

PREACHING TO THE TATTOOS AND THE TAMBOURINES
A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO INCARNATIONAL PREACHING IN THE URBAN
CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING TO THE TATTOOS AND THE TAMBOURINES

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The purpose of my project is to explore how a semiotic approach for incarnational preaching that will reach the unchurched or *Tattoos* in my community as well as build bridges between the churched, *Tambourines* and the *Tattoo*. This project will engage the culture, both internally and externally, of the Tried Stone Baptist Church in a series of sermons and to uncover a new narrative. In this series I used contemporary images in a relevant way in the attempt to make the gospel incarnate. Through a series of sermons, it is hoped that it would ignite a fresh passion in my congregation that they would be able *(re)preach* within the context and in the local community making us a truly missional church that engages the *Tattoos* in the community.

The results of my project here shown me that there are several areas of my ministry that need to be changed or *(re)framed* to meet the needs of the image driven *Tattoos* in my community. One of the first things requiring our attention is our social media presence. My church's website needs to be more attractive to the surrounding culture with which we are trying to connect. For example, via our website, we can provide information and services for the single mother or those who are looking for jobs or health care service. Also, I can utilize social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram in an effective way that demonstrates a community that both *Tattoos* and *Tambourines* can belong. Furthermore, I need to create a workshop to help *Tambourines*

understand this generation and to provide them with strategies for influencing this new generation.

Lastly, my biggest discovery in this project was that I discovered who I am as a preacher and a leader. As a leader, I discovered that I really do have a heart for the people in the community. However, in order for me to be more effective, I need more time to be available for the community. Unfortunately, I am bi-vocational and being a change agent in ones community requires time to effectively train, strategize and minister. However, this project will function as a springboard to do effective missional ministry in the downtown Bronx.

I dedicate this work to my wife Kia who is my glimpse of Heaven and to my parents who have sacrificed everything for me!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I entered this doctor of ministry program in hopes of becoming a better preacher. I was looking forward to sharpening my preaching skills in a practical way. Also, I was looking to enhance my exegetical and expositional skills to communicate the gospel more effectively using contemporary tools which I would have access through this program. Since being introduced to semiotics and learning effective methods of preaching in the digital age, my view of preaching has been turned upside down. As a pastor and practitioner, when I look at my current ministry context, I now see my preaching ministry with a new set of eyes.

I am going into my eighth year pastoring the great Tried Stone Baptist Church of the Bronx, New York. This area of the Bronx was ravaged in the 1960's. It was polluted by the crack epidemic in the 1980's. Now, this zip code where the church is located not only is in the poorest county in the country but also has one of the highest rate of HIV/AIDS as well¹. Hopelessness unfortunately seems to be in the air because of the lack of support and resources available. That external hopelessness has seeped into the church. I sense an underlying attitude in my congregation that subconsciously says, "we are forgotten and no one cares." The majority of my congregants are renters and not owners

¹ Jennifer Cunningham, "Disease Alley", *Daily News*, June 6, 2013, (accessed December 28, 2014), <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/bronx/disease-alley-stds-epidemic-proportions-10457-zip-code-article-1.1364485>

of their homes, which has a strong effect on how they view life. You would think as Christian renters, the mentality would be to be the best steward over what you have. However, they really don't think they have anything when they have to struggle to survive day to day in a place where they are voiceless because of their race and economic status.

However, one thing I have learned about my people (traditional church goers) who I will refer to, as *Tambourines* is the fact that they do have a story to tell. Whether it is of faith or natural survival, there are stories of hope as well as tragedy that are redemptive.

Along with Bronx swagger which is a self-confidence and pride which comes from their origin and upbringing, the members of my church come from strong traditional Baptist roots, which help them express and live out their faith. These traditions also tell the story of what shapes them as a community and who they are individually. However, many of their faith traditions are not effective in this digital age. Also, these traditions provide a comfort zone that often goes unchallenged. They don't foster spirituality, nor are relevant connecting to the outside community and this prohibits them from being effective in expanding the Kingdom of God. One such tradition is the example of the church ushers who dress like 1950's nurses in order to carry out their duties as ushers in the church.

I find that my *Tambourines* are very loving. But as loving as I see them, I also see their brokenness. And their brokenness often translates in the types of relationships that they develop personally and communally. These relationships are affected by the same life perils as those who are not connected to the church such as finances, single parenting and mental illness. Furthermore, there is a disconnect between the church and the

community. I would label the community at large and I would call them *Tattoos* because I have noticed a large number of people who have tattoos who walk right past the church without any acknowledgment or connection to the church. This is where the problems lie.

As a pastor in an urban context, not only do I have to understand the *Tambourines* that sit my pews, but also I would be remiss if I did not address the *Tattoos* that walk right past my church every day. In my limited understanding of this generational phenomenon, I have come to learn in many cases the *Tattoos* also have a story to tell. These people are wearing their own life narratives on their body. They don't look like the people in my pew. They are apart of this new generation that are looking for identity by creating their own through how they express themselves, i.e. tattooing their bodies. This is a great example of how semiotics is expressed in my urban context. Similar to the *Tambourines* that have lost their hope and need to find it, the *Tattoos*, many are looking for an identity by "labeling" themselves with their own narratives. So the challenge is to bring these two cultures together who share a similar narrative search i.e. life experiences that can be impacted by a relationship with Jesus Christ for the better.

As pastor, prophet and preacher, I desire to make a positive change in my people that will translate to positive change in the community. People need to experience God on a relevant and intimate level that is empowering and transforming. They need inspiration and motivation to be the people and community that God created them to be. And despite their current plight of abject poverty, disfranchisement and oppression, they need to realize from history (stories) that suffering is redemptive. One method of communicating this message is through preaching that is theologically sound, hermeneutically appropriate but preaching that *(re)frames*, *(re)signs* and *(re)preaches*.

In the South Bronx, where my church is located, the Hip Hop culture was born.² Along with putting rhymes over beats, people were putting their signature artwork on walls, which we know today as graffiti. Graffiti by definition are markings, slogans and signs. These young artists made a name for themselves by “tagging” anywhere they could display their work. Artists were known by their name and signature style. The images in their work narrated their story-where they were from and what was going on in their neighborhood. The markings on the walls were a moniker and/or messages. For many of these artists tagging a train or a building was the only way of getting recognized. This form of marking was used to express themselves and to establish their identity. It was a way of letting the world know that “we are here” and “we are somebody.” Also, this artwork told stories of the plight of the people in that community. They speak of senseless killings, anger and frustration with oppressive systems. Graffiti provides a sense of hope and healing in rugged urban landscapes as an attempt to bring beauty *out of ashes*. But it also can be used as a prophetic voice of doom that will either explode affecting those on the outside or implode by hurting those who created it.

However, *graffiti* was not originally introduced in late 1970’s when Hip Hop was emerging. Holy Scripture gives us an account of where *graffiti* was used to give a message and share the identity of the one who wrote. Chapter five of the book of Daniel gives us the first account of graffiti. A mysterious finger wrote a message to the Babylonian King Belshezzar at the great feast pertaining to his kingdom. No one from his royal court could interpret the message but a prisoner from outside his kingdom could.

²“*History Detectives: Special Investigation: the Birthplace of Hip Hop*”, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/birthplace-of-hip-hop/> (accessed December 15, 2014).

From the perspective of Daniel, my job as a preacher and leader is to read the writing on the wall in my urban context. There are many signs, markings, and messages that need to be interpreted. The interpretation requires work. Like any exegesis, it has to be looked at in context understanding the stories or *narraphors*. However, unlike Daniel I have to look at *(re)signing* i.e. giving a different meaning to the images to see how they can be incarnational meanings embodying Jesus Christ.

In this digital age, your identity is wrapped in your image. Today it is called branding. There has been a shift in this urban culture. Writing on walls and subway cars was a way to display your brand and have an identity. Now, the graffiti markings are no longer on things that people don't own but on one thing they do own, their bodies, in the form of tattoos. *Tattoos*, once seen as unappealing are now viewed as body art. Like the Daniel account, a strange finger is doing the writing not with a divine message of doom but any message, sign, symbol or markings that an individual desires to express about themselves. Here lays the shift. The tattooing went from walls to the body. It went from being written on the property of others to one's own property. It went from material to physical.

The Bible touches on the issue of tattoos as body markings. "*Ye shall not make any cutting in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon: I am the Lord.*" (Leviticus 19:28 KJV). Upon reading through text and looking at my urban ministry context, a lot of people have broken this law of God or did they?

The thought of tattooing your body in many mainline denominations is frowned upon because it is viewed as sinful. However, as a thriving theologically trained semiotician, it seems the law of God has been (re)signed and/or ignored. *Tattoos* have

become a phenomenon that doesn't seem to be going away. Many question the relevance of the ancient biblical text in light of today's culture. However, for Christian believers, God is always right and His word is true. When I was growing up, I always heard that tattoos were bad because they were associated with a certain character of people.

However, tattooing today is not only for the punk rocker, or military guys or people who have been to jail but now people from all cultures and economic and social backgrounds have embraced this practice.

So what does God really say about tattoos. Basic exegetically work is needed to find the biblical significance of tattooing and its emphasis in Scripture. In the context of the text, the above-mentioned verse and the previous verse illustrated activities practiced by pagans especially during times of mourning for the dead. The Israelites were not to emulate pagan practices in this regard since they maintained *sacredness* for life and for the human body.³ Another important aspect to consider is how the word *mark* was translated from its original language. In this verse the *marks* refers to marking oneself in connection to a particular cultic religion, not body décor, as we think of it today.⁴

This causes us to raises questions on the motives of those who get tattoos. Are they getting them because of idolatrous behavior or are they signs of faith and love. Do they tell a story of life? Or do they brand who I am and/or who I was? Is it bad that I have a tattoo of my favorite scripture and use it to evangelize? Some think their body is a blank canvas that they can express their creative nature and to tell their story.

³ M. F. Rooker, (2000), *Leviticus* (Vol. 3A, p. 262), (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers).

⁴ Erick Taylor, *Short History of Tattoos* (Amazon Digital Services, 2012), (October 12, 2014)

I have a personal view of this emerging culture from a semiotic perspective. I too can look at the body as blank canvas on which artists to tell a story. There are many stories that intersect into one story when it comes to an individual's life story. In my research, I interviewed eight people from all different forms of life some people with many tattoos and some with only one tattoo. But despite the number, each tattoo told had a story and had a specific meaning to that individual.

Over the past ten years, I have witnessed this phenomenon increasing especially with athletes, actors and entertainers. Tattoos have become more mainstream and more common than going to church.

When I was growing up in the 70's, 80's and 90's, most people I saw who had tattoo were prisoners, military personnel and rock musicians. However, the trend has shifted and in this digital culture, young people have embraced tattooing and some parents have endorsed it by allowing their children to get tattooed. This is the style is not fading away and I wonder why? I have discovered that when it comes to tattoos, it all comes down to individuality, freedom of choice, and identity. Tattoos are influenced and inspired by cultural icons like rappers and entertainers and with that representation comes freedom and a platform, a stage to let the world know who I am, where I've been and what I have become through the story of my *ink*. Is that bad? Doesn't everyone want that in life? Doesn't everyone want to express who he or she is in some form or another? Doesn't everyone want to be seen, heard, and loved for who he/she is? Does everyone have a story? Fundamentally, tattooing goes back to a basic question, "Who am I?" This quest for identity speaks to the culture we live in today; our culture is focused on images

and branding. Tattoos speak for the person; that is, they tell us: “What you see is who I am!”

From a theological perspective, we can claim that God too is image-driven. For example, Genesis 1:27 tells us God made man in “his own image”. Furthermore, in the New Testament, it is through His Son that we identify with the image of God. Our identity as Christians is in Christ. I posit that Christianity is not opposed to tattooing. If it weren’t for the markings on Christ’s body, there would not be any Christianity. The prophet Isaiah 55:5 declares, “He was wounded for our transgressions.” We know wounds leave marks. Christianity can and should relate to this culture because of the piercings. In the Old Testament, only slaves were pierced to symbolize ownership⁵. This means those who are owned. However, this culture uses piercings not as a sign of ownership but personal freedom of expression. Christ’s piercings and markings tell the story of faith, just like the markings of tattoos tell a story.

It is in the element of the story that *Tambourines* and the *Tattoos* intersect. Preaching provides that story. Preaching in this sense needs to be incarnational, embodying Jesus Christ so believers embody Jesus Christ as well. The incarnational message is thus *(re)preached* in order to bridge the gap between these two cultures.

However, my focus in preaching to these two different cultures is from a semiotic perspective. Using the images that are represented by each group and finding the stories within them, I will attempt to draw out the commonality within each group that can be used as a life changing experience. It is through the preaching event; people will find themselves in a story, wrapped in images and metaphors, to point to and challenge their

⁵ I believe that we should have some type of markings as evidence of who our owner is.

faith. The experiential moment in the preaching event of God's Word can be used to create new conversations that can be used to empower the emerging congregation and the community.

CHAPTER II

THE CULTURE

Over the last 10 years or so, I have seen the popularity of tattoos emerging in our culture. Tattooing is no longer seen as taboo. The popularity of tattoos stem from the Hip Hop culture and the entertainment industry, which includes professional athletes, especially pro basketball players. You see their whole body adorned in ink. Rappers also are “tatted” up. Some have tattoos which signifies their gang affiliation or a tattoo they received during a stint in prison. But the case in point is that tattoos are popular. I don’t know if we can call it a trend because of the new acceptance even in corporate America. I call it a fad because of the influence of those who have them. Yet, it is more than a fad because it is here to stay.

