who tells us and teaches us what's right and wrong? Smart Christian dude is talking about moral ontology and moral epistemology and they're trying to figure this out but at one point, Christian apologist dude stops and says, "What is the good life?" And I wanted to jump up and say, "Shoot, you don't need this! Come to Granger this weekend!" I didn't, though, so I thought I'd tell you instead (Miller, 2011).

Miller's opening story is effective in a couple different ways. First, the story serves to capture the audience's attention with humour and Miller's enthusiasm. Also, this story leads into Miller's sermon title, "The Good Life".

Miller reminds the congregation of the previous week when "The Good Life" series began. In the previous week, Miller had discussed that to live a good life, wisdom is needed. This week, he reminds his congregation, "We looked at how God himself calls on wisdom. We read in the Proverbs that wisdom was there at the side of God as he fashioned the universe and made you and me. And you've got to ask yourself, if God himself requires wisdom to make something good then so do we, right?"

After briefly reviewing the content of the previous week's message, Miller begins to talk about vision and opens this section of the sermon with a story about his roommate purchasing a motorcycle:

I didn't have interest in motorcycles, I didn't think it was something I would ever want to spend my money on but that day, wow. It was one of those perfect 75 degree sunny days that we have in Indiana – you know, like two days out of the year where we're like, "Take that Florida!" Those kind of days where you're just cruising through the open country?

So I'm in my Jeep with the windows up and the air conditioning on and I'm driving and I'm watching my buddy experience life like I've never seen out there. Before that day, I didn't have any desire for a motorcycle but I



got a vision or something that day as he's just cruising and the wind's just blowing past him and he's like one with creation and he's saving money on gas and I'm thinking, that's the kind of life I want!... Finally, after so much work, this vision that I had comes to fruition in my life. By the end of the summer, I'm riding to work everyday and it's just the best thing in the world when you've got a beautiful sunny gorgeous morning and instead of getting in your car, you get on your bike and ride to work and you get seventy miles per gallon (Miller, 2011).

Miller's story is an example of his use of mimesis in this sermon. His extensive story (full transcript in Appendix B) provides reach detail of the scenery, his thought process when purchasing a bike, the painstaking practice as he learns to ride and his joy when he finally can ride his motorcycle. Miller also provides further detail with the dialogue between himself and his friend and also the conversation between the man who delivers his motorcycle and himself.

Miller uses this narrative to pose the question, "What's the vision of the good life look like?" He then reads Colossians 1, which describes Christ as "the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18). Miller points out that all wisdom and vision needed to live "the good life" comes from Jesus Christ. He then cites a biblical example of God-given wisdom:

If you've been with us for awhile, we've studied Proverbs and you'll know that most of the Proverbs come from King Solomon. King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, until Jesus came around. King Solomon was the son of King David. God came to Solomon and said, "What do you want? Anything you want I will give to you." Solomon thinks about it and says, "I want wisdom." And God, I think, is struck by the profoundness of this young man who could have asked for anything – riches, influence, fame, glory – and God is so impressed by this that he says to Solomon, "I'm going to give you wisdom and I'm going to give you everything else too" so he just pours our blessing on Solomon. Soon the nation of Israel is so renowned that heads of states from another nations come to consult with King Solomon to find out how it is that a leader leads a nation like this. This is the life of King Solomon, this is the wise king (Miller, 2011).

While Miller uses dialogue between God and Solomon in this story, he uses diegesis to maintain a role that allows him to inject his own insights into the story. For example, Miller muses on God's reaction to Solomon's request for wisdom, "And God, I think, is struck by the profoundness of this young man who could have asked for anything – riches, influence, fame, glory".

