

The Messenger

Of St Thomas's Parish

The Anglican Parish of Tamaki-Kohimarama



Spring 2017



Stewardship

From the Priest in Charge

Stewardship will soon be upon us. This is the time when we consider how we might respond to God not only to secure this Church, but also to grow the Church in the local community.

When I was a young boy, I remember a person standing up at the AGM and saying how she gives time to the Church rather than money. Another responded that they gave money instead of time. Yet another remarked that they share their treasures with the Church (meaning that she made her holiday home available to parishioners and loaned her van to the Youth Group)

The Vicar responded that each was partly correct, in fact one third each. The total Christian is one who gives of their possessions, their money and their time.

The only person who responded to this challenge was the third person. She began renting out her bach and paying the proceeds to the church. She also joined the morning tea roster. The ironic thing was that it really cost her nothing. Her bach was being used, and as she took no financial gain in the beginning, charging and giving to the Church was of no financial consequence to her. She always stayed for morning tea so in her mind it made no difference which side of the servery she was on.

You know, stewardship is not so much about scrimping and saving to the point of desperation, but rather about making better use of the resources which God has provided for us.

It's a bit like making marmalade and donating the sale proceeds to the Church, being on the flower arranger's roster, and opening your home to others as a place to gather to make palm crosses.

It is not so much about giving until it hurts, as making it hurt not to give.

Mark Sullivan

Services in November

There are four Sunday services in November; on 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th of the Month. The sermons on these Sundays will all have to do with stewardship.

On 5th November we will look at giving a gift of time towards the Church, and then on successive Sundays look at gifting our Treasurer and our Talents, culminating with a presentation from the Church Wardens on the 26th.

From the Herald Newspaper *(with apologies)*

A young boy emerged from his room where he had been watching TV. He positioned himself on the sofa next to his father, and asked: "Dad, what is love and juice?"

"Well son" replied his father, thinking *this looks like it's time to explain about the birds and the bees*, "when a man and a woman fall in love and want to spend the rest of their lives together, they get married, sleep together and make love. The man's juice enters the ladies tummy and then, if all goes well, along comes a lovely baby, just as you did to your mummy and me".

Because of the bewildered look on his son's face, dad asked "Er, what have you been watching, son?

"Tennis" his son replied.

The Figurative Language of Scripture

The subject matter of this article was first given as a sermon. This is an expansion of that sermon, and covers ground which was too long for inclusion in a sermon. All Biblical passages quoted come from the New English Version of the Bible, except where otherwise noted.

Tony Poole

Our Bible is written in English, but English is just one of three languages which has left its mark on the Bible. The other two are Hebrew, in which the Old Testament was originally written, and Biblical Greek, the language of the New Testament.

Each of these languages has a literal side, and a figurative side. I.e., in each of these languages, words can be written which literally tell exactly what happened; but many of those same words can be written so that they also convey a figurative meaning.

To give an English example: recently, Stephanie (my wife) was going to play the piano in Church, then something changed so she did not need to do so.

Immediately I heard this, I sent her a text, saying "You are off the hook".

I imagine you know what "Off the hook" means; but if English was your second language, or if the words were actually a translation of a figurative expression from another language, which we did not have in English, I think you would have been confused.

English is full of figurative language:

"She fell in love"

"I racked my brains"

"He climbed the ladder of success"

"She was as light as a feather"

"I'm starving"

"I ran at a million miles an hour"

"Have you ever seen a penny-farthing bicycle?"

I'm sure you can think of many more examples. The point is, none of these statements could ever be taken literally – they are examples of English words, used figuratively; i.e., words used to mean something other than what they literally say.

Sometimes, figurative language is also called "figures of speech". Every different type of figurative language has been given its own name. In the English language alone, scholars have found at least 20 different types of common figures of speech, and at least 170 less common types.

And that is only English. Biblical Greek also uses words figuratively, and so does Ancient Hebrew. This means that our English Bible, which is translated from Biblical Greek and Ancient Hebrew, is chock-a-block (woops, another figurative expression!) with figurative expressions, none of which mean precisely what they say.