In the African American community, some of the first role models we see are those in the entertainment world or athletes. Because their lifestyle is so appealing, young people want to emulate what they see or perceive. Their first vision for their lives maybe to see themselves living a life of a “lil Wayne” or a “Lebron James.” Both of these young men have tattoos. Both of them were raised by single mothers and come from urban areas. Yet both have achieved more than a modicum of success. Why wouldn’t a young person want to live a life like them? Why would a young person want to be like them? These types of lifestyles and upbringing are relatable to many who grew up in an urban environment. They are successful and they have tattoos. Some would say, “Ok, I can get

one” I can look cool!” It sets them apart. At the same time, it makes them stand out as individuals. Even those of us who have a darker hue, can stand out and be distinguished because of ink.

But how do we get so close to a “Lebron James” or a “Lil Wayne” to know they have tattoos? How did tattooing become so mainstream? I don’t know the answer directly. But I can only speculate from the age we live in. We live in a media driven culture. From reality TV shows to the Internet community, we have opted out of personal privacy. It was thought at one time that people could hide behind their computers and be a loner. That is no longer the case. It is behind a personal computer that in today’s age you find community through social media. You get as personal (in some cases more depending on your lifestyle) with someone as you can have a face-to-face conversation. The reason for this I believe is because the mystic and anomaly of hiding behind the computer screen yet being transparent. The social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram and Google allow you to be close to a person who is far away. These media platforms allow you into lives of people who you would not get a chance to know.

Social media bombards you with images that can create dreams and fantasies and they allow you to explore new realities and if they are unreal. More importantly, social media address your need to express who you are in a way *you* want to express yourself in a format you can choose.

At one time, to take a picture of yourself all the time you would be labeled a narcissus. But in today’s culture, the “selfies” are a daily routine as brushing your teeth.

We live in a culture that promotes and welcomes personal branding. Branding helps us to see people for who they are and who they want to be. This image-driven

society highlights our narcissism. Everything we do suggests, “see me.” Also, within the last 10 years, individual branding has come into the forefront. No longer are we only enticed by corporate messages like Nike’s, “Just do it” or the Coke commercials.

Individuals like Kanye West have become a household name. Individuals have also become a brand.

When I was child, brand named designer blue jeans came into the scene. People started wearing more than Levi’s and Lee dungarees. Jordache, Sergio Valente, Sasson, and Gloria Vanderbilt became familiar names. We always wore names. Now the names have changed. They spoke to a class of people who worked hard and lived in a community that these clothes would suit. Then the name went to high fashion and style. They made you exclusive. If you wore these brands in my neighborhood, you were considered cool and/or your parents had money. This connection of branding to status continues. Fashion houses are not the only brands we are wearing. Polo is now along side of Kanye West’s line of clothes. What caused the shift? Everyone wants their own brand. From entertainment to athletes and churches, we are marketing our own brand and want others to buy in.

Celebrities, because of media exposure in this digital age are open books. We see into their lifestyles. Yet, we celebrate who they are because of how they make us feel. Furthermore, we want to be like them. Therefore, we try to emulate them by dressing like them. These celebrities recognize their media power and capitalize more on their fame by branding themselves. I can look like Kanye, Jessica Simpson, Beyoncé by buying their clothes. But what is the underlying message conveyed as consumers buy the products of these trendsetters? They are and are considered icons. We have bought into their story.

I suggest this same psyche is the premise for tattooing. Our individual tattoos are how we brand ourselves. They tell a story of who we are or who we want to be. But this is not always the case of those who want to express who they are by getting a tattoo. In my research, in conversation with people who I asked to tell me the story of their tattoo, they told me that they saw it on another person and liked how it looked. Is that individuality? Or is it a copying someone else's identity. Is our country becoming identity thieves? Some don't know who they are as individuals so they have to find it in other people. When a tattoo is duplicated, it means that you have the same story as another person. But no one has the exact same story.

As I look at tattooing from my African American culture and context, it seems that tattooing is more "trendy" than individualization or art form. This practice has been more recently popularized by the latest rapper's ink. It seems "fad-ish" because of the trends in the hip-hop culture. It also seems to be contagious. It seems like almost every NBA player has a tattoo. Because so many have them in these two entertainment arenas, I question its individuality. Is this a trend or has it really entered into mainstream culture? I really don't know. But I make my judgment because of other trends and how they came about in that culture. But maybe it is "both/and." It is both imitation and artistic expression for identity. Maybe the tattoos of others sparked a liberation movement of expression. It is said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. So if I am copying, am I flattering someone else or I am expressing who I am? What about variation of what I see? If I get a variation of someone else's person, I am I saying I am a variation of that person's identity. Or is tattooing empowering?

In this age of *selfies*, are tattoos walking *selfies* of who I am at the moment? I say at the moment because once I get another tattoo my image changes. Stories are added to who I am. I also disclose more of my self. Therefore, what am I portraying at a certain time in my life?

Because of the importance of expressing who a person is and how he/she wants to be express him/herself, I would like to say tattooing is a metaphor for that individual. A metaphor by definition is a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, esp. something abstract.¹ According to Daniel Chandler in his book *Semiotics: the Basics*, suggests a metaphor expresses the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to what is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance or something used or regarded as being used to represent something else.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of Saussurean semiotics, explains signs into two parts; the *signified* and *signifier*. A tattoo can be the signifier and the signified, the mental concept or image and the ink itself. Tattoos are a sign for a person and of a person. They give you a mental concept of who the person is or what that person wants to communicate about him/herself. These tattoos are their life's metaphors. These metaphorical symbols are usually emotional or spiritual signs. These symbols or signs tell the story. For example, if I were to get an eagle as a tattoo it would signify freedom, strength and independence. Usually connected to this sign/symbol is a story of why I chose this tattoo. The eagle has meaning. The metaphor suggests the person is free like an eagle in their lifestyle and/or the life yet to be.

¹ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics, The Basics* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 127.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF TATTOOS

Tattooing is now the sixth growing retail business in the United States according to Erick Taylor, author of *Short history of Tattooing*.¹ Tattooing is an ancient practice that dates back over five thousand years. This ancient practice has moved into the mainstream by the help of celebrities and athletes. The word tattoo is said to come from two sources the Polynesian word “ta” which means to strike something and the Tahitian word “*tatau*”, which means to mark something.² From the beginning of its history, tattooing in its original sense served as symbols for declaration of love, religious belief, luck charms and even as forms of punishment. Even the thought tattoo has evolved from its traditional sense, one thing has not changed is that they hold special meaning by those who get them.

Tattoos have found their way into the mainstream culture. According to Margo Demello, author of *Body of Inscription*, “For westerners, the tattoo has always been a metaphor of difference. It has represented different things at different times, but ultimately the tattoo has always been seen as the mark of primitive”³. Now, in this digital age, tattoos are no longer seen as primitive but a part of our current culture. Once viewed

¹ Erick Taylor, *Short History of Tattooing* (Amazon Digital Services, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ Margo Demello, *Bodies of Inscription* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2000) 14.

a suggesting difference, tattoos now have created community and culture. Once seen as a repellent, tattooing now attracts millennials.

Though tattooing is popular in my ministry context and in many urban areas, it actually was popularized by white Americans in the early 1960's at the end of World War II and originated in Pacific island cultures such as Tahiti, Samoa, and Hawaii. Its induction occurred by appropriation, colonialism and cross-fertilization.⁴

Ironically, tattooing was introduced to the western world by Christian missionary activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was during this period that that Captain James Cook and other explorers discovered tattooing on the people of Tahiti and other Pacific Islands. It is here that tattooing entered into European consciousness. It was Cook who first used the word "ta tu" (as mentioned earlier) to describe the markings of the native Polynesians. These markings included lines, stars, geometric designs, and images of humans and animals. Today, they maybe called "tribal". At the time of European contact, these tattoos were primarily linear and served as a genealogical function and signs of protection. Cook's men started getting tattoos from the native people and it is believed that the trend began here. Western artists started using native technology to give tattoos to the crewmembers and new designs were added such as rifles, dates and words. Because of the European influence Polynesians as well as Hawaiian and Tahitian augmented the tattoos with British and European designs. Without this early cross-fertilization, it is doubtful that tattooing would have been reestablished in Europe or seen as anything more than a primitive tradition or practice.

⁴ Ibid., 15.

Further investigation of the history of tattooing points to the elements of storytelling and identification that tattoos give today by looking at the history of the *Mako*. Again, it was Captain Cook on one of his voyages to New Zealand who had the ship artist draw pictures of the *Mako*. The *Mako* was a curvilinear facial tattoo worn by the Maori men and women as a sign of status and affiliation. The Maori had a tradition of preserving the tattoo heads of the deceased persons of nobility to keep alive the memory of the dead. The head to them was considered sacred and said to possess magical qualities. Europeans became interested in these heads and started trading heads for weapons. Because of the value of these tattooed heads, during tribal wars, captives were decapitated, tattooed and sold to the Europeans. Eventually, because of this danger of being killed, the Maori stopped preserving the heads of their dead friends, but the practice of wearing a *Mako* was used to distinguish native Maori from the Europeans who settled there. Historically, tattoos were marks of distinction and had value and meaning to those who had them.

Cultural exchange was important in the history of tattooing. This is seen in the technique of tattooing. For example, Maori people would use wood carving techniques, carving into the skin and then adding ink to their open wound. After the Europeans introduced metal, they adopted the puncturing technique. Also, a cultural exchange is going to be need today between the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines*.

Early eighteenth century sailors returned to Europe with tattoo from Polynesians, they also returned with tattooed Polynesians to exhibit not as a form of flattery but a form of mockery. This was a cultural exchange but it was demeaning. Those who had tattoos

were considered the primitive *Other* as DeMello coins it⁵. These tattooed natives were displayed in pubs, dime museums and fairs. These displays painted a contrast between the high achieving Western culture and the primitive native practice. This contrast still goes on today. Some look at people who have tattoos a certain way, creating a class difference in our society. This view constructs a narrative about tattooed people as savages. But this view was turned on its side when white tattooed people started displaying themselves in sideshows. It was frowned upon when one group had them, but when another group adorned tattoos the perception was different.

The display of tattooed natives became a huge moneymaker in Europe throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. People were intrigued enough to gawk at the tattooed natives. They were introduced at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. They were not displayed as human oddities at this time, but it did pave the way for them to be viewed as oddities in fairs and sideshows.

The history of tattooing *was re-signed*. Tattoos in the colonial period from about the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, were seen as marks of savagery yet the British and European traveler willingly received tattoos from the so-called natives. Early tattoos were viewed paradoxically. Even though tattooed natives were seen as savages, they were brought over to Europe and the United States as exotic displays. Now this exotic notion of having a tattoo became ingrained as a part of the North American working class. The origin of tattoos in North America traces back to sailors who represent the working class. These people were adventurous, traveled, and free spirited. They helped tattoos to transform from marks of primitiveness to marks of adventure.

⁵ Ibid., 47.

As we discuss the emerging culture of tattooing and its impact, I believe it is important to discuss how tattoos are made. In this discussion we will also be able to tease out a metaphor and/or new narrative i.e. *narraphor*, extended metaphors⁶ that speaks to the understanding of our current culture and meaning of those who want to express themselves with tattoos. In its earliest years, the tool used to make a tattoo can be best described as a sharp point that was set in a wooden handle.

It was also believed that the earliest form of tattoos and evidence of tattoos came from Egypt as early as 2000 B.C. There were female mummies who had tattoo marking. However, in 1891 near the Italian-Austrian border, the Iceman was discovered with many tattoo patterns. He was carbon dated at 5,200. He had tattooed dots and small crosses on his lower spine, right knee and ankle joint. Specialists say that these marking may have been therapeutic to alleviate joint pain and discomfort⁷.

The influence of the practice of tattooing has its roots in the Pacific Islands, which is how the art got to North America. However, tattooing has more ancient roots. Tattooing also can be traced back to ancient practice in Japan. (*By the way, Japanese tattooing style is very popular in today's culture.*) In Japan, tattoos were applied on clay figures that would be placed inside the tombs of people they resembled.⁸ They believe that the tattoos had religious and magical significance. This dates back to 3000BC. The first documented Japanese tattoo was in 297BC by the Chinese. The Chinese mentioned tattooing in their history but always mention it negatively. They believed that tattooing

⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood* (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2014) 37.

⁷ Erick Taylor, *History of Tattooing* (Amazon Digit Services), 2012.

⁸ Ibid.

was barbaric. Similarly, people today have their stereotypes about people with tattoos. These stereotypes as well as prejudice cause division and separatism. This is the same tension that has existed between people who are in the church who stick to tradition and the *unchurched* that reject the church, yet are in need of a savior. There is a cultural divide that needs a bridge to create communal connection.