Miller then contrasts Solomon's request for wisdom early in his life to the later years, when he penned the book of Ecclesiastes. Miller notes, "Did you hear the exhaustion in Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes? He's wasted away. It's a life that meant to be good but lost its bearings somewhere along the way and it's wearisome" (Miller, 2011). Miller paraphrases Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me if you're weary and tired of that, if you're tired of wasting your energies and your efforts, if you're tired of this discombobulated life that isn't very good and you want to find something good. Come to me and let me teach you" (Miller, 2011). Miller then begins another narrative,

Awhile ago in November, I went to the Holy Land. We actually didn't go over to see the holy sights, although we did see some. We went over there to learn about the conflicts going on over there and all the nuances and intricacies of the difficulty that they're having between Israel and the Palestinian territories in the West Bank Gaza Strip and the security concerns and the religious conflict that's happening there - we went to see it firsthand. And everywhere you went, you were just overwhelmed by the fact that there is a lot here that's not good...

The first day we were there, I didn't know what we were in for. We were in this beautiful little town up on the coast and it was very tropical and beautiful. Then we went to this church in the West Bank and the priest is over a church in the ancient Christian tradition. I saw a picture there – it was an icon of Jesus. On the first day of the trip, I just thought it was an interesting picture. I had no idea how much I would need that picture the rest of the way. Because you're in this place where everywhere you go, you're meeting people who have lost their kids and spouses and you meet people who are very hurt and broken by what's happening there. The churches – like

the Church of the Nativity – there are bullet holes all over the side of the building. The more broken I felt, the more I wanted to look at this picture of Jesus. The more I saw broken, devastated lives, the more I wanted to remember the good life of Jesus...

Even though this was a war zone, I saw people who were living the good life in a way that I don't know if I've ever lived. And it was because they knew Jesus and they knew that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life... I don't want to wait until we're living in a war zone to find out what the good life is! And I'm telling you, the good life is Jesus – it's the life that He lived and the life that He lived through us.

Miller's final narrative is another example of diegesis. He remains a present narrator in the story, letting his present reflections of a past experience guide the story. The contrast between descriptions of the modern Christians in Israel and Solomon in his old age is striking. Solomon had great wealth and power but at the end of his life, he was depressed and empty. However, Miller notes that the Christians in Israel are "living the good life" because they know Jesus Christ.

In their sermons based on the book of Colossians, Wesley and Miller both use relatable examples. Wesley's narratives about obeying parents and providing good leadership in the family reference a common life experience. In the same way, Miller's stories about pursuing a goal and finding happiness are also relatable. These stories reflect Fisher's declaration that narratives have "sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them" (Fisher, 1984, p.2).

## **ANALYSIS: SERMONS BASED ON 1 PETER 3**

The final sermon pair is based on 1 Peter 3. 1 Peter was a letter written by Simon Peter, one of Jesus' disciples (Peterson, 2002). The name Peter means "stone" or "rock" (Raymer, 1983). This name seemed unfitting while Jesus was on earth as Peter struggled with doubt<sup>11</sup> and even denied knowing Jesus three times.<sup>12</sup> However, as seen in both Wesley and Beeson's accounts of Acts 3, Peter provided a strong foundation for the church and preached the Gospel boldly.

The purpose of Peter's letter was to encourage Christians who were experiencing persecution. Peter's intention was to encourage these Christians and also exhort them to live a holy life pleasing to God (Raymer, 1983).

One of Peter's instructions for holy living was centred around dress. He wrote, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3-4). These verses formed the basis of John Wesley's sermon entitled "On Dress".

Wesley begins his sermon by discussing the common question of why God would be interested in clothing choices made by Christians. Wesley notes,

"But is it not strange," say some, "that the all-wise Spirit of God should condescend to take notice of such trifles as these? to take notice of such insignificant trifles, things of so little moment, or rather of none at all? For what does it signify, provided we take care of the soul, what the body is covered with, whether with silk or sackcloth? What harm can there be in the wearing of gold, or silver, or precious stones, or any other of those beautiful

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 14:22-33

<sup>12</sup> Mark 14:66-72

things with which God has so amply provided us? May we not apply to this what St. Paul has observed on another occasion, that 'every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected?'" (Wesley, 1872)

