

The Power of Image

Milton Boykins sits in the Sacramento County Jail on the front end of hard time for seven counts of robbing local banks. A crime hotline tip puts the cops on his trail. Authorities largely credit a catchy label for cracking the case. Boykins sports web-like tattoos on both forearms and police christened him the "Spiderman Bandit."

The FBI claims this kind of branding does more than amuse people. It creates an image that hypes media coverage, generates public awareness, increases tips and leads to arrests. Still at large are the Skunk Bandit (signature black shirt and pants with white tie), the Ponytail Bandit, and the Grandpa Bandit.

"Nicknames are wordplay that captivates people's imaginations," sociologist Paul Leslie tells the Sacramento Bee. "Seems like the FBI may have hit on something."

Seems like Jesus may have hit on something too. Seems like many preachers still have not.

Calvin Miller points out in his book *Spirit, Word, and Story* that Jesus bagged the three-point alliterating outline in favor of striking images.

Jesus' sermons do not labor over word roots. Jesus did not exegete for 55 minutes nor dissect any Old Testament word. His Sermon on the Mount is his only entire sermon mentioned and can be preached in 18 minutes. In an economy of 2,320 words, Jesus spends 348 on such images as wolves, sheep, light, rock, sand, and storms.

People remember Jesus' teaching for the same reason they remembered – and fingered – the Spiderman Bandit. Colorful characters like the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, and the Lost Sheep etch a tattooed web of memory across the minds of his hearers – a web that spans cultures, generations, and even centuries.

So tell a few stories today. Sharpen your eye for the snelled shank of memorable images that hook the fleshy mass of memory and refuse to turn loose. When it comes to the gospel, show more than you tell. That's the sticky web which, when well woven, never lets go until it captures wandering hearts.

Stick 'Em Up!
Doug