CHAPTER IV

THE TAMBOURINES

As there is a history of tattooing that can be traced back thousands of years ago, there is also a history of tambourines. The tambourine can be traced back to the most ancient civilizations such as India, Greece, China, Egypt, and Rome. It is also the instrument on which Miriam played after the Israelites escaped from Egypt. The author states, “Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing (Exodus 15:20).¹

The tambourine was often associated symbolically with joy, dancing, rejoicing, victory, and times of happiness and gladness. The tambourine in the Bible is referred to by several different names: tambourine, timbrel, tabret, tof, to name a few. Considering we do not have any physical evidence of ancient Israeli tambourines it is hard to say what they looked like. However, it is assumed that they would have been substantially larger than the tambourines of modern day with a membrane and extensive decorations on the rim. There would probably not have been a hole, and far fewer jingle pairs, possibly none.

The tambourine was used for a variety of different reasons including: praise, joy, gladness, rejoicing, triumph, singing, warfare, victory, celebration, processions, welcoming etc. It was definitely an instrument of praise and warfare, often leading armies

¹ Exodus 15:20 (KJV).

into battle.

As the Jewish religion allowed for no images to be recorded, we do not know for sure how the tambourine was played, however, from studying neighboring nations surrounding Israel it is thought that the tambourine was held in one hand while it was hit on the membrane with the other hand in a rhythmic manner. It was often accompanied by dance, especially when women played it.

The tambourine was played in a multitude of different places: in the home, on the battlefield, at feasts and celebrations etc. According to Waller, there is evidence that the priests in the temple took the tambourine at one time and even used it in the temple, however, when this happened it was taken away from the common people.²

The tambourine began to take a prominent place in the music world during the eighteenth century when composers used it in their operas, however, it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the tambourine became more popular, appearing in Igor Stravinsky's ballet "Petrouchka", as well as in works by composers such as Berlioz.

Although the tambourine is accepted as a percussion instrument in the orchestra, it wasn't until the Salvation Army began to use it at the end of the nineteenth century did it begin to once again take its rightful place as an instrument of praise, worship, and warfare in the church. The Salvation Army was also the first to form timbrel brigades, often of young people, devoted to learning and playing the timbrel, especially during outreaches.³

² Dodie Sarchet-Waller, "*Timbrel Praise*", Tambourines, www.alittlegiggledesigns.com, (accessed August 2012).

³ Ibid.

The tambourine is a commonly used percussion instrument in African American worship. It is used for rhythmic accentuation. Tambourines have a historical connection to and are fervently used by worshippers in Holiness and Pentecostal congregations. Those attuned to the spiritual dynamics of the worship environment have developed an art and skill to use the tambourine to accompany the other musical dynamics in the worship service⁴.

Preaching to the *Tambourines* in my church, I need to understand certain signs and symbols that point them to faith. Regardless of tradition or lack of biblical accuracy, there are signs that have shaped and will continue to shape the faith of some in my congregation. When it comes to the physical structure, the church itself is considered holy ground. It is a sign that suggests God dwells in the place. The *Tambourines* that worship there for most part uphold its reverence. For example, even though some who have developed a smoking habit dare not satisfy their nicotine fix by smoking on church property; they will go around the corner or across the street because of the value they place on the sign/symbol of the church. Another example that the church *physical* is a sign of faith is when an occasional passer by genuflects when walking past the building. Even though this is a Baptist Church, those whose come from a Catholic heritage show respect. It is still a dwelling place for the divine.

When looking inside the church there are several signifiers that have shaped and/or point to faith for the *Tambourines* in my church. For example, as you walk in the vestibule of the church and look up and see the founding pastor's picture, to some, it is just to honor history of the ministry. But to others it means much more than that. That

⁴ Melva Wilson Costen, *In Spirit and In Truth* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2004), 129.

picture is a sign of dedication, struggle and victory. And for some it may be salvific. It is the story behind the sign that means some so much to a person's faith.

When we look at the sanctuary and its furnishings, there are several signs and symbols of meaning. One of the sacred and traditional signs of faith is the communion table with the white linen, two candles on each side of the bible placed in the center. The white linen is a sign of purity and the linen itself represents Christ's shroud. The two candles are a sign of Christ's two natures. The Bible is in the center because God's word is central to our faith. In my church setting, the communion table is so sacred that touching it, leaning on it, putting objects on it, or moving it is not tolerated.

Another place that is considered a sign of holy ground is the pulpit. You don't walk onto it unless authorized. A deacon in my church told me at one time that not even quartets, or anyone one other than the preacher was allowed to sing in it. Another symbol in the church was the "mourners bench". This bench, situated in front of the sanctuary, was the place where unsaved people would sit and hear the message of the preacher then *tarry* until they felt the change. This seat was a sign of the salvific event.

Marching in my church setting is another sign that people wrap their faith around. Personally, I didn't thought it was out dated and irrelevant. *Tattoos* would not relate to it. However, after listening to the hymns they sung and story of people's journey through the civil movements, I understood that marching was important to them. It is an expression of faith. I saw joy on old members who barely could walk but wanted to march in with the choir because it meant something to their faith.

The way we dress indicates our position in church and is also a sign that points to faith. When a person sees a man dressed in a dark suit sitting in the front row with other

men, you know that is the deacon's row and the people sitting there are deacons. Likewise, the ladies on the opposite rows are deaconess. Their hats are signs of virtue. Tradition suggests that women ought to have their head covered. Hat wearing comes from when Apostle Paul addresses the church of Corinth on order of women in service. But the most significant sign in the church is the vestments of clergy. The robe is symbolic of covering ones fleshly nature. The *Tambourines* in my church love when I wear robe. It says to them "that is my pastor and he is a holy man." To them it means that I point them to God. Even the Sunday school is a sign. It is a sacred moment that is an institution in most Baptist churches. Lastly, to the *Tambourines*, "Sunday is the Sabbath". They were brought up that the only thing you do on Sunday was church and they did church all day. Again, these signs point to faith because they tell the stories of a person's journey of faith.

CHAPTER V

SEMIOTICS IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

In preaching to the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines*, I chose to use a semiotic approach to examine each of the social groups in their cultural context. This approach will help me to understand each group with the hopes of building a bridge that causes a strong and effective relationship to flourish. Robert J. Schreiter in his book, *Constructing Local Theologies* describes semiotics as seeing a cultural “as a vast communication of network whereby both verbal and nonverbal messages are circulated along with elaborate, interconnected pathways which together, create the systems of meaning”.¹ Each culture has as system of meaning and communicates messages in a way that those within the groups can understand. The messages in particular are signs, symbols, codes, rules, gestures and “the unsaid” i.e. in social context “don’t snitch”. These signs travel through different cultural pathways and are giving different meanings. My goal is to discover the commonalities that will lead to a collective narrative between the two groups.

I looked at each of their context as I would a text to preach. So the church where the *Tambourines* gather and live out their faith would be a text. The community where the *Tattoos* reside and go about their day-to-day activities would be a text. But instead of exegeting a text I as would in sermon preparation, I exegeted the imagery, symbols, and

¹Robert J. Schreiter *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York, Orbis Books, 1985), 49.

signs of each of those contexts. I looked for the narratives that play out in the lives of faith and community. I excavated for meaning behind what was observed in both settings. My goal was to discover what is embedded in these cultures. Also, this semiotic approach will highlight the relationship to these signs of culture. Furthermore, I will look at what needs to be *(re)signed* for new narratives to be lived out by both the Tambourines and Tattoos.

To fully assess the effectiveness of preaching in my context and apart of my semiotic analysis was to participate in a prayer walk with members of my Lay Advisory Committee, (LAC) through the neighborhood. The purpose was not only to pray for restoration and healing in the community but to be a participant observer of the signs, symbols and metaphors in the surroundings. Following the prayer walk was a workshop on basic semiotics. I instructed this prayer team to up their senses. As they walk, they would see, hear, feel and smell for stories, metaphors and signs. We surveyed landscapes from street corners to stores to parks and housing. On our prayer walk, we conversed with people from the neighborhood and offered prayer.

The prayer team consisted of people who lived in the neighborhood all their life. So immediately there were personal connections and personal and shared narratives. As stated before, I instructed the team to open up their five senses as we walk through the neighborhood. I gave them several questions to consider: What do you see? What used to be there? What should and should not be there? They were to look at the landscape, absorb the visual and see the stories of people unfold before their eyes. As the team was walking, they were praying for what was visually encountered. The smell was also important. Smelling can invoke memory and from these invoked memories, stories of the

neighborhood unfolded also. The team, as they walked and prayed were asked to touch. Touching allowed the team to connect to the environment and to the texture of the community's personality. They were to touch jaggedness of fences, roughness of the walls and feel the air. As prayer is a two-way conversation, the team would pray and listen. They were basically "eavesdropping" on the community, not to be nosy but to be intercessory. There is more to hear in our church's neighborhood than sirens and gunshots. As for tasting, the team took a metaphorical approach. I did not recommend them to "taste" the streets literally. But I asked the team what taste does the community leave in your mouth? It is good or bad? What is the flavor? It is alive or bland? Where in the neighborhood needs more seasoning? Is there any place that was over cooked or under cooked? What about the neighborhood taste to right? What makes you come alive? The intent for this prayer walk was to come at one with community and to embody a missional approach to prayer.

Two main streets were the hot blocks we targeted, 174th street which is a two way street mixed with mom & pop stores, restaurants, as well as established franchises such as Popeye's and I HOP. The other street we targeted was Hoe Avenue, which is a narrow congested one-way street with an adjacently stacked apartment building. What was so unique about the Hoe Ave apartment there is an intertwining of new renovating building and older vintage building. These two different building style designs collided and contrast in the aesthetic of the neighborhood. The reason why these two areas were selected for our walk is that they are notorious for drug and other criminal and gang related activities.

However, before we walked, we first look at the structure, location and aesthetics of our church building. Our church is located on the corner of Boston Road, which is a major thoroughfare. The building is nearly one hundred years old and was a former Jewish synagogue. With the migration of Jews in early 1900's, this former synagogue transitioned to meet the new demographics of the African American community that now resides in this area of the Bronx. The property that surrounds the church is enclosed by an 8 foot black iron gate. There is a big pad lock on the gate, which at one time was capped with barbwire. The gates were erected to protect the church from the riots in the sixties. The side windows also are adorned with bars for security purposes, I had reinstalled after a church break in. In the front of our church, there is a plot of grass where our church sign stands. However, at the time of our walk there were no letters on the sign and it was broken. From the aesthetics alone, there is a message that is communicated to the *Tattoos* in the community, who pass by the church on a daily basis. If we look at the church semiotically as a sign we see several messages conveyed. From a time perspective and change in the demographic, the church may go through a culture shift to accommodate the dominant demographic. The Latino population has increased in the community the church will one day transition culturally to accommodate and meet the needs of that demographic. This in itself should shape the nature of my preaching in my context. Next, from aesthetics, the church building gives mixed messages. The tall, padlocked iron gates suggest we are protecting what is inside from the outside community. It also suggests, considering the amount of time its open during the week that it is less welcoming to the community than it is protecting itself from the community. But what is most alarming to me as pastor/preacher of our church property was the empty sign in front of the church. It

was blank and broken down. If I were a passerby, the sign would communicate that there was nothing going on in the church. There were no service times on the board. Not even the pastor's name was on the board. The sign also communicates that if there is something broken on the outside, you expect to be on the inside. The empty sign indicated that there was not much value placed on the house of God.

Next, as we traveled down Boston Road we came toward the train station. This is an elevated train in this section of the Bronx. Due the economic conditions and lack of job opportunities, most people who live in the neighborhood work outside the neighborhood. They have to take the train to go to work, leaving their community in fulfillment of their economic needs. Residents of this poverty stricken area work in places like Midtown Manhattan and then come back into their neighborhood. Largely, they work for other people and as such the train station speaks to the social status of the community.

As we continued our walk through the neighborhood, we saw groups of young men congregated on the corners and apartment stoops. In passing, we heard the news of the day, laughter and observed silence. In the urban setting, according to media perception of African Americans males, negative assumptions are made and stereotypes are created from this type of gathering. Were these drug dealer or gang bangers? These are the images that are portrayed. However, I observed something different. These street corners provided a place of connection, fellowship and information. This urban space is equivalent to the front porches in the south and the suburbs where I am from. I can remember in my early years it was nothing to see people hanging out on the front porch talking to neighbors. There are no front porches like these in my church's urban context; however, the front porch camaraderie is demonstrated on the corner. In *The Search to*

Belong, Joseph Myers explores the notion of belonging. He asks the question, “Where have the front porches gone?”² He suggests that we need to create “front porches with our churches.” I suggest that the churches, my church in particular, need to be more missional and evangelistic and go to the front porches in the community and cast our nets while creating a space within the church where the *Tattoos* that are on the corner can be safe and find fellowship and identity within the church.

In the urban landscape where the church is located, there is not a lot of green space with the exception of Crotona Park, which sets a block away from the church. This provides an oasis in the spring and summer months for gathering and events. Other than that there are several small parks and garden like areas in the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, they are locked so no one has access. From an image standpoint, it looks like people are locked out of green pasture. One of the LAC members on the walk commented on the statement that it makes to the members of community when these areas are locked. She said, “It makes the statement that this is good and you are bad. You are not good enough for this.” Sussurean semiotics suggests that what is signified in this is that people are devalued by the *signifier*, the locked gates. Again, these signs make me think more about what type of imagery is needed to inform my preaching to the *Tattoos* of the community.