Wesley's tactic in this narrative is to take on the thoughts and feelings that some of his congregants may be feeling. Compared to other sermons where Wesley is preaching on living for Christ wholeheartedly, persecution, or relationships within families, the topic of clothing may have seemed trivial. Instead of ignoring these opinions, he chooses to deal with them directly in this narrative. Wesley uses mimesis in this instance, creating a complete dialogue around an imaginary person. After explaining his motives with this narrative, Wesley explains that there are bigger issues at hand than simply the "trifles" of clothing choices. He then outlines his main arguments that clothing choices can lead to pride, vanity, wrong impressions, lust and lack of good works.

First, Wesley notes that clothing choices can become an area of pride and vanity. Wesley warns that "fine clothes have natural tendency to make a man sick of pride; plain clothes have not. Although it is true, you may be sick of pride in these also, yet they have no natural tendency either to cause or increase this sickness. Therefore, all that desire to be clothed with humility, abstain from that poison" (Wesley, 1872). Wesley also notes that fine clothing can make one vain and seek out clothing that will lead to compliments, praise and ultimately, arrogance.

Secondly, Wesley warns that fine clothing can give others the wrong impression of one's character. He explains, "The wearing of gay and costly apparel naturally tends to beget anger, and every turbulent and uneasy passion. And it is on this very account that the Apostle places this 'outward adorning' in direct

opposition to the ‘ornament of a meek and quiet spirit’” (Wesley, 1872). Wesley notes that while clothing does not define character, a person’s appearance should reflect the expectations that God has for a person living a holy life.

Wesley then explains that lust is another characteristic that does not belong in a holy life. He says that fine clothes can be a catalyst for lust. Wesley describes the lust caused by expensive clothing as “a flame which, at the same time, consumes both yourself and your admirers” (Wesley, 1872).

Finally, Wesley points out that expensive clothing requires time and effort that could be spent completing good works. In fact, Wesley emphasizes that “wearing costly array is directly opposite to the being adorned with good works” (Wesley, 1872) and considers any extra money spent on extravagance is stealing from God and the poor. He continues this point with a narrative,

Many years ago, when I was at Oxford, in a cold winter's day, a young maid (one of those we kept at school) called upon me. I said, "You seem half starved. Have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?" She said, "Sir, this is all I have!" I put my hand in my pocket; but found I had scarce any money left, having just paid away what I had. It immediately struck me, "Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward?' Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?" See thy expensive apparel in the same light; thy gown, hat, head-dress! Everything about thee which cost more than Christian duty required thee to lay out is the blood of the poor! O be wise for the time to come! Be more merciful! more faithful to God and man! more abundantly adorned (like men and women professing godliness) with good works! (Wesley, 1872).

Wesley’s narrative underlines his exhortation to the congregation to be generous with their money. Wesley uses mimesis in the story to describe the conversation between himself and the maid but also to describe the deep feeling of guilt that came over him when he realized he had spent money on himself that could have

been used to help someone in need. Wesley adds to the mimesis with descriptions of the setting (“cold winter day”), the maid’s apparel (“thin linen gown”) and the contents of his own pocket (“I had scarce any money left”). The use of mimesis here allows Wesley to draw his congregants into the situation and experience it through his detail. The feelings experienced by the audience during the telling of the story also serve as a reminder of similar situations that the individual congregants have experienced themselves. This effect leads Wesley to his point that instead of focusing on outward appearance and dress, Christians must focus on the condition of their relationship with God.

