

Fall On Your Knees...

"We Are Living Gospels! Parables
Unfolding!"

Mark 10:17-31; Hebrews 4: 12-16

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Have you ever tried to retell a funny story or joke only to see it fall flat as a pancake the second time around?

The same setup, the same characters, the same punch line that brought laughter to yesterday's lunch crowd, leaves today's coffee clutch yawning as they sip their coffee.

We've come up with some standard comebacks to cover ourselves: "I guess you just had to be there." "It loses something in translation." "You just don't get it."

But the fact is, storytelling of any sort...amusing anecdotes or tragic tales, is an unrepeatable art form.

The variety of people listening, the inflections in your voice, the mood of the day, the color of the sky

–

they all combine to create a one-time-only atmosphere for the words you speak.

A story may bring a tear or a smile at one telling, and yet,

the very next audience experiences the same words in a completely different way.

Jesus is a storyteller. On purpose. For just these reasons.

Mark's gospel tells us Jesus chose to speak in parables.

Some people find that very annoying, or maybe think Jesus is a trickster, or feel his stuff falls flat.

Why didn't Jesus come right out and say what he meant?

Why did he leave behind all these cryptic sayings, loaded with innuendo, instead of a crisp code of laws or a stack of essays with titles like

"How to Be a Good Disciple in 12 Easy Steps,"

"Roadmap to the Kingdom of God" or

"Seven Key Features of the Coming Kingdom and What This Means You Better Be Doing."

But no.

Instead of guidelines and rules,

we have these cryptic, incomplete, awkward, sayings known as Jesus' parables. Stories.

But realize, a list of rules never changes, never adapts.

Written guidelines are like insects encased in amber -- beautiful and precisely formed, but no longer vital and alive.

It takes the fluid format of a story -- a tale that can never quite be told the same way twice --
to keep breathing new life into the Good News. Making it still relevant today

If you still think Jesus would have gotten his points across better with hard and fast rules,

try remembering the last time you sat down and really enjoyed reading Leviticus or the first few chapters of Numbers.

The last time you did what you were told to do or lived by the rules, without exception.

Without the easy ability Jesus' parables have to engage us and entice us into their world, even God's Word becomes a hard read.
Thank goodness for the New Testament!

By preaching to his followers in parables, Jesus let each listener make the Good News become his own story, her own experience.

As we are swept up in the story, we ourselves become part of a new parable -- the parable of our lives.

Taken together, the parable and our individual experiences of the kingdom,
our personal stories of God's work and witness in our lives,
we end up creating a new gospel.

We are living gospels for each other!

We are greatly mistaken if we think our tradition stems from only four canonical gospels.

Becoming de facto rules!

As well as "The Gospel According to Matthew," "The Gospel According to Mark," "The Gospel According to Luke" and "The Gospel According to John,"
(by the way, these form one gospel and are not really intended to be 4 different ones)

the church has almost 2,000 years' worth of other gospel books to celebrate.

"The Gospel of Thomas, of Mary Magdalene",

The Gospel of Augustine," "The Gospel of Martin Luther,"

"The Gospel of Thomas Merton,"

"The Gospel of John Calvin/Gospel of John Wesley."

All these "gospels" have remained vital parts of our tradition because of their eternally rechargeable parable power.

Other gospels may not be quite so well-known, but they work just as persuasively in our lives.

How many of you know the personal parable stories making up "The Gospel According to Grandma,"

or "The Gospel According to Aunt Mary,"

or "The Gospel According to That Kid at Camp Whose Name I Can't Even Remember,"

parable stories that have affected your life dramatically?

And then there are the gospels of John Lennon and Gene Roddenberry, Maya Angelou, David Whyte.

AND, all of us are in the process of writing our own gospels – our own accounts of experiencing the Good News of the coming kingdom *in our midst*.

Writing a gospel through the very act of living is part of being a disciple of Christ, follower along the way, child of God.

Stories connect us to one another, to our ancestors, to our world and to our God.

Earlier in Mark (4:33) it is said when Jesus spoke to the crowds around him, he "spoke

the word to them, as they were able to hear it: in parables".

Jesus knew that only parable power had the ability to make the Good News of the kingdom a potent reality for every listening ear.

In the levels of meaning of each parable,
each person's level of formation finds its level of meaning.

People go as far as they can as quickly as they can. Not faster.

God knows this.

God doesn't control outcomes, nor does Jesus.

Gutsy.

But truly, how else could it possibly work...and work with power! The world is changed one person at a time. Powerfully!