Jesus himself acknowledged that he used figures of speech: John 16²⁵:

“Till now I have been using figures of speech; a time is coming when I shall no longer use figures, but tell you of the Father in plain words”.

At about the time the King James Version of the Bible was translated (1611), people were reluctant to acknowledge that they were dealing with figurative as well as literal languages. People felt that if something was said in the Bible, then it must be literally true.

It has taken until the present day for people to slowly come to the conclusion that much of the Bible needs to be interpreted figuratively rather than literally, and that in many if not all cases, its meaning becomes clearer with figurative interpretation.

Even now, possibly some people are still doubtful. The Christian world is still in a process of change, moving slowly from literal interpretation to figurative interpretation of the Bible. This means there are some passages of the Bible where there is confusion – is this to be taken literally, or is it a figure of speech? We shall consider two of these at the end of this paper.

In the meantime, we will look at six examples of figurative speech in the Bible; six out of many hundreds if not thousands, because the Bible is literally teeming with figures of speech.

Perhaps the commonest figure of speech, especially in the New Testament, is **Hyperbole**. **Hyperbole** is defined as *a gross exaggeration in order to make or reinforce a point*. And I'm going to begin, not with my own words, but instead, quote from *Robert I Bradshaw*, whose paper “**Figures of Speech in the Bible**” is available on the web. He writes:

“Perhaps the most famous (and most misunderstood) hyperbole is found in Matthew 19²⁴; Mark 10²⁵; and Luke 18²⁵: ‘It is easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'

Traditionally it has been said that there was a gate in the wall of Jerusalem called the 'Needles Eye', through which an unladen camel could squeeze with great difficulty. Unfortunately this interpretation is simply not true, there was no gate in Jerusalem called the 'Needles Eye' and there never has been. The first reference to this is found in the writings of Theophylact, Archbishop of Achrida in Bulgaria in the 11th Century. Jerusalem had been destroyed twice by this time (in AD 70 and AD 134-36), and Theophylact had never visited it. He simply made-up his interpretation, to try to make the statement [seem] literally true.

It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just as it is impossible for one who trusts in riches to enter the Kingdom. It takes a miracle for a rich person to get saved, which is the point of what follows: 'All things are possible [only] with God'."

Another example of hyperbole is in Matthew 5²⁹⁻³⁰, in the Sermon on the Mount:

"If your right eye is your undoing, tear it out and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand is your undoing, cut it off and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to go to hell."

Not unsurprisingly, Christendom down through the ages has not been strewn with eyes and hands that have been discarded, nor is there any record of large numbers of Christian men and women having only one eye or one hand. Christ was speaking *figuratively*, to make his hearers sit up and take notice. Rather than pluck out your eye or cut off your hand, start acting in a way that will offend neither you nor God, seems to be the obvious message.

Another example: Matthew 6²⁻⁴:

"When you do some act of charity, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in synagogue and in the streets to win admiration from men. I tell you this; they have their reward already. No;

when you do some act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; your good deed must be secret, and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

The point is made in the last part: “your good deed must be secret, and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” I.e., keep your good deeds secret between you and God.

By contrast, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” is a bit of nonsense; catchy, grabs the attention thereby reinforcing the point being made, but not in any way intended to be taken literally. Jesus treated each hand *as though it was its own person*, which is another type of figure of speech, known as **personification**. We shall look further at personification later on; merely noting at this point that sometimes two or more figures of speech, can be and are employed together.

Some instances in scripture of the use of hyperbole are easy to understand, even fun. The disciples came and told Jesus that the Pharisees were taking offence at some of the things he had been saying about them, and he replied, humorously in Matthew 15¹⁴:

“Leave them alone; they are blind guides, and if one blind man guides another they will both fall into the ditch.”

Again from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7³⁻⁵)

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye, with never a thought for the great plank in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, when all the time there is that plank in your own?”

As Robert I Bradshaw (the person I quoted earlier) said: “Jesus was very fond of hyperbole, and used it frequently in his teaching.” But there are other figures of speech used in the Bible, and we should look at some of them.