At Granger Community Church, Mark Beeson preached a message based on 1 Peter 3 entitled “The Me I Want to Be” on January 16, 2011. Beeson takes advantage of the fact that New Year’s Day has just passed and uses an example of resolutions when approaching his title. He points out that every January, people make common resolutions regarding diet and health. However, in order to meet resolutions, there are painful steps. Beeson reinforces this idea with a personal narrative,

It wasn’t so long ago I went with some friends and we climbed Mount Sinai. I should say my friends climbed Mount Sinai and they drug me to the top. The only one of us who had ever been to the top of Mount Sinai – you know Mount Sinai where God gave Moses the ten commandments? – that’s where we were going, to the place where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments! Where heaven touched earth and the miracle of direction really changed everything. We were going to the top! There was only one person who had been there before – Ron Vandergren. Ron said to me, “It’s a long way and what you should do, you should go to Notre Dame and find the tallest building you can find. And you should just run up and down the steps twenty, thirty, forty times everyday for the next three months. And I would carry a big heavy pack if I were you. Because I’ve been there.” So what I did was I went from 230 pounds to 240 pounds and never climbed a step at all.

Ron had been where we were going! And I could think, “Oh I know. I went up a hill one time, I’ve had all these images and thoughts about climbing.” But I didn’t really know. He had been there. He had been up and

come back down and he was taking us back up. He knew where we were going. He knew the journey, he knew the path and he did his best to help me get there.

Beeson's opening narrative is an example of diegesis. While Beeson is telling a story of a past event in his life, he maintains the voice of a narrator. Instead of recreating the scene where he is given advice about the climb, Beeson tells the story from his current perspective. This employment of diegesis allows Beeson to keep the story short yet meaningful as he continues into his sermon material. Beeson emphasizes that in order to change, a person will have to take steps to grow closer to God and learn to be more like him. Beeson also points out that how a person lives has an effect on others, again providing emphasis with narrative,

What I say and how I act has an influence on those that are following so I need to consider who's following and then I need to be clear in my message to them. If it's a little child, I'll speak one way... if it's a teenager, I'll speak another way... if it's a businessman or woman, I'll speak another way... if it's college students, pastors leading ministries... you have to decide who you're speaking with and discipline yourself to stay on message, stay on target, add value! Know that you can be close because there is this gap. Whether you feel it or not, there is this gap – they can't relate to you, your employees can't relate to you, your students can't relate to you – when I saw Mrs. Williams at the grocery store when I was in grade 3, I was shocked. "MY THIRD GRADE TEACHER SHOPS? SHE SHOPS FOR FOOD?" My whole world came crashing down! The gap between me as a third grader and Mrs. Williams was huge and so she had to be careful to discipline her speech, her manner to connect with me and if she doesn't take responsibility to put on the big girl pants – someone has to be the mature person! The one who says "I will tailor carefully my message, my witness, my life so it's helpful! So there aren't gaps here, so we are one."

Again, Beeson employs diegesis for this narrative. By remaining a narrator to the story, Beeson adds his own insights and can easily transition from the example of Mrs. Williams shopping for food and the importance of living and speaking in a way



that has a positive impact on others. Beeson emphasizes the importance of this point with examples of different groups that he has to cater his message to. The purpose here is not to be repetitive but instead to emphasize the importance of relating to various groups of people. The extended list is a way to emphasize his point and its importance.

Beeson goes on to discuss the implications of change when a person chooses to surrender his or her life to God's control. Beeson illustrates,

I gave my life to Christ after summer camp in sixth grade. I came home and told my mother that I'd given my life to Jesus Christ and she said, "Let's go tell Claire." Claire was my mother's best friend. So we jumped in the car and went over to tell Mrs. Devoe. We got to the house and my mom said, "Mark, tell Claire what you did." And so in my sixth grade joy of my newfound faith, I swelled four times my normal size and said, "I gave my life to Jesus Christ" and she immediately looked at me and said, "Well, that's the end of your fun." She saw me right then for who I was, for who she'd known me to be. She had trouble picturing me as the me I wanted to be, the me God created me to be. And all she knew was, in her experience of faith, there are a lot of steps to take to become the person that you really want to be.

I want people to look at me and say, "Wow, he's still got a long way to go" but I want them to see that I've been with Jesus. The me I want to be isn't way out there at some destination, some final point. The me I want to be is just with Jesus – wherever I am on the journey, wherever that is. I just want to be that. I want to be walking with Jesus (Beeson, 2011).

