

A Story to Tell

Parables of Jesus: Part 1 “A Story to Tell”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 15, 2021

12th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Matthew 13:1-23

Reflection: Psalm 32

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 32

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. (Psalm 32 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 32 and we hear of God’s redeeming grace. We hear of our need to repent and God’s willingness to forgive. That God will grant us wisdom and understanding. That we may rest assured in God’s love. What comfort do you find in God’s grace? What is the understanding that God has placed in your heart? How do we find hope in Christ?

Prayer: O God, teach us listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to seek your knowledge that we may understand you better. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus' name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 13 verses 1 through 23.

That day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he climbed into a boat and sat down. The whole crowd was standing on the shore. He said many things to them in parables: "A farmer went out to scatter seed. As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one. Everyone who has ears should pay attention." Jesus' disciples came and said to him, "Why do you use parables when you speak to the crowds?" Jesus replied, "Because they haven't received the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but you have. For those who have will receive more and they will have more than enough. But as for those who don't have, even the little they have will be taken away from them. This is why I speak to the crowds in parables: although they see, they don't really see; and although they hear, they don't really hear or understand. What Isaiah prophesied has become completely true for them: You will hear, to be sure, but never understand; and you will certainly see but never recognize what you are seeing. For this people's senses have become calloused, and they've become hard of hearing, and they've shut their eyes so that they won't see with their eyes or hear with their ears or understand with their minds, and change their hearts and lives that I may heal them. "Happy are your eyes because they see. Happy are your ears because they hear. I assure you that many prophets and righteous people wanted to see what you see and hear what you hear, but they didn't. "Consider then the parable of the farmer. Whenever people hear the word about the kingdom and don't understand it, the evil one comes and carries off what was planted in their hearts. This is the seed that was sown on the path. As for the seed that was spread on rocky ground, this refers to people who hear the word and immediately receive it joyfully. Because they have no roots, they last for only a little while. When they experience distress or abuse because of the word, they immediately fall away. As for the seed that was spread among thorny plants, this refers to those who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the false appeal of wealth choke the word, and it bears no fruit. As for what was planted on good soil, this refers to those who hear and understand, and bear fruit and produce—in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one." (Matthew 13:1-23 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The idea of a parable is an interesting one. Biblical parables usually teach us something spiritual while also being a rather straight forward story by themselves. Jesus teaches in parables in many places throughout the Gospel accounts. In the Bible, Jesus uses a large number of parables. Often when he's talking to large crowds, he teaches in parables. He tells a story to the masses gathered to hear him. But why? Wouldn't it be easier just to tell everybody exactly what it was he was trying to say? Wouldn't it be easier just to impart the information so that people can walk away with it?

In our reading for today, we see Jesus go out and a large group is gathered. As is often the case, Jesus is needing to get into a boat so that he's not swallowed by the crowd. And everyone stands on the shore to listen. He begins to teach in parables. Matthew records one of them in his Gospel account for us today. Afterwards, the disciples want to know, "Why are you teaching in parables? Why is it when you address crowds, you're giving them stories?" Jesus replied, "they haven't received the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but you have. Though they see they don't really see. Though they hear they don't really hear or understand." This can be disconcerting. If people can't really hear, how can you instruct them? If they can't really see, then what's the point? We have to stop and look around at this point, to take in what is happening. This is not about deafness or blindness. This is about an inability to understand. Lots of people were coming to hear what Jesus had to say. Some of them out of pure curiosity. Some of them just looking for any good news they could get anywhere. But as we see in other scriptures, sometimes they came looking to be able to poke holes. Looking just for a reason to say, "well, that can't be right." Many times, Jesus is approached by people trying to entrap him. So, how do you teach with our teaching? How do you reach people without giving anything to the people who aren't actually interested?

This is where the parable comes in. The parable that Jesus gives in our reading for today is itself used to explain the point of teaching in parables. The parable that's used around his explanation is about a farmer scattering seed. It falls on the path and birds eat it. It falls on rocky ground, it sprouts but with no roots, so it dries up and crumbles away. Some seeds fall among thorny plants, but they get choked out and never grow. But some seed falls on good soil, and it bears fruit. Now, one could hear this and just think, "Okay, so make sure you plant seed on good soil." And they get that and that alone. And they walk away. They don't take the time to understand. So, when Jesus explains this parable to explain why he's teaching in parables, we suddenly have a parable about parables. Jesus is saying that when people hear the word of God and don't understand it, it's like seeds that were thrown on the path. What was planted is taken away, the fleeting joy removed because they did not know what they had. The seed that was thrown on the rocky ground is like people that hear the word and immediately receive it joyfully. But without any foundation, it fades. I'm reminded of those people who go to those big tent revivals. There they are being called to come up front and say, "Jesus Christ is my savior" and then everyone yelling and celebrating that the people are saved. And the

