

Fall On Your Knees...

We Are Living Gospels! Parables Unfolding!

“Uncomfortable Seating...Please!”

Psalm 104: 1-9, 24, 35c; Mark 10:35-45

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Jesus is a storyteller. On purpose.
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?

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 parables!

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.

We are living gospels for each other!

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.

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. Do you appreciate this?

God doesn't control outcomes, nor does Jesus. Might you try letting go of outcomes by
trusting folk to be doing their best and working with them from that place inside
themselves?

Gutsy.

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

To live the parables and rewrite them into our own lives applying their wisdom, we
must be self-aware
and find our courage.

Really believe...really believe.

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Every time I come in this place to worship, I pick my seat.

I'm use to sitting right here in the first row of chairs.  
It's been a long time since we've spoken about why I sit where I sit.

But first, why do you sit where you sit? Truly? To hide? To be seen? To blend in? It's  
comfortable?

What perspective does your seat give you on what's going on? What if you changed your seat?

What might you see differently?  
Who might you see differently?  
How might you belong differently?

Remember when the two big chairs were up there. Does part of you still wish they were?  
Why? What is it in us that needs someone to visibly be in control?

Did you ever sit there...when you've been leading worship...or maybe when no one was  
looking?

Up there. That's where the pastor is “supposed” to sit and the one leading worship with her.

For Pete's sake, why then isn't she sitting there!!?

Jesus thinks and says, “OK. The cup that I drink, you will drink” (if you follow me...but before sitting by me, realize it gets harder before it gets better. You drink the cup I drink, meaning you get it and are willing to buck the system not for the sake of bucking, but for *your* sake and the sake of others...people are more important than systems, traditions, habits, rules, seats).

Jesus says, “ok and let’s say you are willingly baptized with the baptism I am baptized.”

(You are washed with and will act from that place inside of you that is the grace of God which takes away the past and opens you to the present,

in-courages you to follow me and not the your former ways or the ways of this world and that itself is a lot!).

Jesus says, “but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

...and so, for whom has it been prepared?

For your pastor?

For the one with the most power and authority through their position in the church

or through how they throw their weight around? The biggest complainer or the sweetest non complainer?

A leader? an elder? a deacon?

Is it the one who gives the most money?

Or, is it the one who gives the most time?

Is it someone outside the church?

Jesus said someone is prepared to sit there...who?

...who will it be who gets to sit with God in paradise?

It's a good thing Jesus goes on to explain because just like the disciples, we all want to be powerful,

get the attention of sitting up front in the big chairs in our lives...at home, at work, at church, in our organizations.

We all need affirmation and credit given and a sense of our own power, and we get bent out of shape (like the disciples) when we don't get it!

Are power and authority bad things?  
Who gets to sit up there?

Well, I don't imagine even in Jesus' glory he is sitting on a throne.  
That would be the last place I'd expect to see Jesus...the last place I'd expect to see God is sitting in a great stone chair amongst the clouds!

**Jesus is where ever there are those who are in pain,  
in confusion, caught up in the culture,  
caught up in despair, left out or behind.**

Jesus is with those who need him most.

Jesus is not like a worldly king....it's not a kingdom he's after...it's a kin-dom

where we are all together as a covenant family...

family the way it can be...where everyone  
has power and say, joy and fulfillment,

the sense of being heard and mattering.

...not in chairs but around a communion table  
of internal empowerment.

Having a sense of your own empowerment  
is a very good thing...power with/not over!

And Jesus says, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them,  
and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it is not so among you. ...and whoever wishes to be first among you (sit in the seat next to Jesus)

must be slave of all.

For the Son of Man came not to be served

but to serve, and to give his life."

**Power is not a bad thing in and of itself.  
Here Jesus is giving us a pep talk to be powerful!**

...and to take that power and **use it** as the divine ruler of life would have us use it: to serve others!

This is how we are prepared to sit in just the right seat next to Jesus, with God...forever:

**by using our power and abilities and time and gifts to serve the needs of others...just like  
Jesus did...  
just like many of us are beginning to do.**

You see, there's open seating in heaven!

Enough seats for all of us who get it...  
and God never gives up on anyone's ability to get it!

I believe God never gives up on anyone...no matter how misled, how evil, how destructive,  
how hateful,  
how corrupt in power.

I believe God will go even beyond time and mortality to reach us. (The Apostles' Creed...and  
Jesus ascended into hell...that's how far God will go for us!)

In God's timing, even *that* person you will see "in heaven" sitting next to Jesus as you sit there  
with him.