Beeson blends mimetic and diegetic elements in this narrative. When describing talking to his mother, traveling in the car and having a conversation with Mrs. Devoe, Beeson is very detailed and recreates the scene. These mimetic details immerse the listener in the story. Beeson then transitions back to a narrator's role with his commentary about Mrs. Devoe, "in her experience of faith, there are a lot of steps to take to become the person that you really want to be." This diegetic transition gives Beeson the ability to launch right into his points about growth. He cautions his congregation that changing to become more like Christ will be a difficult

and long process; however, God will provide them with the strength needed for the journey.

Since 1 Peter is a book that is practical and easy to relate to (Raymer, 1983), it is fitting that both Wesley and Beeson use stories within their sermons that are relatable. Reader-response theory dictates that members of an audience will interpret a story according to their own experiences and backgrounds. By employing stories from common, everyday experiences, both pastors ensured that their audience could understand and relate to the content. This understanding and commonality of experience provide a foundation for the retention of the message of the sermon.

## **INTERPRETATION**

Through this study, it is evident that both Wesley and Granger Community Church pastors have employed extensive examples of narrative to reinforce the messages in their sermons. The natural inclusion of narratives in the sermons reinforces MacIntyre's view that humans are natural storytellers. However, stories are not always used in the same way and for the same purpose, as illustrated in the sermons studied.

Wesley employs stories to better describe the context of the biblical passages used as the basis of his sermons. Wesley uses extensive diegetic narratives and almost always keeps his voice as narrator. Wesley's narratives are a way to point his congregation to further scriptural examples. In the rare instance that Wesley uses a personal narrative, the style is reflective of the biblical passage. When direct advice or encouragement is in the biblical text, Wesley reinforces it with a short story taken from his own experience. Moreover, Wesley uses very short, direct narratives. He uses minimal description of the setting and his use of dialogue is to the point. His narratives always reflect the biblical text very closely. The purpose of his sermons is to enlighten listeners to the message of the Gospel, to bring the Bible's instructions to a modern audience and to spur listeners to a life lived for Christ. As a result, Wesley's narratives stay true to the biblical text. By using narratives to expound on the biblical text, Wesley reinforces Fisher's theory that narratives can provide meaning for the audience. Also, since Wesley is urging his audience to apply biblical truths and follow Christ, he is using narratives in hopes that they will aid in forming his congregants' Christian worldview.

Narratives used by Granger Community Church pastors serve a different purpose. The use of narrative is extensive and is a means to draw in the audience. In all five of the sermons analyzed, an entertaining narrative is used to set the foundation for the sermon topic. The pastors also seem to employ this technique to draw their audience's attention to the sermon portion of the church service and keep them engaged in the message. Similarly, throughout their sermons, the pastors use creative and often humorous narratives to change the pace of the sermon. Often, these attention-grabbing narratives are followed directly by a challenge or application point. The placement of these narratives supports the assertion that stories are relatable and more likely to be remembered. By pairing them closely with the sermon's ultimate message, the likelihood of remembering and applying the point of the sermon increases.

Both Wesley and Granger Community Church employ narrative in a way that is unusual among their contemporaries. In the eighteenth century, it was rare to hear a pastor so passionate about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation message in the way that Wesley was. Wesley's stories are formed around the urgings for his congregation to pattern their lives after Christ, live humbly and surrender their will to God. Emily Walker Heady describes Wesley's sermons as "homiletics of conversion" or "sentimental sermons", a different pattern from the doctrinal instruction commonly preached from the pulpits in Wesley's day (Heady, 2004).

