

THE PARABLES OF LENT

DAILY DEVOTIONS *on the*
STORIES *of* JESUS *for* LENT

DEAN NADASY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' parables are treasures waiting to be mined by new generations of listeners. In Lent especially, the parables carry strong connections to Jesus' Passion, cross and resurrection. May the cumulative impact of these devotions bring you to deeper repentance and faith on the other side of this and every season.

—Dean Nadasdy, author

THE PARABLE *of the* PHARISEE
and the TAX COLLECTOR

Luke 18:9-14

Pride

Ash Wednesday

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.

—LUKE 18:9

Pride, according to Augustine, is the mother of all sins. Ash Wednesday puts the mirror of God's law before us, and shows us liking what we see way too much. We see someone we can trust to do the right thing, a good person guided by a seemingly flawless moral compass. We may struggle to think of a sin we recently committed. Comparatively speaking, we are not just good but better than most. As Luke puts it, Jesus told this parable to those who trusted in themselves.

Jesus' intent is to bring us down from the place where we trust so much in our own goodness that we don't need God. He wants to wound—even kill—our ego, so obvious in our incessant "I" language. He comes preaching repentance, a reversal, where humble sinners look better than self-righteous egotists.

We need him! He has become our righteousness, emptying himself and giving us purpose in sacrifice and service.

PRAYER

Lord, forgive my pride, so often the platform for my sins. This Lenten season, give me the humility to deny myself, take up a cross and follow You. Amen.

Mercy

Thursday After Ash Wednesday

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

—LUKE 18:13

An old story has an uppity, wealthy socialite, not that good-looking, having her portrait done. Repeatedly, she says to the artist, "Be sure you do me justice. Be sure you do me justice." She says it once too often, leaving the artist to blurt out, "Lady, what you need is not justice, but mercy!"

We spend much of our lives demanding justice from God. We expect God to recognize our goodness and reward us. We question God's fairness when things go bad. The tax collector in Jesus' story has no such sense of entitlement. He will not lift his eyes before God as he asks for mercy rather than justice: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

God's capacity for mercy is limitless. God knows the heart that cries out in desperation from sin's dead ends. God has always heard the cry for mercy. It is the beginning, the middle and the end of faith, answered by God through the death of His Son.

PRAYER

You alone, O God, answer my need to be clean and whole. In Your mercy, O God, make me merciful. Amen.

THE PARABLE of the SOWER

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Understanding

Friday After Ash Wednesday

Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

—MATTHEW 13:18-19

In the ancient Greek world, learning to maturity involved a three-step process. First was knowledge, becoming acquainted with a truth. Then came understanding, the grasping of that truth and the ability to put it into words. Finally, maturity came in wisdom as one applied truth to life.

Jesus describes the first soil in His parable as someone who hears the Word of the kingdom and does not understand it. As birds eat up newly scattered seeds, so the devil snatches God's truth from those who have not understood it.

Before we can apply God's Word to our lives, we must know and understand it. That takes cultivation. We must not only hear it but listen to it, not only read it but meditate on it. It is, after all, an alien word from another "kingdom." We study it and paraphrase it. We "eat the scroll" like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and John. We read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it.

There can be no wisdom without understanding.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Word made flesh, may Your words shape the wisdom of my life. Amen.

Roots

Saturday After Ash Wednesday

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

—MATTHEW 13:20-21

A father was asked to share his faith story at a Lenten Vespers. He spoke of losing his only son in the war in Afghanistan. His grief was still fresh. He wept as he spoke, and we who worshiped wept with him. At the close he said, "Only the promises of God will get me through this."

What marks the difference between those who break from faith under pressure and those who hold fast? What makes spiritual survivors out of those who endure pain and loss? Is it courage? Is it fortitude? Jesus says it is depth, the seeds of the Word of the kingdom so deeply rooted in heart and mind that we follow, even when it is hard.

The Word of God is more than a book or a sermon. It is a living, empowering force in the life of a Christian. It is the stubborn little seedling reaching down through the rocks to the depths of hope. It is the Word of a Father who lost His only Son, whose promises will get us through.

PRAYER

O God, plant Your Word so deep within me that I may persevere. Amen.

Cultured

First Sunday in Lent

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

—MATTHEW 13:22

The preacher pointed his finger outside the walls of his church at a fallen culture. “Repent!” he shouted after listing “the evils we deplore.” At the close of the service many at the door complimented his prophetic passion. One friend, however, stayed afterward and gently reminded him, “We are the culture, my friend. Your finger should have pointed at us as well.”