Joseph Daniels Jr. in *Walking with Nehemiah*, “It isn’t until you know for whom your heart breaks that God can reveal where in the community and with whom your

² Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2003), 121.

ministry needs to be done.³ My hearts breaks for the *Tattoos* in my Bronx neighborhood who not only don't know Jesus for their personal Lord and Savior but those who feel that the church is not relevant and that the preacher is suspect. Just as Nehemiah asked about the condition of his people, I had to ask about the condition of my people. Like Nehemiah, I wept about hearing the news of the people. The community, like ancient Jerusalem of Nehemiah day, is broken down. If the community is broken down, people are broken down. It is the purpose of the church to rebuild the lives of the people so they can rebuild the community. But in order to do this the church has to see the needs of the community. That primarily comes through the vision of the pastor/preacher. As Nehemiah went out to inspect the damaged walls, I had to go out into the community to inspect the walls. Walls are supposed to provide structure, support and protection. Without walls, the city can be infiltrated by all kinds of things. However, the walls I inspected are people. People of the community provide structure; support and protection. Without people in place all kinds of things can infiltrate a community such as drugs and violence. Unfortunately, it has. But fortunately there is the *Church*, which needs to have the spirit of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of the kingdom.

I believe my church has an obligation to strengthen the people of my Bronx community. However, in order to do that we have to not only have to know their needs but who they are i.e. their identity. The prayer walk that the church did that summer was an attempt to discover the identity of the people. As I walked in my church community that Saturday morning in the summer, I saw a lot of people who by my initial judgment

³ Joseph W. Daniels, *Walking with Nehemiah* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2014), 1.

were not apart of my church and didn't seem to belong to any other church. Also, I noticed that they had an apparent commonality i.e. *tattoos*.

In my observation of my *tattooed* neighbors, though I had a passion to reach them for Christ, I had an apparent judgment as it comes to people with tattoos. I realized that in order to reach them, I needed to know who they are as well as their beliefs and lack there of. This would take a new level of learning because of my jaded traditional eyes that were developed in a Baptist environment. Taking my cues from Peter Senge et al. author of the book *Presence*, I had to see what I am seeing that there is an apparent disconnect between the church and the community⁴. That disconnect Otto Schamer, author of the book *Theory U* would call this a *blind spot*. According to Schamer, a *blind spot* is the place within or around us where our attention and intention originates. It is the place from where we operate when we do something.⁵ It is from the blind spot where relationship building, ministry and effective preaching need to focus on. This place would be my blank canvas but first I need to suspend my judgment.

In the past, whenever I saw a person with his/her body tattooed up, a certain stereotype popped in my head. My thoughts led me to think differently about that individual without any personal understanding, knowledge and/or intimacy with him/her. I had start looking at my community with fresh eyes. That approach opened a new world to me. Instead of looking a people as rebellious or freaks, I am looking at them with interest as walking storybooks. These were people of *meaning* who were visibly

⁴ Peter Senge, C. Otto Schrarmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Lou Flowers, *Presence* (New York, Random House, 2004), 29.

⁵ Otto C. Scharmer, *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges* (Bk Business) Berrett-Koehler Publishers) Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 335

expressing their meaning. As preacher, I see the *Tattoos* as souls who are looking for identity and belonging in a community.

Suspending my negative perceptions enables me to think more deeply and compassionately. Suspending my thoughts puts me in the posture of Jesus after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. In Luke 19:37, after he came down from the Mount Olive, his place of solitude and after experiencing the praises and the rebuke of the Pharisee, he comes near the city and wept. This is a metaphor of a life of a preacher in an urban context. We have to be able to come down out of our divine time of fellowship with God and other saints. As often as we come down, we are met with two types of crowds. One set of people will give praise for the selfless act of ministry. These people will celebrate you because you are going to meet the needs of a community, but also you will hear negative jeers from an opposing crowd trying to hinder the joy of those who need help. The suspension of thoughts is exemplified by Jesus when he looked over the city and weeping, showing his compassion for the lost. He could have gotten caught up in the enthusiasm with which he was greeted or he could have been distracted by his opponents attempt to silence them, but Jesus suspended his thoughts and focused on the needs of the people. Also, in this story the Pharisees didn't see what the praisers saw in Jesus. They had preconceived notions about who Jesus was therefore could not see the bigger picture. Many times in ministry, we behave like the Pharisees when we don't suspend our thoughts. Similarly as Nehemiah, Jesus' heart was broken over what he saw. My heart breaks when I see people who have wonderful stories of their identity without knowing their true identity in Jesus Christ. It also breaks when the *Tambourines* make no *sound* outside the church walls by not sharing their stories. I have learned in my research

that when you come down from the mount you will always see something that breaks your heart that you have to act upon.

The prayer walk really enabled me to comprehend my context. Walking around the neighborhood further enabled me to suspend my thoughts. Joseph Daniel Jr. contends *Walking with Nehemiah* too often went up doing ministry for people instead of with people.⁶ He further suggests this happens because (1) we see an us -them divide; (2) and we identify a need based on statistics proving what we think needs to be done (or what we think needs to be preached). There needs to be a relationship between the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines*. This is where we have to see and hear the needs of the people like Nehemiah who inspected the mission field. Nehemiah went out and inspected the walls and the gates that were destroyed in Jerusalem. I went out into the neighborhood to the “*hottest*” block in the community where the walls and gates were destroyed not by outsiders but by insiders with an evil outsider mentality. It is known evidence that gang violence and drug trafficking has destroyed this neighborhood. They have torn down the walls of hope. Nehemiah had to deal with the repercussions of exile. People in my neighborhood may have not experienced physical exile, but the experience and exilic state due to oppressive and depressive social ills. Sadly, for many, they made exile a place of comfort because of the loss of hope. Both the un-churched *Tattoos* and the traditional *Tambourines* have gotten comfortable with the conditions of their surrounding neighborhood while being in a self-inflicted exile held within the church walls.

⁶ Joseph W. Daniels Jr., *Walking with Nehemiah* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2014), 49.

The *Tambourines* have made preaching comfortable and preaching has made the *Tambourines* comfortable. In doing so, churches particularly mine are not being effective as being missional and therefore they are not effective. The church should be about the *mission dei* or mission of God. Without a mission, the congregation is not a church but more of a civic organization. In our going out or *sending* there is an *embedding* that needs to be accomplished. The embedding presence of God makes the mission incarnational. That is where preaching becomes relevant. In *Missional Preaching*, Al Tizon in the introduction gives two basic assumptions about missional preaching. He notes that the first mission is integral to what it means to be the church. Secondly, that biblical preaching remains one of the primary ways in which leaders influence God's people and shape the church.⁷ However, the method of preaching has to be geared specifically to the context of congregations and community. This is very important in this digital age. Preaching has to connect and the only way to connect is to know the needs of your ministry context. With that said, I have to extend my pulpit. Streets corners need to become sanctuary.

Language is important in semiotics, and it's important in my church community as well. Christianity has its own language. Alex Scott in *Christian Semiotics and the Language of faith* states that Christians are members of a religious community who share a language of faith⁸. Communities have their own language. Language of this Bronx community is more than slang and street talk. Language has a specific meaning for the people here. Because of the disconnect between the *Tambourines* in the church and the

⁷ Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching* (Valley Forge PA, Judson Press 2012), xviii.

⁸ Alex Scott, *Christian Semiotics* (New York, iUniverse Inc., 2007), 4.

Tattoos outside of church, there is no shared language. The lack of a shared language prohibits any real community from taking place. Therefore, in order to connect both groups, one group needs to understand the language of the other. The mainline church has to learn the language of their surrounding community if it is going to be missional. The neighborhood has its own language and that language is embodied in the signs and symbols that are present. But first in order for the *Tambourines* to understand the language of the tattooed “unchurched,” it first must understand its own language. In my context, people use clichés to express their faith such as “I am blessed,” “God is good and good all the time” amongst others. I have discovered many times the *Tambourines* use these phrases unconsciously and without full comprehension. What does it mean to be blessed all the time? Am I qualifying what I mean when I say God is good? This is important because the *Tattoos* are on another wavelength meaning they speak another language. If we look at language as *blind spot* as defined by Otto Schrammer in *Theory U*, as the place within or around us where our attention and intention originates, the *Tambourines* and the *Tattoos* are operating from different *blind spots* and not speaking the same language. The *Tambourines* are operating from a blind spot that is both biblical and cultural. There is both positive and negative when operating from this source. The positive can point the people i.e. *Tambourines* to faith and identity. The negative is it can isolate people who don’t speak the language of the *Tambourines* i.e. the *Tattoos*. For example, in my setting there are what you call Annual Days. These are days set aside to honor the faithfulness of ministries in the church. Usher’s anniversary is one of those days. The positive is it signifies faith that is to be honored. It also gives a cultural identity in the traditional march and strut of the honorees as they parade during the Grand March.

The negative is because it only embraces other *Tambourines* from other churches. It is not a missional event therefore no real connection to the *Tattoos* in the community. We are speaking a different *language*. Thus, it leaves them in past. Ushers wear dated uniforms and those outside church will not relate to the style. Everything that is done during the anniversary points to the past and celebrates the past. It signifies that the church has become insulated. To reverse that trend, the *Tambourines* need to look through a different lens. Scharmer calls it learning from the future as it emerges.

The community in which my church is located is apart of an ecosystem. Ecosystems must be understood and all elements in place are for health and growth to take place. As Tim Keller in his blog, Gospel Coalition writes, “Just as a biological ecosystem is made of interdependent organisms, systems, and natural forces, a gospel ecosystem is made of interdependent organizations, individuals, ideas, and spiritual and human forces. When all the elements of an ecosystem are in place and in balance, the entire system produces health and growth as a whole for the elements themselves.”⁹ I believe the goal of the local church is to help and aid putting these systems in place for healthy growth. Preaching is the catalyst for getting things into place for a healthy ecosystem in the church and in the community. To that end, (re)preaching will take place.

⁹ Tim Keller, “*Changing the City with Gospel takes a Movement*”, Gospel Coalition, Sept. 3 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/03/changing-the-gospel-takes-a-movement/> (accessed September 10, 2014).

CHAPTER VI

(RE)PREACHING

(Re)Preaching is a transductive way of doing discipleship. Preaching in itself is transductional. Transductive or transduction by definition is the action or process of converting something, especially energy or a message into another form.¹ Preaching is the transducer which takes the power, the Word of God that is from one system into another system, the “hearer i.e. receiver.” That power in the receiver’s life manifests in life-changing and motivating events. The goal is that this power will multiply and don’t die out. It creates a movement. This is in an incarnational process. This (re)Preaching starts with me as the pastor in my preaching process. My message will be received by the *Tambourines*. This is where the actual (re)Preaching takes place. Here is where the importance of a semiotic approach in preaching is effective. Semiotics will produce a shared narrative in that people will find themselves in the story. These stories can be shared and transferred by the *Tambourines* to the *Tattoos* that will be able to find themselves in the story.

Within my congregation each of my *Tambourines* has a specific sound that has the potential to reach *Tattoo* that may identify with that sound. That specific sound is a signifier (Saussure) with a shared meaning to those who hear the sound or sign from where the source is coming from. This comes from teasing out the *Tambourines* in my

¹ *Meriam Webster dictionary.*

congregation and their specific sound by describing its details and characteristics. For example, the sound of a tambourine for a single mom has certain sound. There is a certain sound, language or signs that only single moms can identify with. When that sound, language or sign is connected to a narrative of the Word of God, incarnation can take place. She then can embody this in her lifestyle, which can become contagious. For instance, when a Tattoo single hears how Mary, the mother of Jesus held on to the promises of God despite her challenges gives encouragement to the plight of single moms. This is a powerful metaphor that *sounds* in the ear of single *Tattoo* and *Tambourine* moms.

Understanding the Preaching Audience

My congregation is made up of other *Tambourines* such as divorcees, blended families, people of Latin American and Caribbean decent, recovering addicts, young people, grandparents raising children and singles. Each of these *Tambourines* makes their own *sound* and this can be a relational connection to the *Tattoos* outside in the community. Preaching can incarnate these *Tambourines*. With that incarnational message, these *Tambourines* can (re)preach to those with a shared narrative.

Small groups create belonging

Preaching to these two groups is about relationship building. Each of these groups can be formed into small groups. A small group can create a petri dish dynamic in that the Gospel becomes an “infectious germ” to be inoculated in a target community. Groups are God’s design for transformation. God exists in community i.e. small groups. We see this in the perichorectal nature of God. We see this expressed in the Godhead.

There is an intimate relationship in the group that consists of God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each is perfect and equal yet has distinct roles. This small group is in community with one another and operates with a single purpose. When Jesus came in the flesh to dwell among us, he in fact came into community with us to show us how to come into community with God. To come into community with God happens in fellowship with one another. This fulfills the longing to belong. Everyone has a need to belong, from the divorcee to the teen mother. I believe it is in groups or community this longing can be satisfied and people can thus experience the transforming power of God.

Every community has a shared narrative. Within the shared narrative are smaller meta-narratives. These meta-narratives need to be teased out by the church as they uncover the needs of the community in order to meet those needs. These meta-narratives will be the basis of small groups where the *(re)preaching* will take place that will also not only be a place of healing and restoration but also discipleship that replicates and multiplies. Each of these shared groups has within them a similar heartbreak. As a result, they are in position to share in a similar healing that can only take place with that shared intimate space.