Granger Community Church uses sermon themes that are short and memorable. For example, the "Robin Hood" sermon preached by Pastor Rob Wegner

was part of a series entitled “Soul Flix”. The sermons all opened with a clip from a popular movie. The film clips in themselves act as a narrative. Likewise, all of the sermons from Granger Community Church employ creative narrative based on current events, personal experiences and famous stories. These stories provide a framework for biblical truth and are a tool to aid the congregation in remembering and applying the lesson. Beeson himself attests to their effectiveness: “People are not coming to church to hear a line-by-line apologetic for their faith. They don't resonate with linear postulates; they long for wisdom wrapped up in stories, images, and art” (Beeson, 2008).

The pastors at Granger Community Church also use personal narratives to establish a link with the congregation. With a congregation of over 5,000, it is impossible for the pastors to know all of their congregants personally. The stories derived from their own lives are a way to establish a connection with their audience and provide a means to “bind the facts of our experience together into a coherent pattern” (Goldberg, 1982). Also, the pastors are open with their own struggles and questions through their stories. Beeson maintains,

Are we bringing new people into church services where they can make contact? How many of us lob up a weekly service new people can follow? Look at your services. Are you lobbing it up when you preach? Are you hoping people get it? Do you want them to knock the ball out of the park, or are you hurling knuckleballs so erratic even you don't know where they're going? People are intimidated and fearful of pastors when they are perceived as impressive and “untouchable.” Paradoxically, people are impressed by God when they realize God became “touchable” through Christ. People are awed when they realize Jesus brought “up there down here.”

Every pastor must decide. Do I want people impressed with Jesus or me? No one can pursue both goals. People will leave your services impressed with Jesus or with you, connecting with the gospel or feeling confused and discouraged. Which do you want? (Beeson, 2008)

Beeson and his pastoral team clearly have a vision for pointing people to Jesus Christ. Their examples of driving in snowstorms, learning to ride motorcycles and getting in an altercation at the pharmacy over wet wipes show their purpose. They do not preach to draw attention to themselves; rather, the narratives always lead into an application of following Christ wholeheartedly. The pastors' vision for their sermons is reflective of Goldberg's stance that a theologian must match narratives with their community's convictions (Goldberg, 1982). Granger Community Church's purpose is point people to Jesus Christ, "someone who stretched the faith of those around Him. He constantly dared people to see things differently, to act differently and to live differently" (Granger Community Church, 2011). By drawing in their audience with narrative and then pointing to Christ, the sermons meet their intended purpose.

## CONCLUSION

Church attendance numbers speak for themselves. The North American church is quickly losing members and struggling to find its voice. In conclusion, I suggest that this study of narrative in sermons contributes to the conversation in different ways.

First, John Wesley conducted his ministry in an innovative way, just as Granger Community Church uses creative methods today. Wesley often preached several messages a day and traveled from town to town to deliver his sermons (Christian Ethereal Library, 2011). The pastors at Granger Community Church use creative themes and stories to relate to their audience. These examples show that churches must be willing to be innovative and reflect the preferences of the culture. Wesley and the Granger Community Church pastoral team have succeeded in this area by using creative oratory methods. Their message remains the Gospel, but their methods vary from the norm in order to increase effectiveness.

Secondly, the study of narrative can reach further than these two examples. It can extend to other examples within the United Methodist denomination. Also, comparisons can be made to churches and pastors from other denominations. The statistics of church attendance clearly demonstrate that attendance across all Christian denominations is sinking. It is beneficial for the Christian church as a whole learn best practices from one another. These lessons will help churches conduct services in a way that attracts congregants and, more importantly, inspires them to live passionately for Jesus Christ.

Both John Wesley and the pastors at Granger Community Church provide strong examples of the influence of narrative in creating a powerful sermon. Their examples make a positive contribution to the discussion of effective sermon tools and, ultimately, the overarching narrative of the modern church.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **EXCERPT FROM “ROBIN HOOD” BY ROB WEGNER**