problem is that those tent revivals come in and people go “Yes, I’m saved!” And then the tent revival leaves, and those people go, “Now what?” They’ve been told they’re saved but not what to do with it or what that really means. And like the seed thrown on the rocky ground, the rootless faith is fleeting. Then we have the seed among the thorny plants. There we have people who are chasing wealth. People who are so worried about things and opinions that they let the world encroach like a thorny plant on the good news. They get crowded out, chasing after worldly gain instead of thinking about heavenly gains. But the seed planted on the good soil? It’s those who understand and then they go out and do. There’s a yield in this crop, those people who have heard the word and understood it. They get the true meaning. What’s interesting is that when Jesus explains this to the disciples, it means that even they were struggling to fully understand what Jesus meant. I like to think that it’s because they’re still on a journey of understanding. They’re trying to understand, but it isn’t quite clear yet.

Now, one of the things about parables is that it’s very easy to go in one of two ways when we approach what’s being said. One method is to immediately go overboard and think that every minute detail is something drastically important. The reason that this is a problem is that sometimes the details are just there to make the story feel real, to flesh out the visuals. We could think that there’s a special meaning between thorny plants and what the hidden meaning of choke is. We could think about those and try to find hidden details. Obsessed, we keep going deeper and deeper, until we relate something to every little bit, to every single word said. And when we do, we start to lose the actual meaning. It’s like a man trying to understand a painting. So, he gets a microscope, and zooms in until he can see every brushstroke. When he sees it, he begins to describe how each and every stroke has its own meaning, but fails to see that it’s a painting of a flower. We can’t get so lost in the details that we lose sight of the truth. But on the other hand, we can’t just brush by the parables as if they are simple teachings that are easy to understand, thinking the surface meaning is the only meaning. It would be a man who looks at a painting and notices that there’s flowers. He remarks upon how pretty the flowers are, never noticing that the flowers are hiding a fox that is hunting rabbits. A hidden danger not noticed if we just take a glance. Now, I know what you’re thinking. Now we’re having parables about parables about parables. You’d be right. It’s like a man... OK, so maybe that’s a layer too far.

But maybe that’s how we understand. We read and we reread, and we think, and we think again. Sometimes we have to ask deep questions. Sometimes we may see two different meanings in a parable. And there may be even more. They’re not always straightforward, and they’re not always easy to detect. And that’s what makes the parable so fascinating. Because they also speak to us as individuals.

In coming weeks, we will be looking at the different parables of Jesus. And I want to ask something of each and every one of you. I don’t want you to take my word for it about what these parables mean. Now, that isn’t to say I don’t want you to listen to me. I don’t want you to think that I have nothing to share with you. Quite the opposite is true. I have plenty to share

about how I have read and understand these parables. However, I want to hear what you see. So, each week I am asking that you read next Sunday's parable and to reflect on it. After you hear what I have to say, I would like to hear from you. Send me a text message, email me, call me, or write me a letter. If you want to stop in and talk about it in person, I'm trying to be in the Greenup office on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. But you might call to make sure I'm in. However, you reach out, I want to hear what you think.

Another interesting thing about the parables is that when we share our understanding, we help to cast those seeds again and maybe this time they find good soil. Maybe we find something that the other didn't see, and maybe when we share, we gain a greater understanding of God. Maybe we gain a deeper understanding of Christ together in what we share. I want this to be a shared experience for all of us. So, each Sunday the bulletin will have next week's parable and it will have a general summary of the sermon. I also hope you share with each other. I want to know what fruit blossoms in you when you hear those words and gain your own understanding. Because I feel that Christ's words will always have personal meaning for each of us. That we can share our stories and gain a greater understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven. We may share our experiences and gain a greater understanding of the Bible. That we help each other become better disciples and grow in love together. Because that's a story I want to tell.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

August 22nd – *A Generous God* – Matthew 20:1-16

We take a look at the parable of the workers in the vineyard and what it tells us about generosity.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Ronnie Winstead
Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson
Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland
Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Shelley Murphy	Jeff Davidson
Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt	Family of Harold Moss	Allen Goebel & Family
Jodie Bunch	Diane Waggle	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Kristen & Zack Morecraft
Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Family of Mark Fulton

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