

Living a Parable

Genesis 28: 10-19a,

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

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Genesis 28: 10-19a,

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Here ends the reading of God’s Holy Word.

This year we have a vegetable garden. This is my first attempt at a garden since my children were preschoolers and dug up the carrots to see how they were growing. My green thumb is not really having any beginner's luck so it's a good thing we are not dependent upon those few rows we planted in the spring. The wax bean plants are growing the best, and the cherry tomatoes are a close second, but the rest is a mix of stunted growth and weeds that despite our best efforts need quite a bit of attention so that we will in time have some beefsteak tomatoes, carrots, mesclun, parsley and cilantro. Then there is the rosemary that seems to have been planted in cement since even weeds don't grow in that pot. Having time in the garden, even without the fantasy abundant harvest we had as the garden took shape a few months ago, has actually been a spiritual, reflective time.

Looking at the success of the wax beans and the cherry tomatoes is a reminder of how with sometimes just a little bit of time, patience and effort there can be great rewards. A little planning, a little attention, can yield wonderful—and delicious—rewards. But there is a cautionary note here as well, and it is found among the struggling vegetables. There is more than first expected to preparing soil, a healthy foundation, for good growth. Do not take for granted the successes that you do have, be appreciative of what you have achieved, and know that there is always more work yet to be done. Sometimes, despite effort, hard work, time, care and attention, some things are just not meant to be. Weeds are burdens, worries, problems, that impact the ability to live a full, rich life, and we need to be careful to tend to them as soon as we can, as often as we can, and often with the help of others. This has all been a reminder of just how much, actually just how little, is actually in our control.

This little fenced-in plot of land is more than a garden, it is a parable, it is a simple story that highlights a spiritual lesson.

Parables were a way that Jesus taught. He would take everyday situations and experiences, and use them as a model for a spiritual truth, or a moral insight. He would unpack the simplicity of daily life as a metaphor for the kingdom, the realm, of heaven, as a way of sharing the gospel message. Parables are a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison drawn from everyday life and has two meanings.

For Jesus, a parable is a paradox as it is meant to both conceal and reveal. As a story that conceals, it offers a basic, superficial statement that can easily be understood apart from God. Jesus simply told a story of a farmer's enemy who mixed weeds among the wheat seeds, and he had to decide how to save the wheat crop in spite of the enemy's efforts against him. As a story that reveals a deeper, profound spiritual meaning that can only be understood by those whose minds and hearts are opened, those 'to whom it has been given,' a parable paints a clear and vivid spiritual truth.

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

The ones with ears to listen, the ones with a heart and mind for Jesus' teachings, the ones who take the time to think through the parable, will grasp and understand the deeper, spiritual meaning. This is anything but a story about a wheat farmer deceived by an enemy.

For those who have the ears to listen, and are willing to think through Jesus' parables, it is easier to understand and remember the spiritual lesson. In time, Paul will write, "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil 4:8) Think about these things.

The story from an everyday situation becomes a touchstone, a memory prompt, that is never far from the forefront. The message is no longer an abstract point, but clear and meaningful.

Jesus' parable came from the daily life of planting seeds, of troublesome weeds, of barns filled with a generous harvest, of an enemy's trickery and deception, and of hunger satisfied. Jesus encouraged those with ears to listen, and to think on, the important and timeless spiritual truths and lessons he was sharing with the world so that they, and we, may live lives transformed through him.

Parables are around us today just as they were during Jesus' earthly life. What good seeds, what spiritual truths, what moral insights, are being planted in our vast field, in our vast world, during this pandemic? What weeds are being sown so that they take root and grow up and among the good seeds yet to bear fruit? What shall be harvested and stored in barns, and what shall be burned away?

Seeds of long overdue racial justice, the quick emergence of signs of environmental healing, the slowing down of over busy lives that leave us running but not fulfilled, the sign of care and concern for others by wearing a simple face mask, and the ability of churches to broaden worship beyond the sanctuary have all been sown by the Son of Man.

What shall be reaped from what has been sown? Amen.