That leads me to a story called “The Wet Wipe Warmer Incident”. My youngest daughter was born in December 2003 and we had one of those wet wipe warmers and it functioned well for our first two daughters but a couple weeks after our youngest was born, it just up and died on us. So my wife sent me on a mission to retrieve a new wet wipe warmer. So I went to the local pharmacy, got in line where there was only one cash open so it was kind of a long line. This lady pulls up behind me and she has a cart full of Christmas clearance items because it’s about mid-January. She has dozens of reindeer antlers and is actually wearing a pair. She has chocolate Santas, Christmas lights, just a cart crammed full of stuff. As we’re standing there, she asks, “What is it that you have there?” And I’m standing holding the wet wipe warmer thinking, “This is going to be awesome because I am a super dad and I’m going to be perceived as a nurturing dad who is so loving to his newborn baby”. So I turn around and tell her it’s a wet wipe warmer and it’s for my new little girl. She doesn’t look happy and asks, “Can I see that?” and at this point there should have been warning bells in my head. But I hand over the wet wipe warmer and she turns it over and reads the back then hands it back, locks eyes with me and says, “What’s that for?” Now I knew something was wrong. I’ve stepped into some sort of enemy territory but I don’t know why I’ve offended her and so I just look at her and say, “It’s a wet wipe warmer, it warms wet wipes”. I think she thought I was being sarcastic but I swear to you, I wasn’t being sarcastic. And she launched into a tirade. She yelled, “That is the most obtuse, appalling appliance I



have ever seen!" Now it's a good thing I didn't know what "obtuse" meant or I really would have been offended. And I think she could tell I didn't know what the word meant so she began to explain to me what it meant. Now remember, I'm in a public space, a checkout line! And we're inching forward and I'm getting closer and closer to my turn and she's talking to me the whole time as I'm holding the wet wipe warmer walking backwards. And she begins to say to me, "So I guess Mom can't just take a towel and dip it in warm water to wipe the baby's bottom?" And I was like "uuuuhhhh". "And I bet you have to leave it plugged in all day everyday and it's using all kinds of energy, have you ever thought of that?" And at this point, I'm in the front of the checkout line and I look at the kid working – he's maybe 17 years old – and he had this look of fear on his face like he was going to hit the panic button under the counter or something. And then she looks at me and ends where she began, "That is the most obtuse appliance I have ever seen!" And then there was this pause and everyone in line was watching and it was my moment to have a clever, cunning comeback so I looked at her and I said, "Uhh, it's a wet wipe warmer." I couldn't think of anything else to say! I was so discombobulated that I was being mocked by a stranger and she was just laying into me and I don't know why. I got into the car and it wasn't until then that the irony of this woman reaming me out about an obtuse appliance and the whole time, she has a pair of fake reindeer antlers on! With a price tag hanging from it! And on the way home, I came up with ten awesome comebacks which I keep in my pocket in case I see that woman again. But on the way home, I thought, "Wow, she wanted a fight." And it almost didn't matter who it was.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **EXCERPT FROM “THE GOOD LIFE” BY JASON MILLER**

A few years ago, one of my roommates decided that it was time to get a motorcycle. He had grown up around motorcycles, his dad had a motorcycle and it was time for him to get a motorcycle. So my buddy saves up his money, does some online shopping and he finds the perfect starter bike for him. So after he saves up his money and he orders it and has it shipped to his dad's house about an hour away from where we live – about an hour out in the country. So the big day comes and my buddy gets his bike delivered to his dad's house and I'm just trying to be helpful so we jump in my car and drive to his dad's house about an hour away so he can pick up his bike and he can drive it back to the house. Now I've got to tell you guys – I didn't have interest in motorcycles, I didn't think it was something I would ever want to spend my money on but that day, wow. It was one of those perfect 75 degree sunny days that we have in Indiana – you know, like two days out of the year where we're like, “Take that Florida!” Those kind of days where you're just cruising through the open country? And I'm in my Jeep with the windows up and the air conditioning on and I'm driving and I'm watching my buddy experience life like I've never seen out there. Before that day, I didn't have any desire for a motorcycle but I got a vision or something that day as he's just cruising and the wind's just blowing past him and he's like one with creation and he's saving money on gas and I'm thinking, that's the kind of life I want! So out of nowhere, I get this vision that I want a motorcycle and I start saving up my money and I learn all the stuff they teach you in the little book so you can get your learner's permit. I find my bike, I order it online