Simile and **Metaphor** are two common forms of figures of speech – both now, and in the days of Jesus. A **simile** is a direct form of comparison, usually incorporating the word “as” or “like”. “He had a heart like a lion” is a direct comparison, and is a

simile. “His lion’s heart beat strongly” is an indirect comparison, and is a **metaphor.** A metaphor is generally considered a stronger comparison than the corresponding simile.

Here is an example of a **simile**; Matthew 23²⁷:

“Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are **like** tombs covered with whitewash; they look well from outside, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones, and all kinds of filth.”

Christ is saying lawyers and Pharisees have certain things in common with whitewashed tombs; he is not saying they are literally tombs.

Christ used figurative language like this quite deliberately. Note how the passage begins – “Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees, hypocrites!” At this time, he repeats this phrase six times (and uses it once more with a slight variation). This is known as an **anaphora**, which is defined as *the repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses*. Christ could not have done this by accident.

This means Matthew 23²⁷ is both a **simile**, and part of an **anaphora**.

Another example of a **simile** occurs at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew Chapter 7²⁴⁻²⁷:

“What then of the man who hears these words of mine and acts upon them? He is **like** a man who had the sense to build his house on rock. The rain came down, the floods rose, the wind blew, and beat upon that house; but it did not fall, because its foundations were on rock. But what of the man who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them? He is **like** a man who was foolish enough to build his house on sand. The rain came down, the floods rose, the wind blew, and beat upon that house; down it fell with a great crash”

Note that this **simile** is also **anaphoratic** in style; quite a complicated form of an anaphora. Its six sentences are arranged in two groups of three. The first sentences are questions, both similarly constructed. Both second sentences are also very

similar. The third sentences are identical until the semicolon; only after the semicolon are the third sentences different.

This form of construction is common in the Bible. Not only are figures of speech common, but the very language itself has an almost poetic-type quality about it. As a result, there are many scholars who are not Christian, but who still study the Bible for its literary qualities. If for your Bible reading you use a recent version of the Bible (such as NIV) it will make it clear when the words are mere prose, and when some other sort of writing, such as poetry or songs, is being used.

Matthew 7^{13 – 14} is a further example, this time of a **metaphor**:

“Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition, there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way; but the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few.”

The Christian way is not literally a road, has no gates, and is neither wide nor narrow. On the face of it, this statement is nonsense. But metaphorically, this passage makes perfect sense.

Similarly, Matthew 11^{29 – 30}:

“Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble hearted; and your souls will find relief; for my yoke is good to bear, my load is light.”

His yoke may be good to bear; but Christ was definitely not saying that he is a donkey!

Another often-used figure of speech used in the Bible is **personification**. This is defined as *the representation of an object or concept or non-person, as if it were a real person*.

An example of this occurs in Corinthians 15⁵⁵:

“O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?”

Similarly, from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6³⁴):

"So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own."

A longer example of personification occurs in Matthew 11^{20 – 24}:

"Then he spoke of the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, and denounced them for their impenitence. 'Alas for you, Chorazin' he said; 'alas for your Bethsaida! If the miracles that had been performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.'"

Christ continues in like vein until the end of verse 24.

In Biblical times, it was common to treat unknown diseases as devils, or evil spirits, which had to be driven out of a person. e.g., Matthew 8¹⁶:

"When evening fell, they brought to him many who were possessed by devils; and he drove the spirits out with a word and healed all that were sick."

Similarly, Matthew 8^{28 – 32}:

"When he reached the other side, in the country of the Gadarenes, he was met by two men who came out from the tombs; they were possessed by devils, and so violent that no one dared pass that way. 'You son of God' they shouted, 'what do you want with us? Have you come here to torment us before our time?' In the distance a large herd of pigs was feeding; and the devils begged him: 'If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs.' 'Be gone!' he said. Then they came out and went into the pigs; the whole herd rushed over the edge into the lake, and perished in the water."

These last two quotations, although examples of *personification*, are slightly different from other forms of *personification* and therefore of *figures of speech*, in that they represent the genuinely held beliefs of the time, rather than just the figurative use of language.