Also, within these small groups there will be a sense of belonging that is innate because of their shared narrative. *Belonging* is important not only in the church where the *Tambourines* dwell, but it is extremely important to the *Tattoos* in the community. I believe preaching helps to direct not only to whom they belong to i.e. Jesus Christ, but also where they are in the His kingdom. Belonging is what both the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines* desire. The *Tattoos* create a sense of belonging by self-identification and

individual expression. They connect in community via technology platforms that can give them intimacy without proximity. They are used to creating their belonging with a “like” on a page or as a *follower* on Twitter or Instagram. As the tattoo was interpreted as a sign of rebellion and going against status quo, those who have them gravitated toward places of acceptance. We as a body of Christ, also have to create an acceptable community so they can feel a sense of belonging. As for the *Tambourines* whose missional mandate is outside the walls of comfort of their churches, I believe their sense of belonging comes as they infuse the outside environment and the outsiders with the gospel message. Love will create a space for them of acceptance and enable them to authentically be themselves i.e., Christian in identity. As we attempt to create belonging between the two groups, there has to be an understanding that the belonging may not be reciprocal. Those who participate may not be there to give but only to receive. They may view the setting just as place of refreshing.

The key is to make the church and/or small groups a safe place so that people feel safe in that setting. Therefore, in the church setting we have to rethink belonging. According to Joseph Myers, in *The Search to Belong*, the church space and communal space have to be a place of connection. This would require how the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines* view and need space. Myers describes four different spaces: public, social, personal and intimate. Both the *Tambourines* and the *Tattoos* have created these four spaces for themselves. For example, Myers tells a story of his love for new technology. “Later on that day that he purchased a new phone, a teenager girl who he didn’t know came up to him and told him he had a “rad” phone”.² There was a connection made

² Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003), 39.

through the gadget. The connection to a common interest happened in a public space. The connector, the phone made the teenage girl perhaps come out of her comfort zone to come up to a stranger and check out his phone. We see that same type of connection to a common connectors happen with the *Tattoo* and the *Tambourines* that make them feel comfortable with one another that creates instant community upon interaction. For the *Tattoos*, this connection in public space that creates community happens when one admires another “Tattoo” or like in Myers’ experience, that latest gadget everyone is blogging about. As with the *Tambourines*, a “thingy” may not be the connector that creates communities. Most of the time it is language that creates the connection. There is a certain *Tambourines* talk, or *semiotic* sound. A conversation may be overheard about a church event that an inquiry is made and an invitation is given. Thus, community is created right where it happens, in public space. Myers gives an excellent illustration that captures how the *Tambourines* have to create a public space for *Tattoos* as they *(re)preach* the gospel message. He writes, “Jesus is master at permitting people to belong to him...” He offered to come to the centurion’s home.³ As the biblical account goes on, the centurion didn’t want to come to Jesus. He felt that he was undeserving and unworthy. How many times do we encounter people with a desperate need that feel they are unworthy to come to Jesus? The centurion needed Jesus to accept him in that space. For *Tambourines* that acceptance may mean praying for someone who requests prayer even if that person does not attend church. But more importantly, like Jesus, do we offer to go where they are comfortable?

³ Ibid., 44.

Of the two groups, the *Tambourines* are often uncomfortable to go into the spaces where the *Tattoos* are comfortable and so they miss the opportunity to form a connection that establishes a sense of belonging. The next space that needs to be discussed is the social space. Myers describes social space in three distinct factors. Each revolves around relationships that are created. First, social belonging provides space for neighbor relationship. Neighbor relationships provide safety, comfort and connectedness. For the *Tambourines*, neighbors are people who are friends and who are geographically close. You can knock on their door and borrow sugar. For the *Tattoos* neighbors are their Facebook friends and Twitter and Instagram followers. Like with traditional neighbors of the *Tambourines*, you can have small talk and connect at any time. Furthermore, because of technology, they don't have to be physically close. The *Tattoos* find safety, comfort and connectedness by who they befriend on Facebook. Even with Instagram you can choose your social belonging by who you follow. With both social media outlets, you be safe because you block or unfollow whomever you want. This leads to the author's second social belonging factor. This space allows you to decide whom you want to grow in a deeper relationship with. For that *Tattoos* it is the shared information- For "friends" only. As for the *Tambourines*, it is often through the social groups i.e. cliques that are formed in the church setting. You are in the "know" crowd or you are not.

The third factor of social belonging can be problematic if both groups are not careful with their space. Myers' notes, "These interactions allow us to display a reality we create for who we are, while at the same time enabling others to witness a sample of the process through which this reality was created..."⁴ This factor challenges one's

⁴ Ibid., 46.

authenticity. Since each group can create their own reality, they can be anybody other than themselves especially in these individual groups. For example, a *Tattoo* can create a false reality of themselves through the images and messages they send out. Therefore, you don't know to whom you are really connecting. As for the *Tambourines*, you can create an image in church that may not be who you really are which will compromise true connectedness to belong. For example, I can hide behind my title as a pastor as one who is in authority and influence, but who I am really is a person who struggles with acceptance and deals with personal insecurity. My title can provide me a false reality to connect in areas, which I am lacking.

The third factor of social belonging according to Myers is personal space. Myers makes a clear distinction between personal space and intimacy. In this space people would connect through sharing experiences, feelings and thoughts but not necessarily be too transparent. This way it also creates clear boundaries between other relationships that a person holds dear to his/her heart and makes a person feel that the church folks are not getting into their business. These relationships that cultivate may start off as "discipleship" but may develop into genuine personal friendships. In this personal space private information is shared and kept safe. In this space is where community with the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines* takes place.

The last factor of social belonging that is needed but will not necessarily be fostered in the setting I am trying to develop is a space of intimate belonging. This is a place of true transparency. Few relationships are like this where one person knows the naked truth about someone and they are not "ashamed." Myers points out that Eden was created in perfection. God fashioned all relationships to operate in perfect harmony. The

intimate relationship was described “naked and not ashamed.” When this harmony was broken the intimate relationship suffered, as did all relationships.⁵ In my pastoral experience, I have seen several people leave the church because the “intimate relationship” was broken. The problem in the cases I experienced was the relationship was broken was due to lack of understanding of the importance of trust and confidentiality. When hearing things like this happening in a church environment, people are reluctant to be apart of the church because of the fear of exposure and the idea that they need to belong and that they have to be exposed i.e. “naked and not ashamed.” Therefore, I need to create a space in the church for a healthy community guidelines and set that create clear yet comfortable boundaries for everyone. In this way, harmony between the *Tambourines* and the *Tattoos*, which is the overall goal of belonging to a community of faith, is fostered.

⁵ Ibid., 51.

Reconstructing of the Preacher

During our prayer walk, I was introduced to a young *Tattoo* named Wayne Edwards. I asked him what he thought about preaching and preachers in general. He immediately shared his views about the preacher. He said when he was younger he went to a church and the preacher was wearing gold chains and driving a nice car. However, the church roof was leaking. He went on to say that the preacher was a pimp. This young man said a mouthful that we can look at semiotically to unfold the metaphors in the conversation. In describing his image of a preacher, the young man sent a message that did not draw someone to Christ and the church but pushed him away from the Church and tainted his view toward preachers. I heard his description of the way the preacher was dressed and the message that was transmitted was that of success and wealth. Gold chains and a nice car, in an urban context, have a clear meaning of status. The image of the church roof leaking can be looked at as a metaphor for a breakdown of a place where people find hope, healing, redemption and salvation. The leaking roof suggests that what is on the outside is seeping in. But one problem I saw in this young man's viewpoint is that no one is fixing the problem. Symbolically, the more that which was on the outside seeped in, the more damage was being done to the inside. Also, the image painted of the preacher and the church shows what was important in that congregation. The image suggests money flowed to the preacher instead of the church. The preacher's need came before the "community's" needs. Use of the term pimp to describe the preacher implies that the young man viewed him as engaging in ecclesiastical prostitution. In the urban context, a pimp controls prostitutes and arranges clients for them, taking part of their earning in return. A pimp tends to dress flashy and bring attention to themselves. This

description and view from the young man is shared by many other unchurched *Tattoos* in their depiction of the preacher and church. Metaphorically, the image implies that if the preacher is the pimp, then the church is the prostitute.

Since we live in an image driven culture, certain stereotypes and judgments calls should not be overlooked or ignored. I believe that a healthy critique of the preacher is needed since he or she is the conduit that helps to connect the *Tattoos* and the *Tambourines*. I suggest that there needs to be a “deconstruction” or reframing or *(re)signing* of the image of the preacher.

There was a time in the black community that the preacher was respected and held in high regard. People would stop cursing and change their behavior around the preacher because of who s/he represented. The preacher was a signifier that pointed to God and what is divine. That same is true for the church. However, due to highly publicized scandals within the clergy and sin exposure of preachers with the television shows such as *Preachers of LA*, the preacher is no longer looked at as revered *image* of faith especially those outside of the church. I believe in our current context the image of the preacher needs to be more sacred than ever, more relevant than ever and more relational than ever if we are going to reach this current image-driven generation.

Semiotic Preaching Method

Otto Scharmer's concept of Theory U as a means of assimilating the *Tattoos with the Tambourines*, is an interesting approach to creating community and a sense of belonging. Moreover, if semiotic preaching produces a shared narrative in which people find themselves in the story, then preaching is an element in the creation of this community. Furthermore, Schramer points to inflection points that can be essential aspects of semiotic preaching:

- *Downloading*: reenacting patterns of the past—viewing the world through one's habits of thought
- *Seeing*: suspending judgment and seeing reality with fresh eyes—the observed system is separate from those who observe
- *Sensing*: connecting to the field and attending to the situation from the whole—the boundary between observer and observed collapses, the system begins to see itself
- *Presencing*: connecting to the deepest source, from which the field of the future begins to arise—viewing from source
- *Crystallizing* vision and intention—envisioning the new from the future that wants to emerge
- *Prototyping* is the living microcosms in order to explore the future by doing—enacting the new through “being in dialogue with the universe”

- *Performing* and embodying the new in practices and infrastructures—embedding the new in the context of the larger co-evolving⁶

There are various similarities between Schrarmer’s method and how I approach a text for preaching. In my traditional approach, I use an expository method that focuses on words and principles found in the biblical meaning of the text. However, in semiotic preaching I exegete images and stories that resonant in the text. These images, stories and metaphors convey the truth of Gospel. To the end, the message becomes and Dr. Len Sweet coins “E.P.I.C.,” which is an acronym for experiential, participatory, image driven and connective.⁷

In one of his Lab Practicums called the Gospel Grail, Sweet outlines seven steps for preaching with metaphors: 1. Find and touch the image 2. Trust the image 3. Embody the image. 4. Texturize and contextualize the image. 5. Keep the image moist. 6. Twist the image. 7. Spin the image and let it go.⁸ These principles are used so not only the preachers a wordsmith but also now he or she becomes an “image-smith.”

By marrying these two independent methods, I believe I have come up with an approach I can use to develop semiotic sermons that are trans-incarnational. I will call this the Semiotic Loop. In this semiotic process the preacher becomes one with the message and the goal is to make a missional message that is reproductive i.e. (re)preached through the lives of the hearers. The Semiotic loop goes as follows:

⁶ Otto C. Scharmer, *Theory U: Learning from the Future as It Emerges* (Bk Business, Berrett-Koehler Publishers) Kindle Edition. Kindle Locations 807-812

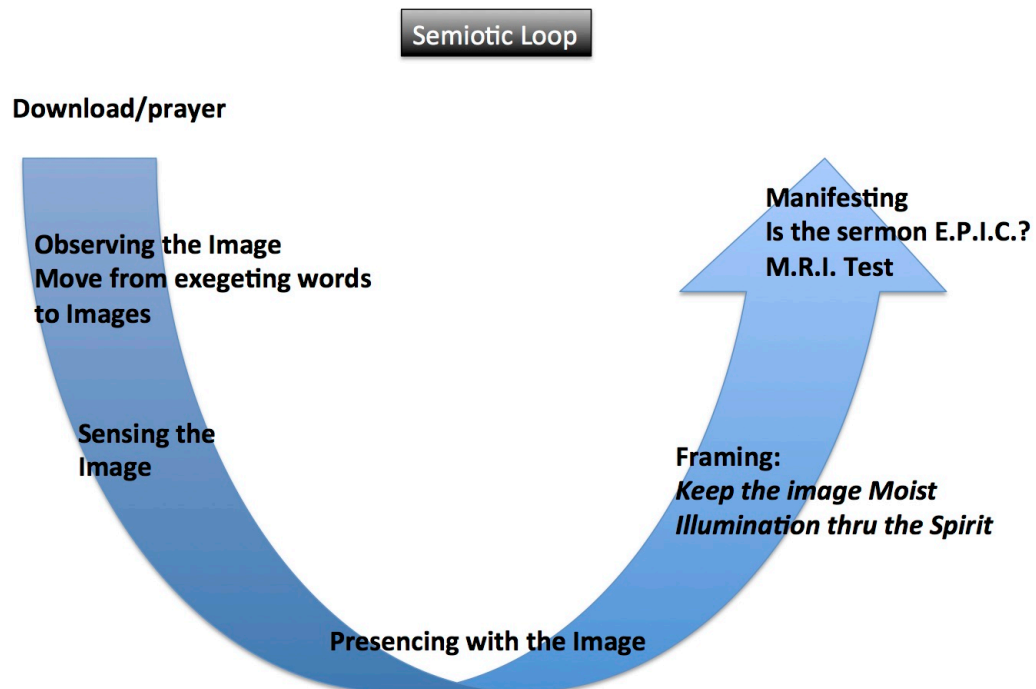
⁷ Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood* (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2014), 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

- *Downloading* through prayer. Like information is downloaded to a computer, the Word of God is downloaded to the preacher by the Holy Spirit through study and prayer. Instead of reenacting patterns of the past, as Schrarmer puts it, you are reacting the biblical story. Like Scharmer you will need an open mind, open heart, and open will to explore the text initially.
- *Observing* the image starts first with proper exegesis of text. You are mining for word images that resonant. In this step, you move from exegeting word to exegeting images.
- *Sensing* the image in this step one begins to embody the image you literally use all five senses. You see it, hear it, touch it, smell it, and taste it and internalize what you are experiencing.
- *Presencing* with the image. This is where you texturize and contextualize⁹ the text according to Sweet. As with Theory U, this is where the stories, image and metaphors connect with you and with culture. Explore how the image plays out in your cultural context. This is where the sermon takes shape. This is where the intent of the sermon is formed. The basic question is what is the Spirit says to us? This is where the message starts to form. When you enter this phase of the preparation process, similar to presencing with Theory U, you are letting *go* and letting *come* according to Schramer. Sweet calls this twisting of the image. What is the revelation? What new truths come out of this image? What arises for the hearer?