And so this "man" in today's parable leaves shocked to hear that faithfulness is not only about spiritual gleanings and right belief
but about the witness of your life....

your life revealing your true faith.

And it says he went away, grieving.

I wonder what have happened if he had stayed?

I wonder if Jesus was surprised he left so quickly after he had come so far?

I note Jesus doesn't say sell everything, but says "lovingly" to this man that he owns much. With all his belief, he could do it differently.

Believe and survey your belongings/perhaps sell some or all. Live differently and with that difference address the needs of the poor.

You miss the point if you think we all are to sell everything!
Or if you think this man is rich and so this parable intended
for people who have *more* than you do!

The story does not say he was a rich man...he is you and I. Wait...that *would* be rich!
We are wealthy by world standards!

You probably don't feel rich. In fact, these days, it's pretty hard on you given on our economy and cultural norms. Sometimes it's even herd to have hope...all you can do to find any hope. When so, then all we do really have if our belief. And so it is so very crucial to know what it is you do believe. When you're ill, at your wit's edge, bottomed out, what do you believe? There is your hope. And true life and new beginnings. Jesus knew this...perhaps that's why he wasn't afraid.

And Jesus goes on with the disciples to say that if you leave your house, possessions, family, or work, for my sake and for the sake of the good news...leave not completely or to abandon but to do for my sake.

Living God's care for each and all and the common good,

you will receive a hundredfold

NOW in this age as well as the age to come.

Now! Now!

It's not about self-denying! It's not about later!

**It's about a new kind of investment that yields riches
beyond compare ...NOW!**

Actual care and comfort, now just spiritual comfort!

I wonder why we don't hear that.

Why we resist so dramatically giving as much as we can...

which then keeps us from the very thing we need most:

peace in God...our needs met as well as the needs
of those around us which also directly affects us.

Actually, I do know why we don't hear this.

We're afraid.

We think if we hang on to what is ours we will be protected.

We won't trust in other outcomes. We say: It's too risky.

We know better, but we resist...we resist shaping our financial lives differently making it possible to give, to pledge, as much as possible

rather than as little as we can get away with! As if faith alone would save us!

We are naked before God...do we think God doesn't see what we are doing? We let so much get in the way of living our faith.

God knows. Yet, not punishing us, God's seeing implores us to think again, take a do-over? Have everything you need and more!

To live the parables and rewrite them into our own lives applying their wisdom as we find our courage. Really believe....

So, let's see. **What chapter did you add to *your* gospel this week?**

How were the parables told in your life witness to the Good News you say you believe?

Do any of these titles remind you of this week's additions to your work in progress?:

The Parable of the Crabby Boss and the Overtly God-centered Coworker Who Sees the Issue beneath the Subject He/She is gripping about.

The Parable of the Kids Who Won't Clean Up Their Rooms and the Mother Who Is Threatening to Ground Them for Life.

The Parable of the Flat Tire and the New Suit.

The Parable of the School That Doesn't Feel Safe and the Kids Who Must Attend There.

The Parable of the Parents Who Don't Have a Clue.

The Parable of the Empty Cupboard and the Overflowing "Bills to Pay".

The Parable of How Do I Cope With This Body of Mine Now.

Don't worry if these, or the particular parable stories you experienced this week, didn't seem to have any grand significance,

any definitive "gospel" quality to them, as you lived through them.

The power of a parable is partly its ability to stand up to scrutiny and self-examination at a later time –
and there to reveal its true meaning, its gospel heart.

And so then begin to live its wisdom courageously.

Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds.

Only later did he explain to his own disciples the kingdom kernel that lived within his stories.

He wanted them to think on their own, reflect, and ask questions. He wants you to!

It is the job of all of us, as Jesus' disciples, to come together and “plug into” the parable power running through each other's lives.

Because we know the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – the gospels of Augustine, Aquinas, and Avila –
the gospels of Luther, Calvin, Wesley and Edwards –
the gospels of grandpa, our Sunday school teacher, Cousin Emilio and our little sister –
because we have gleaned the wisdom....

we, as a community of faith,
can courageously work together to discern in what new direction
each week's parable power has taken us.

And so begin to know what to do next and what to do differently!

Let us return to the world Monday morning and live the parables of our lives, live our faith.

In this way we become living gospels of Jesus Christ:

Our lives, how we live them, witness to what we really believe.

We are not in the book. We are the ones with the book.

Told for us. Now through us.

We become the book. We are living gospels.

Desmond Tutu says know this:

God without you, ...**won't**.

You without God, ...**can't**.

Thanks to the resources of Homiletic-On-Line for some of today's insights!