and it's getting shipped to my house. A few weeks later, the guy's who's driving the semi-truck and delivering my bike calls and goes, "Hey! I'm going to be in your neck of the woods tomorrow, you ready for your bike?" and I'm like, "Do you have any idea? Uh, yeah!" So the next day, I'm just bouncing off the walls in my house waiting for the guy in the semi-truck to bring my motorcycle to me and I can finally take hold of this vision that I had when I saw my buddy driving on the open road. So he called and said, "Hey I'm pulling up man!" and the thing about my neighbourhood is I live in one of those really narrow sidestreets that intersects a big street so he realizes he's not going to be able to get his semi down the little side street so he parks it on the big street which is by my house but not in front of my house – maybe about 200 yards away. So I run out and semi-truck driver dude comes out and opens up the back hatch of the semi, uses this little lift to go up into the truck and get the motorcycle, and wheels it out on to the lift and lowers it down to the ground. It's another one of those beautiful 75 degree sunny days and I'm standing there just looking at this masterpiece enamored, in love. Piano-player boy finally found his testosterone, I've got my motorcycle and I'm so excited. So I'm having a moment and the motorcycle is glistening in the sunlight and I'm totally enraptured with this beautiful bike that's sitting right in front of me and the guy says, "Go ahead and start it up to make sure that everything's okay." But I just completely tune him out because I'm having a moment. And he says it again, "Go ahead and start it up to make sure that everything's okay" and I'm still ignoring him because I'm still having my moment. He says it a third time and the real story is that I don't know how to start a motorcycle. I figure I'm not going to get out of this one without 'fessing up so

I tell the guy “I don’t really know how to start a motorcycle. So the guy just kind of snorts and starts the bike for me at which point, I realize this would have all been great if he could have pulled up in front of my house. He turns to me and says, “I suppose you need me to put this in your garage for you too, right?” So he rolls my bike in the garage and my little balloon of masculinity that got inflated popped pretty fast. So then the bike’s in my garage and I’m just waiting for my buddy to get home so he could teach me what I was doing. Did you know that they give you a learner’s permit without knowing if you know anything about riding a motorcycle? Does anybody else think that’s stupid? I do! Motorcycles aren’t like cars where you have your parent in the seat next to you while you’re driving down the open road. Anyway, my buddy finally gets home, we go into the garage, get my bike and put it out on the road in front of my house. We decided we’re going to take it really, really slow and really, really easy and put the bike in first gear and let it idle a little bit. You can just feel what it’s like and start feeling your bearings on this thing. It starts to idle a little bit faster and at this point, I want to do something. Does anybody here know how on a motorcycle, your hands control both the brake and the gas? I happen to be on a road that’s lined very narrowly on both sides with vehicles and I’m on the motorcycle going “Brake, brake!” and my hand goes “THROTTLE!” I got about six inches from just plowing into a car on the side of the street. At this point, let’s put the bike back in the garage for now. We scheme a little bit and figure out that we need a large wide open parking lot that’s safe for all this kind of stuff like perhaps the parking lot at Granger Community Church. So my buddy drives the bike and I follow him in my car up here to the church and we do some practices in the lot. We

do first gear around the lot for awhile and then first gear turns into second gear and I'm not going to tell you where but we hid the bike for about two weeks right here on the property so during my lunch break, I could take my little bike around the parking lot in first gear and do some laps. Eventually I got gutsy enough that I tried some of the streets just around the perimeter of the church here and do like a lap or two. Finally, after so much work, this vision that I had comes to fruition in my life. By the end of the summer, I'm riding to work everyday and it's just the best thing in the world when you've got a beautiful sunny gorgeous morning and instead of getting in your car, you get on your bike and ride to work and you get seventy miles per gallon.

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