The thorns of Jesus’ parable point to how acculturated those who hear the Word can become. We can become so worldly that the Word is lost to us. In other words, we do not hear the Word of the kingdom, and we do not obey it. It is choked out by the culture’s claims on our hearts—wealth, success, happiness, convenience, entitlement.

Being “cultured,” it turns out, is not always a blessing for the Christian. We are called to be different enough to be noticed, to be fruitful, to be salt and light. Jesus’ words and life stood out in His culture as amazing and rich with authority. May the same be said of us.

PRAYER

Lord, may Your words bear fruit in my life in Your world. Amen.

Dynamic Listeners

Monday, the First Week of Lent

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

—MATTHEW 13:23

Often a pastoral search committee will list the qualities they hope for in a new pastor. Admittedly the composite list often asks for superhuman heroics, and almost always topping the list is the expression “dynamic preacher.” It is a reasonable expectation. Most pew-sitters, after all, would like an effective, engaging communicator up front, presenting a personal, thoughtful and moving exposition of God’s Word.

Jesus’ parable of the sower reminds us that those on the receiving end of Gospel proclamation also have responsibilities. They must clear their minds and hearts the way a farmer clears a field of weeds and rocks. They must pray for understanding. They must go beyond hearing to listening. As Martin Luther suggested, they must bring to the Word their trials and hard times, fully anticipating that God will have something powerfully

helpful to say. Then, and perhaps most importantly, they must bear much fruit, finishing the sermon in their own lives. The powerful Word of God is enhanced by both dynamic preaching and dynamic listening.

PRAYER

Lord, make of all of us who hear the Word dynamic listeners. Amen.

THE PARABLE *of the* MUSTARD SEED *and* LEAVEN

Matthew 13:31-33

A Little

Tuesday, the First Week of Lent

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field."

—MATTHEW 13:31

In Robert Frost's poem "The Pasture," he is ready to go out to clean the pasture in spring and fetch a newborn calf. Clearly these seemingly little things are valuable to him, so valuable that he invites those he loves to join him in his little outing. "You come too," he writes.

The kingdom of heaven is the way things are between God and the people God loves, and in that kingdom a little becomes a lot. Little things matter in the kingdom of heaven. From a tiny seed comes a tree, says Jesus. Put a little yeast in the dough, Jesus says, and watch the whole loaf rise. Little children, He says, are the essence of this kingdom. A boy's sack lunch feeds five thousand others. Little things like a gentle touch, a focused look or a conversation with a woman by a well yield amazing results.

Conventional wisdom says, "Don't sweat the small stuff." Jesus reminds us to value the small stuff because in the kingdom of heaven a little means a lot.

PRAYER

Lord, help me see the value of little things in Your grand scheme of things. Amen.

Seeing As God Sees

Wednesday, the First Week of Lent

It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. ... The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.

—MATTHEW 13:32-33

In his 1888 poem “As I Sit Writing Here,” an aging Walt Whitman lists among his burdens of old age a “whimpering ennui.” Ennui is a bored focus on minutiae, the little things in life. Whitman’s whimpering ennui moved him from epic poems to melancholy verses. Christians are prone to that malady, causing God to bring us back to His original uncropped view of an ever-expanding kingdom.

God has no such listless boredom with little things. God may have chosen one small nation as His own people, but only with the goal of blessing every nation and all people with His grace. God’s eye is not only on the single little sparrow but also on sparrows everywhere. God is not satisfied with little seeds but longs to see the seeds turn into rich crops of grain and forests of trees.

We may see small aging churches becoming smaller; God sees the kingdom of heaven expanding to new people and cultures. God is out to leaven the whole lump. God would save the whole world through His Son.

PRAYER

Lord, extend my vision beyond the immediate and the little. Amen.

THE PARABLE of *the WEEDS*

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Seeds

Thursday, the First Week of Lent

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.”

—MATTHEW 13:24

Johnny Appleseed is a figure in American folklore who went about planting apple seeds across the frontier. Actually, behind the legend is the actual man, John Chapman, who fought in the Revolutionary War and did indeed head west to plant apple nurseries and orchards in Ohio and Indiana. The apple trees transformed pioneer land into homesteads. Chapman was a Christian, remembered today in many

THE PARABLES *of* LENT

“**H**e spoke to them in parables,” the Bible tells us of Jesus, and in this daily devotional for Lent, these very parables of our Lord speak to us of core components of this sacred season as we reflect on his suffering, death and resurrection for us. Author Dean Nadasdy takes us line by line through some of the most well-known and beloved parables of Scripture and relates the events described there to the events of Lent we experience—repentance, forgiveness, sacrifice and everlasting love—helping us to apply the divine messages of these stories to the story of our life in Christ.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazon](#)kindle and [nook](#).

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