Another figure of speech in the Bible is **Euphemism**. This is defined as *the substitution of an inoffensive term for one considered too offensively explicit.*

In most places, the Bible tells it like it is. All the blood, mayhem and murder of the Old Testament is recounted pretty much as it happened. Euphemism is rarely used. Human intercourse of a sexual nature appears to be the exception, however. 2 Samuel 11³⁻⁴:

"And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house."

At least, that is the way the Authorised King Kames version has it. The New English Version is rather different:

"He sent to enquire who she was, and the answer came 'It must be Bathsheba daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So he sent messengers to fetch her, and when she came to him, he had intercourse with her, though she was still being purified after her period, and then she went home."

So, it appears, all the pussyfooting around with "lying with her, and she was purified from her uncleanness" was the work, not of the writer(s) of 2 Samuel, but of the King James translators!

There are many more examples of the use of **hyperbole, simile, metaphor, anaphora, personification** and **euphemism** in the Bible, and many more figures of speech used beyond these six. I hope these six will whet your appetite to study the Bible afresh, and perhaps take comfort from the fact that not everything in the Bible is intended to be read as literally 100% true.

Let us end by looking at two passages in the Bible which have the appearance of figures of speech, but which many people still interpret literally.

One of these passages is the event recorded in Matthew 26²⁶⁻²⁹; Mark 14²²⁻²⁵; and Luke 22¹⁷⁻¹⁹. Taking the words from Mathew's Gospel:

"During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to his disciples with the words: 'Take this and eat; this is my body'. Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins'."

Many scholars interpret this as a **Metaphor**; perhaps the greatest metaphor which Christ used about himself.

Roman Catholics do not in fact believe this is a metaphor. They treat Christ's statement as literally true, and use the doctrine of *transubstantiation* to explain that the elements actually become the body and blood of Christ, while acknowledging that every worldly test has found the elements to be exactly the same after consecration as before. Possibly some other groups of Christians, and even some Anglicans, may also hold this point of view.

I do not wish to get caught up in a debate on transfiguration. As far as the use of figurative speech is concerned, if the statement quoted above is not intended to be taken literally, then it must be a metaphor. If it is intended to be taken literally, then it cannot be a metaphor.

Christ said at various times "I am the door", "I am the way, the truth and the life", "I am the good shepherd", "I am the true vine", etc. These statements are generally accepted as being not literal, but figurative, in meaning. The meaning of these statements intensifies our understanding of Christ; it is in no way denigrated by a figurative interpretation of the statements themselves.

At that time, many of the disciples still did not understand that Christ would be killed by the High Priests of the Jews. One interpretation of Christ's words, is that he was trying to tell his followers yet again that he was not the avenging saviour who many still believed him to be, but a sacrificial saviour who would die that we might live.

Probably time will tell whether the statement (quoted above) is an example of figurative speech or not; probably more time than any of us has left!

The other example of continuing uncertainty concerns **personification** of the devil. It is undoubtedly true that Biblical man and woman did not understand the urge to

sin, they merely recognised and acknowledged its existence in their lives. We can understand therefore that they personified sin as the work of a person (the devil), in the same way that they personified illnesses they did not understand as "evil spirits" or "devils" which inhabited real people.

Modern studies, especially of human development, thought processes, psychology and even economics, suggest that our behaviour comes from within each person, rather than from an external agency. It may be time to revisit our theories of the devil, treating each reference to him as a personification and/or a metaphor, rather than the literal real thing. You must make your own mind up about this, or at least remain thoughtfully agnostic.

I have just **scratched the surface** of figurative speech and its use in the Bible; I have given examples of six of the theoretically 190 different types of figurative speech; but I hope you find **food for thought** in what I said, and will perhaps look for other examples of figures of speech, as you read your Bibles.

Who is this Person?

This man is an engine lover with an affinity for large boilers. He has displayed this from time to time by feeding fuel into their intestines. Also, to extend the experience of youth, he followed the Boy Scout movement and became Commissioner of Scouts for Auckland. On occasions, you would have seen him at the head of some parade. Perhaps you saw him at General and latterly Diocesan Synod. He has been a vestryman at a number of Anglican churches as well. He was a solicitor besides in private practice, giving humble but professional advice.

Who is this man of substance?