⁹ Ibid.

- *Framing* is the preliminary or early sample of a model. In the words, of Schramer prototyping living microcosms in order to explore the future by doing. It is reenacting the *new* through being in dialogue with the universe. This is where the message becomes organic. Sweet calls this MRI test: missional, relational, and incarnational. The goal is that the sermon becomes E.P.I.C.(experiential, participatory, incarnational and connective).
- *Manifesting* the new practices. This where the “new” is embedded in the evolving ecosystems. The “new” in the semiotic preaching process is the embedding practices that will replicate behavior to other believers. I call this (re)preaching. This is where the sermon becomes E.P.I.C.



CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Preaching to the *Tattoos and the Tambourines* will always be an on going work that will need to be revisited because of the emerging cultures in the future that will impact the church as well as our communities. The Gospel has to always be relevant. The preaching should always be missional in its intent. Stories, symbols, sign, and images should always come alive to give meaning to life.

As for my local ministry context, in a perfect world where resources and committed souls were available, I would continue to improve the church's social media presence. I would love to have a minister or pastor of Social Media to enhance our reach to those in that context. I would further conduct impact classes for my *Tambourines* which will not only empower them as disciples with the Word but also give them a voice and accountability to reach out more. Their stories can be a "narraphor" that others can embrace.

Furthermore, I will look for ways to break down the cultural divide that is present between the church and the unchurched. This is going to take courage and radical leadership. Within my ministry context, there are "sacred cows" that need to be sacrificed because of their lack of relevance to this present age. Even though these practices lack biblical significance sensitivity is needed in handling these situations because people

have wrapped their faith around them. Removing it, no matter what it may be, is an insult to someone's faith.

Another challenge is creating a passion to reaching beyond the church walls. I need to not only refocus on where my church has been casting its net but how it is being recast and who is doing it. As I mentioned, I would like for some *(re)preaching* to take place through small groups to meet the relationship needs of the *Tattoos*. However, the challenge has been traditionally in African American settings, small groups tend not to work. One reason, especially in my context, is that people don't want you to come to their house. That is why I recommended safe space within the community. Also, there is a leadership dynamic that needs to be in place. I have heard horror stories about small groups leading to the establishment of premature churches. Why this happens needs to be looked into further. However, I believe it has to do with the view of leadership authority in the African American culture.

As a preacher I will always have to ask myself is my preaching effective in my current context. I have to stay attune to the emerging culture while holding on to the gospel. But the one thing I learned through this project was that as a preacher of the Gospel it is vital in this image-driven culture to keep up my image as a preacher. Like the *Tattoos* who have markings to tell their story, I must bear the marks of the Gospel in my lifestyle and have Jesus *tattooed* on my heart.

Finally, a preaching evaluation form was given to the LAC to evaluate my semiotic sermon series (see appendix). In my sermon series, I attempted to use relevant events and stories as metaphors that have meaning in my ministry context such as light, Facebook and guys hanging on street corners. Each LAC member was given a form to

fill. The questionnaire was designed around what Dr. Sweet calls an EPIC¹ style of preaching; E stands for *experiential*; P stands for *participatory*; I for *image rich* and C for *connecting*. The members were asked to identify these characteristics in my sermon and how it impacted them. Also, on the evaluation form, the LAC was asked for input on how the sermon could be better or more relevant to this present age.

Here are some of the comments made by the LAC on a sermon entitled, “Let your light shine” from Matthew chapter 5.

“My experience was that I was edified by the word. I had been blessed that the word came alive.” Alice Johnson. This was her response to *experiential*.

“I don’t let my light shine enough.” Kelly Johnson. This was his response to *connecting*.

Here are some comments from the sermon entitled, I want to play from Act 9:26-31.

“The image of Ananias touching Saul and the scales coming off.” Connie Johnson. This was her response to the sermon being *image rich*.

“It caused me to pray for God to lead me on how to be humble and approachable.” Diane Ames. This was her response to the sermon being.

The overall consensus of the evaluation was that the Word was demonstrated effectively.

The sermons were relevant to what people are going through now. I was also encouraged to use PowerPoint and also to include social media

¹ *Giving Blood*, 23.

APPENDIX A

BE THE LIGHT

Text: Matthew 5:14-16

Here in the text, Jesus is speaking to the disciples after giving the kingdom principles of the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. He now discusses the distinctions and influence that his followers should have in the world. We see in this pericope a *metaphor* to describe our *identity* we have as believers and as a church. Here Jesus says in verse 14 to them, “*Ye are the light of the World.*” This is so important to us for several reasons because *light* was the first thing God spoke into existence. In Genesis 1, God said, “let there be light.” Also, Scripture describes God as *light* in I John 1:15 and Jesus calls himself *light* in John 8:12, “*I am the light of the world.*” Now, here we get the same attribute of both *God the father* and *Jesus the Son*. *You are the light of the world.* This is the ultimate compliment you and I have as believers. Therefore, what is *in* the Father and the Son is also *in* us!

Jesus uses this metaphor to describe who we are and what we are do to establish the kingdom of God on earth. We are light! This is our true *identity* that comes from God. This is another reason why you should come to church i.e. to *discover* who you really are. Too many times we allow people and circumstances to define who we are and give us our identity. Generally, *I can tell you who you are by whom you hang with.* If that is the case, the only person some of you should hang with is Jesus because those who you are

hanging with are no good for your identity. They are defining you! But as a believer, God tells you who you are and what you can become. He is the Creator of the universe who made you in His image. But if you look at your life it may look like someone else's image that defines you! That is not who you are! But the Lord said you are light! Not maybe or possibly. You are light! Not worthless. But light! Not a hot mess but light! Yet, and still though God tells us who we are, we think too small of ourselves. You limit yourself and stifle what God wants you to do. You think too small and narrow-minded. Beloved, what God calls you to be is something that is always greater than you imagine for yourself. But by faith and obedience you can become what He wants you to be! You are light for this dark world!

What is *light*? *Light* by definition is electromagnetic radiation visible to the human eye responsible for sight. It is measured in nanometers as wavelength, approximately 400 nanometers. Light is clear and pure. The characteristics of light are synonymous with the characteristics of Christ, which is also demonstrated in the lifestyle of believers and the church. "*Ye are the light of the world.*" Jesus is saying in other words, we are his disciples and what the world is going to need. *I am calling you what I am.* Therefore, you ought to look like me. Like *light*, we ought to be clear, pure, true, right and good. Also, *light* penetrates darkness. It cuts through and eliminates every dark place in your life! You radiate and reflect the light of Christ. And like a laser you cut. That is why people don't like having you around. You shed light on their darkness and you cut their bull! This is what makes the church prophetic. You *light* up the community and give people a way to cut through their darkness and guide them to the True Light which, is Christ. Also, *light* enlightens. As a believer, you are to give people vision and

knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ. As *light* you give insight and revelation of Christ. This is who you are, *light!* But what is also important is where we are to be light i.e. *of the world*. This speaks of the vast influence we, as believers have. The world needs you! You are it! You are the one to bring light to a situation. For example if your family is in darkness you are to be that light.

The next verse supports this thought. “*A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.*” Because you are light, you are *inconspicuous*. That means you are easily noticeable. Jesus again uses a metaphor to describe our identity. He could have said village or town or hamlet but he used city or *polis (in Greek)*, which means large and densely populated urban area. Jesus is teaching on the mountainside and gives this illustration. There was a Greek city of *Hippos* near where he was teaching set in the mountains. All could see it who, were in this area of Galilee, which was not too far from Capernaum. All they had to do was look up to see the city. The city was elevated above other cities. This tells us something about us as believers and disciples of Christ. Because of our identity in Christ, you are elevated above the rest! You are above a lot of things. And things are subject to you. But you are also on display because you are so *inconspicuous*. You are too big not to see! Therefore, it comes with responsibility. As it relates to the church, people will always look up to us. Jesus put us in that position not to be arrogant or conceited but to be strategic. Because you are big and high you can see things from far and give warning when the enemy comes to attack (church). But again our problem we act small and low when it comes to connecting to the community. Beloved, this neighborhood has to look up to Tried Stone Baptist Church. That is why I am glad we have stairs to remind us when you come to church you are being elevated to a new level and people will know

that they have been with the Lord because they will see your light. Just like Moses when he went up to Mount Sinai. When you come into the presence of God, it shows on you! You are inconspicuous! That comes through your worship! There is a difference between coming to church and worship!

But the next verse tells us what we are to do that will personally and communally impact the kingdom. The text says in verse 15, “*Neither do men light a candle or lamp and put it under a bushel...*” A bushel was a staple in the Jewish home. It was a measuring bowl, a container. This is metaphor for limitation. When you put a lamp under a bowl, the light goes out and loses its impact! Some of you have put or allowed your light to go out because you allow things to limit your impact. Your light needs to shine! Beloved, God gave you vision but you are putting it under a bowl. Beloved get from under the bushel. You have to see yourself expanding, growing, reaching, obtaining and impacting people’s lives! See beyond the bushel you are under. Don’t let the enemy put your light out!

There is one thing that will definitely keep your light from shining and that is sin. God wants you to shine but your light is under a bushel because of sin and it is darkness in your life! Beloved, there are Christian light dimmers. Sin is a light dimmer. The more you do it the less you shine. Also, there are other dimmers. No prayer life is a light dimmer. Not reading the word dims your light. Not living by faith dims your light. These things will dim your light until you blend in with the darkness! This why I come to church to shine more! Prayer meeting makes me shine more. Bible study makes me shine more. Serving makes me shine more! Beloved, you need to shine!

The next verse tells us what to do. As light you have to *illuminate*. The text continues, “...*but on a candlestick (or lampstand) and it gives light to all in the house.*” In the Jewish home, they would put the lampstand in a place where everybody in the house could see the light. Beloved, you are light! You have to *illuminate* where you are! Everybody should be able to see that you are a Christian. I am talking about your testimony. How you live in your home is your testimony of who you really are. You are supposed to be light in church and out of church. For some of you, every time you go home from church the house gets dark because the first thing you do is turn your light off because of your spirit. That is why friends and family won't come to church because all they see is darkness from you. They want light!

Beloved, our behavior affects the church. If we are light, the church is light! Janet Jackson sings in her song, *That's the Way Love Goes*, “as moth to a flame...” Flame is light. Moths are attracted to light. How come you are not attracting any moths? People don't come to our church maybe because your light was not shining when they met you or spoke to you.

Next, Jesus gives his disciples a command in v. 16, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is heaven.*” This is not an option for us as believers but a command. Jesus tells them in the text where to shine their light. “*Before men*” speaks of a world because of sin. Men like darkness more than light. Jesus brought spiritual light in the world. His life made men and women feel the brunt of their sin. People felt their imperfections because of His light. Yet He drew men to Himself. We are to do the same. We, the church and we as individuals are to be like Jesus and be the exposing light yet drawing men and women to the love of Jesus

Christ. Often we use light to expose people and use light to highlight ourselves instead of shining the light of Christ. But we forget God will shine His light on us to expose our sin. So be humble!

It is also important to look at what are “*good works*.” The word “*good*” in the text doesn’t mean quality but good as beautiful, handsome and fine. Jesus wants our light to shine through what we do in a way that is beautiful and attractive. These works are works of compassion that we extend to those in need of the love of Jesus.

Beloved, your life should reflect the love of Jesus! *Reflection* is light returning to a surface. When we do *good works* we *reflect* on ourselves the light of Christ and people see it. I found out that it is not only important to *reflect* the light of Christ but it is also important to *refract* the light of Christ. In physics, *Refraction* is to direct where the light is to go. In order to refract light it has to shine through an object to shine the light in a certain direction. God wants to use you as an object that light shines through so people can see and go in a different direction. But you have to be clear and clean! The amount of light that is emitted in your life has to do with the intensity or power. Remember light comes from oil that is in the lamp. And the amount of oil determined how much light was going to be given out. Beloved, how much oil do you have in your lamp? I come to church to get my oil, the Holy Spirit so my light can shine with intensity dispelling the darkness in my life. The more I shine, the more God gets the glory. People would glorify my father in Heaven according to the text. Glorify means to make shine. So when I shine, it will make God shine meaning people will exalt Him, honor Him and praise Him and experience His splendor!