There are no power plays in this life that assure the best seating with Jesus.

And in this life, those who engage in power plays only get temporary rewards...folding chairs!

...until in God's timing, they get it and take their seats.

But make no mistake! Those are not cheap seats!

**When we follow Jesus to use our power for the good of all, we are saying yes to living a life  
diametrically opposed  
to many of the values and norms of society.**

It may mean befriending the most unpopular kid at school.

It may mean losing a job rather than compromising your integrity.

It may mean refusing to blindly obey your government.

It may mean going hungry yourself in order to feed others.

It may mean giving up a sports event to go to church where your presence impacts people.

Drinking from the cup that Jesus drank from is not easy.

We may well wish to ask God to take it away if possible...just like Jesus did at first...filled with sorrow at the cost of discipleship.

There is a cost, but we are called to serve...as Jesus did ...called to make a difference in the lives of the people around us.

So, how will you know if you're making the right choices to reserve a good seat for yourself?

Would you feel comfortable with your choices if you saw Jesus standing next to you as you made them?

You do know how to make good choices.

**You can feel it, even if as you try to deny it, you can feel it.**

How do you know...if there'll be seating available for you in heaven when you get there?

Look at who you are serving right now in your life through the choices you are making?

Are you self-serving? Serving in easy ways?

Serving left overs instead of a banquet?

I know it's scary to serve.

It's even scary to serve your church

where you are loved...how much scarier to serve people you don't know who are so needy.

But you are equipped and able to do this work.

God made you to be able to do this work and God gave us each other to make it easier to go and serve...together.

Where are you to be seated? Well.....

**We are about to start purchasing materials for Divine Intervention. How many excuses do you have to say no I don't really have enough money left over to help out? Or time to host...I need all of my sleep every night!**

...beware... folding chair!

We are being better stewards of our space as we also greet those outside the church with more inviting worship bulletins and seating. And are using our outdoor space for gardening, maybe even our non-usable flat roof...better stewards and in service of feeding others.

**Are you really willing to let chairs, bulletins, garden beds, a flat roof...your fond memories of the past versus a growing community now... keep you from worship and ministry?**

...beware...folding chair!

We are being invited to participate in a new education program and we're not use to being expected to do that,  
we or coming to fall clean-ups, winterizing our building,  
and now pledging to keep our building open

**and most importantly fund the programs that are God's presence all year round, Christmas all year round.**

**How many excuses will you make saying you don't have the time or money to do that? ...while you expect others to do that so when you need Tippe, we'll be here for you!**

**(This is not about shaming us, this is exactly the self- honesty Jesus is talking about in today's scripture. Think again! Please think!**

**These ways of thinking are exactly what Jesus calls us to have!)**

otherwise...beware...folding chair!

We are soon to be inviting people to name their gratitudes for Tippe's ministry in their lives as well as the lives of others...  
name it through pledged support.

**How many excuses do you have to say no...I'll not give more?**

...beware...you just may be sitting on a folding chair!

We are about to step forward in all areas of our ministry as we grow our annual budget.  
**How many excuses will you make to avoid changing your life in any way that will help you devote more money, time, talent, just to come...and so enable the kin-dom?**

**FRIENDS...those changes it will take may just be what can lead you to the life you say you long to live.**

**Come with your mind already made up, not going to do it?**

...beware...folding chair!

You know, if you came and sat up here, it doesn't really feel good.

I think that it's partly because the chairs would face away from the cross and the table.

**The cross symbolizes the courage (not the suffering, but the courage!) which comes if we truly sup with Jesus at table.**

The cross and table symbolize the joy that comes in being freed from the perspectives of this world...sitting ourselves in a new seat, a just perspective.

There is a cost, but there is joy in the freedom these choices bring! Praise be to God!

For God's sake, for your own!

Pick a good seat!

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So, let's see.

What chapter did you add to *your* gospel this week?

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

The Parable of the Conversation that happened when your co-worker/sister/brother said: That's Not Fair, You Got More Than I Did.

The Parable of the One who threw a temper tantrum when they didn't get their way, right after they told someone else what to do and expected them/intimidated them to do it.

The Parable of the Dirty Kitchen and Tired Parent after a wonderful family dinner conversation.

The Parable of the School That Doesn't Feel Safe and the Kids Who Must Attend There.
Or, The Child Who Wants To Learn But Whose Style Of Learning Isn't Supported.

The Parable of the Writing the check to Tippe vs Writing a Check to Visa.

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.

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.

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.**