A Personal Point of View

The Gifts of the People

The season for reviewing our giving to the Church is upon us - a difficult decision for all of us.

Am I giving enough? How do I know how much I should be giving? A lump sum periodically, or regular weekly giving – which is best? Does my giving of time count? These are some of the questions which assail us all – me as much as everyone else.

The Bible has a lot to say about giving, and some related matters as well – too much to summarise all of it here. Chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel is a good place to start, however, especially: (*All quotations are from the New English Bible*)

- 1 'Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your father's house in heaven.' (Matthew 6¹)
- 2 'When you do some act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; your good deed must be secret, and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.' (Matthew 6³⁻⁴)
- 3 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in and steal it. Store up treasure in heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.** [Emphasis added] (Matthew 6¹⁹⁻²¹)
- 4 'How little faith you have. Do not ask anxiously "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?" All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, for your heavenly father knows that you need them all. Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well'. (Matthew 6³¹⁻³⁴.)

To this we could add Mark 12⁴¹⁻⁴⁴:

- 5 Once he was standing opposite the temple treasury, watching as people dropped their money into the chest. Many rich people were giving large sums. Presently there came a poor widow who dropped in two tiny coins, together worth a farthing. He called his disciples to him. 'I tell you this' he

said, 'this poor widow has given more than any of the others; for those others who have given had more than enough, but she, with less than enough, has given all that she had to live on'.

6 Perhaps we could finish with 2 Corinthians 8^{12 – 13}:
 Provided there is an eager desire to give, God accepts what a man has; he does not ask for what he has not. There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship for yourselves.

From these and other readings, we could come up with some general principles:

- 1 These readings make it clear that giving to God is one of life's decisions. It should be made in conjunction with other life's decisions; it cannot be made in isolation from them, nor as an after-thought. In many ways it is **THE** life decision.
- 2 In this modern-day world, it might be useful to find other measuring-sticks for giving to God. For example, if I found I was spending more money on alcohol than I did on the Church each week, I would find that unacceptable, and I assume God would too. Similarly, if the rate of inflation exceeded the increase in my giving to God over time, that could lead me to reassess my giving.
- 3 Whatever amount I may decide to give to God, that is only a token gesture towards the monetary value of his generosity to us, and I should keep this in mind when making my decision.

As you consider all of these things, some questions may become irrelevant. The only real question perhaps becomes, "How much do I love God and the Church, and what is the (by comparison) token amount I can afford to pay for it?"

Keep all of this (above) in mind; **pray, listen**, and I am sure you will find your answer. From a practical point of view, keep the sixth quote (above) in mind. If you make a mistake or circumstances change and you cannot live as God would expect of you on what you have left, you can always reduce it. And your giving to the Church is secret, and no person's worth is judged by the amount he or she gives.

Where but in the USA?

An elderly Florida woman did her shopping, and returned to find four males in the act of stealing her car. She dropped her shopping bags, drew her handgun, and screamed at the top of her voice "I have a gun, and I know how to use it. Get out of my car **NOW!**" The four men got out and ran away.

The lady, somewhat shaken, loaded her bags into the car and got into the driver's seat. She was so shaken she could not get the keys into the ignition.

Then she realised why. There was a football, a Frisbee, and two 12-packs of beer which she also did not recognise, on the passenger seat.

A few minutes later she found her own car, parked four or five spaces away. She drove to the local police station to confess her mistake.

The police sergeant to whom she told the story couldn't stop laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four scared men were reporting a car-jacking by a mad, elderly woman, less than five foot tall, glasses, curly white hair and carrying a large hand-gun.

No charges were laid.

Worship Roster

Day of the Month	Liturgist	Prayers
1 st Sunday	Tony Poole	(Donna Little)
2 nd Sunday	Janet Anderson	Peter Newton
3 rd Sunday	Peter Newton	Janet Anderson
4 th Sunday	(Donna Little)	Tony Poole
5 th Sunday	Geo Sullivan	Tim Sullivan

Senior Liturgist/Trainer: Tony Poole

Further Liturgists and Prayer Leaders are required. See Tony if you are interested.

Please let Tony Poole know with as much notice as possible, if you are not available on any Sunday for which you are rostered.