Beloved, the world needs light. It is necessary. Light enables us to see what is hidden. It helps us find what is lost. Light is the source of energy. It gives power. Light causes things to grow. The ultimate source of light comes from the *sun*. Therefore, the world needs the sun. There would not be a sun without The Son! The Son, who broke into humanity. The Son who exposes what was hidden. The Son who found what was lost. The Son who gives power. The Son who causes things to grow. Jesus is that Son, the Light of the World.

The enemy tried to put out the Son's light on Good Friday. They tried to put him under a bushel called the Cross of Calvary. In physics, there is something called a *supernova*. It is formed when the core of a star collapses. When that happens it causes gravitational potential energy to be released thus a supernova. It emits light similar to the sun. On Good Friday, *a star's* core collapsed, the Bright and Morning Star. And potential gravitational energy was released when they put him in the grave. They put Jesus down but all that did is give Him more energy of the promise to get back up! He promised that he would get up with all power! And that is what happened at the Resurrection. The power of the Holy Spirit caused "gravitational potential energy" and there was a **supernova** of Son light! And that *light* had power that would empower the world! Because he got up I am going to shine my light! I shine and the church shines because something on the inside is burning! It causes me to shine on the outside and be light!

APPENDIX B

I Just Want to Play

Text: Acts 9:26-31 NASB

I can remember as a kid the feeling I had when other kids were playing certain games but didn't allow me to play with them. They may have had their reason. But the rejection was painful because I wanted to belong but I could not. I just wanted to play. I want to look at playing as a metaphor for belonging as we enter our story for today. In our text, Apostle Paul who is Saul just wants to *play* with the other disciples. Saul has come to Jerusalem to join with other disciples of the Way, his fellow believing brothers. But there is a problem. They did not want him to *play* with them. He could not join them. How can someone go from persecuting the church for its belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior to now becoming a follower of Jesus? How could someone who was holding the coats of merciless Jews while they were stoning Stephen become one who was committed to the people of the Way? The very same people Saul was trying to kill wants to belong to their community. Beloved, people do change when they have an encounter with Jesus.

In the beginning of the 9th chapter of the Book of Acts, Saul is threatening to murder the disciples of the Lord. He asked for papers for extradition if he found any members of the Way, the Christians, he would bring them to Jerusalem for trial. But as he was on his way to the synagogues on an old Damascus Road suddenly a light from heaven shined so bright that it caused him to fall to the ground and he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" Saul answered him and said who are you Lord? The voice responded, "I am Jesus." Some of you can identify with

Saul because it was while you were on your way to do something ungodly that you met the Lord. He called out your name and you answered! He had to knock you down to humble you so you could see Him!

It was here that Saul was converted but he had to go through a process. According to the story, after Saul picked himself up off the ground he could not see but had to be led from now on. He went three days without food and drink. Semiotically, this is a *sign* of the Christian life. He had to be led to get where he was going. He had a time of consecration. And three days points to the Trinity or wholeness and inner sanctity. This was Saul's conversion story. It was so far fetched. It was so hard to believe that the disciples could not believe it. The disciples thought because of his past behaviors, he didn't belong with them. This is a lesson for us as a church having to function in this millennial generation. There are going to be people who want to come and *play*. But because of their past, you are going to have a hard time accepting that they are Christians because of their story. Yet because of whom they believe in, they belong here right next to you!

A true sign of belief and identity for belonging is their *behavior*. People might have done some things that were not acceptable but like Saul, that is not the end of their story. Why? It is because when you meet Jesus your life does a 180-degree turn! Not 360!

And God will use people to *consign* that they have changed so they can fulfill their role in belonging in the kingdom building process. Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias who the Lord spoke to in a vision. The Lord told him to go a street called Straight Street and inquire in a house for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He saw you in a vision that you were coming to lay hands on him and he would regain his

sight. But Ananias was apprehensive about what the Lord just said to him. He says to the Lord, “I know about the man named Saul and the harm he did to the saints.” Ananias knew about Saul’s past. And was ready to hold it against him. But the Lord said, to Ananias, “I know what he has done but he is my chosen vessel. I am going to use him to speak to the Gentiles and he will suffer for my name sake”. Ananias was obedient and went to minister to Saul despite his past. Despite what you have done and what man says about you, Jesus will speak up on your behalf when you decide to trust him as Lord and Savior.

Now Ananias was going to help give Saul what he needed so he can *play* with the rest of the disciples. He gave him sense of belonging. He says “Brother Saul.” That is all some people need when they come into faith. They need the loving affirmation as a brother or sister. That means that they are family. They are family not by blood but belief. And just like family no matter what they have done or will do, because of the commonality of belief they belong with you! Ananias laid hands on Saul and he regained his sight. Scales seemed to fall off his eyes according to the story. Whatever was hindering him from seeing fell at the moment of impartation. Beloved, the moment we impart to those who need belonging from the church, the scales will come off their eyes and they will be able to see who they really are in Christ. Not only that but the text says he got up and ate and drank. They will have nourishment needed to build the kingdom fulfilling their purpose. Now he is ready to *play!*

Next, we see how Saul proves he can play therefore *belong* with the disciples at Jerusalem. It was in Damascus that Saul started his ministry. He began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. Those hearing him were confused saying, “was

he the one killing Christian's?" But Saul kept getting stronger and the Jews there could not refute him. Since they no longer could handle Saul they plotted to kill him. You can attest to that. Now that the Lord is working strong in your life the enemy is trying to kill you on every level. He is trying to kill your dreams and kill your passion. And now that you are playing for the other team and *winning*, he is trying to take you out so the kingdom won't advance. But God always has a way of escape for his children. The enemy was watching Saul day and night coming in and out of the city gate. Saul heard about it (the Lord will give you discernment). So the other disciples took a basket and lowered him down the window of the walled city. And he escaped! They thought they had him but the Lord had another move! The Lord always makes a way out of no way!

With all that Saul has been through this would have assured his acceptance with the other disciples. He should have been able to *play* with them. But this was not the case. The text tells us that as he came to the church at Jerusalem, he was trying to associate or he assayed to join... In the Greek text, it means he kept trying to join. He tried to be *down* with the disciples but they kept rejecting him. He wanted to belong. I don't see what the problem was. He was now a believer. He preached the gospel. He also went through persecution for his faith. And yet the disciples at the church of Jerusalem did not want him. They did not want him to play. The text tells us why they did not want him to play the game with them. It was because they were afraid of him and they did not believe he was really a disciple, a true follower of Jesus. I could understand their point. A couple of years ago, he was killing Christians. They may have thought that this was a ploy. They thought Saul was trying a covert operation to stop the movement by getting on the inside. But this was not the case. He was one of them now! Also, this text admonishes us not to

be afraid because of someone's past and not embrace him or her. People need the church as a place where they can belong and find their identity and purpose. And we as believers of Jesus have to help them belong.

In our story Barnabas models the behavior we should have to help others with belonging in the church. The text says Barnabas *took hold of him...* which taking him by the hand to lead and assist. In order to give people a sense of belonging, you have to take them by the hand and lead them. But like the disciples we are afraid. Maybe not of what these people used to do but we are insecure. You don't want certain types of people associated with you. The church is still too cliquish. But you have to remember somebody took you by the hand and led you to a place of belonging and let you play with them.

But what jumps out at me in the text is who Barnabas brought Saul to, the *apostles*. The disciples at Jerusalem rejected him. So he went to the next level, the apostles. By definition, apostles were the ones who had direct contact with Jesus. This speaks to us today. Those who have a close relationship with Jesus should be more accepting. The text says that Barnabas declared to them how Saul saw the Lord and had to speak to him and how Saul preached with boldness in the Lord's name. How would Barnabas know this about Saul? He had to get to know him by talking to him by having meaningful conversation. Beloved, in order to have belonging, you have to get to know who people really are. And you do that by listening. In listening, you not only will find out that they are but you might find out who you really are. Their lives may be similar to you. You can identify with them and help bring them into the community of faith. But the

problem is we pass judgment and don't want to put ourselves in a position of listening. That is what is wrong with the church.

Barnabas was Saul's advocate. His name means son of encouragement. Beloved, as true disciples, we are going to have to speak up for the rejected and give them encouragement when they need. Just like how Jesus does for you. You were once rejected but Jesus spoke up on your behalf and let you be apart of the blessed community to give you the belonging that you need.

Then the text says that "he *was with them* going in and out..." He was not alone and left out. But he was with them. When they were ministering he was with them. When they were praying he was with them. When they were studying the Word he was with them. When they were being persecuted he was with them. The power of the church is that we are *with* you in good times and bad. That is our intent. This church is not perfect. I am not perfect. But we do our best to model Jesus Christ the best way we can. For belonging and establishing a community of belief, the behavior piece is just not the responsibility of the church. It is also on the part of those whose desire is to belong. You just can't act any ole way. Some people got issues. We will take you with your issue and with God help you will change. But some people don't want to change and perpetuate their issues on the church. They blame the church or me as the pastor. Your behavior has to line up with our belief. Be a Christian!

But I can't fault the disciples in this text. They had to see how Saul's behavior was now that he was saved. Also, you have to be accountable for yourself. I don't know when you are sick. Especially when you don't tell anybody yet get mad at the church and the pastor. I can't read your mind when something goes wrong. It takes both sides.

Now Saul finds his belonging. So when he finds himself in trouble when he was speaking boldly to the Hellenist and arguing with them when they plotted to kill, the brethren of the church heard of it and got him out of town. They brought him to Caesarea and sent him back to his hometown Tarsus. They knew the only way to provide safety for Saul was to send him home. They cared for him enough to be in tune to what he needed. Beloved, when people come into our fellowship we have to be in tune to what they need so we can serve them accordingly.

Now with Saul was gone out of Jerusalem, his persecutors backed off because the object of their persecution was gone. The text tells us that the church had rest and was edified. They walked in fear of the Lord and they were filled of the Holy God. Beloved, when the church does the right thing giving others identity and belonging, God will release favor! That is not just for the church. He will give you rest from your enemy! He will build you up! The Lord will fill you with the Holy Ghost and give you increase. The text says the church was multiplied.

Be a blessing to the persecuted. Let them play! There is blessing when you make other belong. Let people play with you and God will bless you! There is a story about a boy whom came from Virginia to New Jersey. One day he went to the park and wanted to join in with the other boys playing basketball. Along comes another group of boys who happened to be from New York challenging the boys from New Jersey. So when they divide the teams, the boys from New Jersey did not want the boy from Virginia to play because they thought he was too country. So they called over another boy from New Jersey to be on the team. But the boys from New York were a man short so they asked the boy from Virginia to play. To their chagrin, the boy from Virginia was good and the

team from New York ended up winning the game. All this young boy from Virginia wanted was to play and have a sense belonging. Beloved, sometimes we act like the boys from New Jersey and miss a chance of victory because we did not let someone play with us.

Appendix C

Like Him on Facebook

Text: John 12:12-26

Introduction: Social media is no longer for the technologically savvy. But now it is a way of life. The driving force of social media is “popularity” viewed as *trending*. The more popular you are the more you *trend*. And one of the main forms of social media is Facebook. Everybody has a Facebook page! It is not only a way to connect with friends but also it is used for entertainment, business and community.

Facebook allows you to enter into relationships and life events with your friends by hitting a “like” button. “Like” is agreement and affirms what that person is doing or saying. When you “like” it, it will show up on your page as a witness or “fan.” You can invite people to like you. But that can be dangerous. Some of the people you invite to “like” you may not always be people you should connect to.

Social media also connects with other social media. My Facebook can connect to my Twitter or Instagram. The news can get out about me to a few thousand people within seconds! Our text today metaphorically shows us the power of social media over 2000 thousand years. Without tweeting, the message got out! Jesus got a lot of hits on Instagram. He was trending at a higher level greater than any celebrity out there!

Everybody loves a star. We live in a celebrity-driven and celebrity-focused culture. We are impacted by what a famous person does or says in some kind of way. It is because celebrities have influence and don’t mind using it. Their power of influence comes from their fan base that tracks them using social media.

A fan is an enthusiastic devotee. Fan is short for fanatic, which means marked by excessive enthusiasm and an often intense uncritical devotion. Jesus is a celebrity who uses His celebrity to influence devoted *fans* in the right way. However, when some fans find out who He really is and see why He is trending or getting hits or “likes”, they cannot handle the commitment needed to be a true fan and fall off.

Jesus in our story is entering into Jerusalem in time for the Passover Celebration. Passover was kept in remembrance of the Lord’s passing over the houses of the Israelites when the first born of all the Egyptians were destroyed. Crowds had already gathered there to commemorate the festivities. Jesus had just left Larazus house, the man who He raised from the dead. It was at Larazus house that his sister Mary poured out a pound of expensive anointing oil on our Savior’s feet. Oil was used to prepare bodies for death. This is appropriate for the time because it was now time for our Lord to end his public ministry. He was about to enter the week of Passion, the week of suffering not for what He has done but for we have done. He was about to embark on fulfilling His purpose of salvation of the lost by dying on the cross. As He was entering the city, he appeared to have some fans! He was received by a *parade* to honor Him as a celebrity of that day.

The scene looked like all the fans that line up outside of the red carpet on Oscar night to see their favorite celebrity. If anybody is, was or will be deserving of a parade it is Jesus. He should be sitting on a float and waving his hand. He should be celebrated for all his accomplishments. He gives more joy to people than the floats of children’s favorite cartoon characters. He should be admired more than any celebrity who won any award. There is no sports team victory that can hold a match up to the His victory over death! Jesus deserves a parade! People had to come out to see who this Jesus was! Jesus

is still doing wonders in the lives of His people but some people don't want to come out to Him. He shows up in this church every Sunday so you can honor Him but some members stay home. But worse, some of you are *here* but you are not present, engaging in the celebration! You are more of a spectator.

This large crowd cut down branches of Palm trees and went out to meet Him. The cutting down of palms branches was a symbolic gesture. They were used to celebrated military victories. Waving palms would be the equivalent of wearing your favorite team's paraphernalia and going out to the parade to see them after a big victory like the Super Bowl, World Series, or NBA finals. But there is something all fans do at a parade when they see the one who they admire, they get excited and *praise*.

There is one thing you can expect when you go to a parade. You will hear the cheers from the crowd toward the celebrities that they so admire. The text says that as they came out they *cried* out (*krazo* which is to vociferate) "*Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" This was a quote from Ps 118 one of the Hallel psalms, a psalm of praise. They saw Jesus coming and started praising. They saw the one who healed the sick, opened blinded eyes and raised the dead. They could not help but to give Him praise. They cried out aloud! *Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.* This crowd had the right attitude. They had a mind-set of anticipation. They expected that the Savior was coming and He was coming to do something! This is why I come to church. I have an expectation of what the Lord can do in my life. Fans expect their team to win. They expect victory! Expectation is synonymous to faith! Beloved, expect God to show up and do something in your life!

One thing about fans, they know how to put the one they love on a *pedestal* by what they say about them. Real fans get ugly for the one who they love. They will paint their face. Do what they got to do. They put the celebrity they love *first* in their lives. O, how I wish more of us can be on #Team Jesus! That you put Jesus on a pedestal!

In response to the fans *parade* and *praise*, Jesus fulfills a prophecy. Jesus responds to the *fanfare* by finding a donkey and rides into Jerusalem on it. This fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 “*Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt* (KJV).” Whatever God says, He will complete it in your life.

As this prophecy was being fulfilled his disciples did *not* know what was going on. His disciples who were right there did not understand what was happening. This tells us that we can be close to what Jesus is doing physically and not be close to him spiritually because of a lack of understanding. To fully have understanding of Jesus, you must be *filled* with the Holy Spirit. He disciples would not get it until He was glorified and the Holy Spirit descended. We are blessed that we can receive the power of the Spirit now in His fullness to get the understanding we need!

After Jesus enters in Jerusalem on a donkey, John, the writer of the gospel wants to tell us *why* the crowd is so enthralled with Jesus. He wants us to know where Jesus’ *popularity* (trending) was coming from. There is a reason Jesus has so many “likes” on Facebook page and hits on Instagram and Twitter. The text says that this crowd was there when He raised Lazarus from the dead. When others heard about it, they followed Jesus also. This is the reason why people followed Jesus. It was due to his marvelous acts. They became fans and followed Jesus because of his special abilities that no other could do. He stood out among others and because of his superstar caliber, He developed a fan

base. Jesus is able to do what nobody else can do! He did not use his popularity from exposing Himself but by exercising his authority!

But with all the popularity that a celebrity has, there will be some type of *protest*. There will be some haters. The haters took to social media. Look at the text. The Pharisees say to one another, paraphrase “*nothing is going right for us, the whole world is going after Him.*” The Pharisees were losing their political control and their influence. Anytime you become more popular than those who have been popular there will be some protest against who you are and you will have haters. But you can’t help the favor God has on your life. Some people will hate you because they are not you. Jesus has become the main attraction in Jerusalem!

One problem with social media is that it can exaggerate a situation. But in the celebrity world, there is no such thing as bad publicity. We see this in the text. Jesus was only in Palestine. But his haters said he was all over the world. Beloved, God is telling us in the text that your enemies just add to your testimony of his goodness in your life! They may hate you but they can’t do anything with you! The Pharisees could not do anything about it Jesus.

But there is a major *problem* in our text today with the parade, the praise, and the crowd of people. At first glance, I thought that these crowds of people were real true fans of Jesus. By examining the context of the text, I see something wrong. The problem is *why* they are praising Jesus. The text tells us the only reason why the crowd is even there is because of what he has done and *not* who He is. They are people all around us who will only know Jesus by what he does and nothing else. They accept him as Savior. But have an issue of him being Lord. You can heal me Jesus but I still have to have indulge

in my little sin. You could provide for me all you want Jesus but I still am not tithing! Too many of us want Jesus for what he does and not for *who He is!* As long as Jesus did something they liked, it was all good. This crowd is on the bandwagon. As long as their team is winning they are committed to them. But as soon as their favorite celebrity or team does not do what is pleasing to them, they jump ship and look for the next best thing. That is being on the bandwagon. There are some bandwagon Christians who love a church or a preacher one minute but a soon as they get upset, they are on to the next. Beloved, you may have bandwagon friends. If so, you can “unfriend” them on Facebook.

The Lord is calling us to be die-hards not bandwagons. Diehards are the fans you see on TV whose teams have a losing season and they will still paint their faces every week. These people still go to all games. These people still love the movies and buys the records even though their favorite star may have had some set backs. They still wear a white glove. These are the die-hards. God wants us to be die-hard fans and not jump off the *bandwagon* when things don't go your way! But if you're a die-hard of team Jesus, your team never loses!

In verse 23, after some Greeks who are in town for the Passover wanted to see Jesus, Jesus tells his disciples it is time for Him to be glorified and gives them a short parable for their understanding of the death He should die and the purpose of it. He says in verse 24 that a corn of wheat must fall to the ground and die it remains the only seed. But if it dies it will bring forth much fruit. Then he goes on to tell us what a true *diehard* fan must *do* to really see Him. In verse 25, He tells us that if *you love your life you will lose it but if you hate this life you will keep it and have eternal life*. Diehard fans can be

fanatical enough that they will lose their life for the one they love. Die-hard followers of Christ have to be willing to lose everything in exchange for eternal life.

Diehards do what they do to see their what favorite star does. They say what their favorite star says. Some will alter their look like them to be more like them. This is what Jesus is telling us. Whatever He does, we have to do. In other words, we have to be *like* Him. We have to die to self, pick up our cross and follow Him. And when we die to self there is a *promise*.

There are some promises that we get when we are diehard fans of Jesus. The text says in v. 26 that wherever Jesus is, the die-hard will be there also. If Jesus is exalted, the diehard will be exalted! He reigns, you will reign! If He is victorious, you will be victorious. Not only that, the text says if the die-hard serves Him, the Father will honor that die-hard fan. If you have ever watched TV or read a blog and see those diehard fans express their love and support to those they admire, the biggest and best thing that could ever happen to a diehard fan is a “tweet” where their beloved celebrity is and *see* them. Some celebs honor the diehard by coming to meet them personally for being their biggest fan.” And the diehard fan is reduced to tears of joy. You may want “such and such” to come see you but I want Jesus to come see me and God to honor me. He is not only there when the camera is rolling but He is there everywhere I go! And in His presence there is fullness of joy and pleasures evermore on His right hand! In God’s presence there is blessings for the diehard fan!

Diehard fans show their undying love for their favorite celebrity. And their favorite celebrity appreciates all the love and support of the diehard fans by just saying I like to thank all my fans for making me feel so special. However, I am a diehard fan for

Jesus. And I appreciate Him so much and all I can do is just say Jesus thank you for making feel so special! He showed His love for me by *dying hard* for me! Thank you for dying hard for me so I could be his friend. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

On this Palm Sunday, I am going to friend Jesus on Facebook. I am going to be diehard for the one who died hard! I am going to deny myself, serve and follow Him. And I am not going to praise Him for what He has done but I am going to *worship* Him for who He is! I am going to “like” Jesus not on Facebook, but on Faithbook, the Word of God. I ‘like’ what it says!

Appendix D

A Thug Gets Some Love

Text: Luke 23:39-43

Introduction: As an African American male, I am concerned about the *thug* image that is so popular among our young people. But when I looked closely at our young brothers on the block from a semiotic perspective, I saw a narraphor for our Christian life. I learned something from a thug. Our story is about a thug, a malefactor looking for hope from our Savior. In our story, our Lord and Savior was being ridiculed by people questioning His authority. The rulers derided him saying, “*if you can save others why don’t you save yourself if you are the Christ, the chosen of God.*” Then the soldiers got in on the action mocking our Lord bringing him vinegar saying, “*if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.*” But the mocking seemed to get worse in v. 39. One of the malefactors who also was dying next to him chided in. This one malefactor *railed* him saying, “*if you be Christ save thyself and us!*” It seems like people that are in similar or worse situations than you always have something to say. One thing about *the definition of thugs* is that they don’t show any respect for anybody. And since they say and do what they want to do, they often get *confrontational*.

Look at verse 40a. The other malefactor confronted and rebuked him saying, “*...don’t you fear God?*” My beloved, we can *learn* from a *thug*. There are times as believers we have to be *confrontational* when it comes to our *faith* in the Lord. You have to *confront* the world and let them know that Jesus is Lord! You don’t have to confront to fight physically. Just fight with faith! Don’t let any Muslims, atheists, agnostics, or Mormons or church members question your Savior.

But also you have to be mindful *thugs are ready to back up what they say*. But our problem as Christians is that we *punk out* when we are challenged in our faith because we don't know the Word. But this is the *season* that empowers you to back up what you say! If I don't know anything else about Jesus, I know that He loves me, He died for me and He got up for me. And can't no other religion say that! You have to be confrontational with your faith! Next, thugs *keep it real*.

When can learn something from them. What you see, is what you get! There are too many Christians that hide behind clichés and titles. Christians have *real* issues but our only difference is that we here a real Savior! So we have to keep it real! *Or after awhile God has to pull the covers off of you and expose who you really are*. This malefactor gets exposed! In verse 40, in the New International Version, the other malefactor i.e. *thug* pulls his coattail and says to Him, "*he said, since you are under the same sentence?*"⁴¹ *We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*" That malefactor is dealing with the same plight as Jesus and needs to be *real* about his situation and shut up! Just like in church, we judge people on what they have done knowing good and well we have done *that* and *then* some. How dare you? You have the same issues! So you better keep it *real*!

Another thing we observe about thugs is that they look out for their boys. In verse 42, the one thug who defends Jesus said to Jesus in holy reverence, "*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" In other words in street vernacular, "when you get out of here, don't forget about your homey!" You can learn from them! He had a hopeful expectation since they were dying together that Jesus was going to *look out* for him. My beloved, many of us have been in places and came out of some things

that we know people are still stuck in but we don't *look out* for them. However, when you think about where you were when the Lord saved you, you should have compassion on others who were just like you and Jesus looked out for you!

Another thing we can learn from thugs is that they like to hang out. Jesus response to this thug in v. 43, "*Verily, I say unto you, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*" It is nothing like getting to hang to out with the fellas! Thugs like to hang out with their boys in certain places. They may have a spot on a corner, or the park as their meeting place. Jesus tells this malefactor (thug), I want to hang out. He wants to hang with him *today* in a *special place* reserved for *special people*. Not everybody can hang in that spot. There is a certain criteria. But you don't have to get "jumped in" as initiation. You don't have to rob anybody. You don't have to kill anybody. Jesus is saying all you have to do is have *faith* in him and he will take you to a spot called *Paradise*! You don't have to wait. You can go *today*! Even while you are bound, you can have it *today*! It's a *place* where a thug can *get some love*!

So I asked the question, "*is there any love for a thug*"? I say yes! This thug on the cross tells me no matter what you have done Jesus *has love for a thug when you trust him*! Somebody may be saying I was never a thug. I say yes you were! You may have not robbed people but you may have robbed somebody of their dreams. You may not have killed anybody but your tongue committed murder. Everybody has some thug in them because of our sin nature but there is forgiveness at the Cross!

But I want go to on record and declare Christians should be *thugs* because Jesus loves thugs if you believe in Him. Let me (re)sign this! "THUGS" is an acronym for "*Those that Help Uplift God is Son.*" I came to lift him up! Lift Him up by living i.e. my

walk. ***Thugs got Swagger!*** No gun but a sword! I am here to tell you when you are a thug
you got a place in His Kingdom now!

Appendix E**PREACHING EVALUATION FORM**

- I. Was the Sermon E.P.I.C.?
- A. **E: Experiential?** What was your experience of the sermon? What did you encounter? How were you “with” the sermon? If not, why?
- B. **P: Participatory:** What did the sermon call you to participate in? How are you going to do it?
- C. **I: Image rich:** What images do you see in the sermon? What illustration jump out for you?
- D. **C: Connective:** How did you connect to the sermon? What did not connect you to the sermon and why?
- II. What do you suggest to make the sermon better or more relevant to you? To the people we are trying to attract?

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