Session One: October 14, 2010
Biblical foundations of parables; an exploration of the meaning of the Kingdom of God in the Gospels, the location of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels, their importance and function in Jesus' teaching. Case study: the “day of parables”: see Mark 4 and Matthew 13

Introductory Remarks
- The power of story-telling
- The importance of “the Reign of God” as messianic promise and key to the Gospel proclamation
- The parables as typical way of Jesus’ preaching
- The parables offer a new vision, new set of values that upend “business as usual”
- The Passion as the Focal Point of Jesus' Ministry: The Journey to Jerusalem and the Cross

A. Meaning of “Parable”
“At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.” C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 16

B. The OT background: Some examples:
Nathan confronts David (2 Sam 12:1-7); Parable of the Vine (Ez 15:1-8); the cedar tree that “many birds can nest in” (Ez 17:22-24; 31:3-9); Parable of the Shepherds (Ez 34:1-16) and of the Separation of the Sheep (Ez 34:17-31); the Vision of the dry bones (Ez 37:1-16)

C. The Use of Parables in Jesus’ Teaching
Located in the Synoptic Gospels
“He taught them many things and without parables he did not teach them” (see Mk 4:34) The Gospels: Good News for the churches suffering for many reasons: e.g. persecution, disappointment and doubt at the delay of the parousia, apostasy, lack of leadership, fear, adrift and discouraged in Roman Empire.

- Jesus as Parable of God in the Gospel of Mark
  A Day of parables: in Galilee: chap 4; (also note “wicked tenants” in Jerusalem: Mk 12)
  The lead parable of the Sower and Seed: hope for discouraged church

- The Parables in Matthew (Matt 13-25)
  A Day of Parables in Galilee (Matt 13)
  Themes of Matthew: Jesus, Messiah in word and deed, Jesus as authoritative teacher, leadership, judgment, prophecy and fulfillment, righteousness, church and Synagogue
• The travel and meal settings of Jesus’ parables in Luke
  He taught them “along the way.”
  Themes of Luke: repentance, reversal of this world’s values, the God of mercy and
  compassion, prayer, joy, praise
  Luke’s parables are realistic (not allegorical as are many in Matthew), often with dialogue and
  other dramatic details

D. The Power of Parables to reveal the Hiddenness of the Reign of God
Naming the parables: the importance of imagination
Examples of a New Way of thinking and Acting; a reversal of the world’s values
The Power of Hope

E. Case Study: the “day of Parables”? Mark 4/ Matt 13 also see Lk 8
Focus first on Mark--written for discouraged church
Think of yourself as good soil where planted seed yields 30, 60, 100-fold.
Hope! despite personal limitations and the extreme conditions, God’s grace is efficacious
Think of yourself as the sower: there are four sowings but only one yields a harvest
Trust! confidence in the workings of God
What are we yielding? How do we measure the yield?
The Reign of God is here with Jesus’ presence: this is a time of blessing and rejoicing (see Matt 13:17:
“Amen I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not
see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.”). The here and now is especially evident in Luke.

Session Two: October 21, 2010
Sample Parables and how these might be used in the pastoral care of those confronting illness, loss
and death. Read the parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and Prodigal Father (Lk 15:11-32)

Two Example stories from Luke where journey to Jerusalem and meals are setting (Many of
Luke’s parables meant to give gist of new set of values prevalent in the Reign of God.)

A. The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37):
• Review of the Parable
• Traditional Interpretation: inclusive hospitality/ indiscriminate graciousness
• Another View to consider: from the ditch: Who do we allow to help us? to teach us?
• Instruction of Jesus: “Go and do likewise” (see Last Supper: Lk 22:19)

Conclusion:
• “Go and do likewise” is not an invitation but a demand, an imperative. It certainly means go
  be like the Samaritan who not only tended to the wounds of the one lying by the wayside, but
  went above and beyond in providing for his needs into the future and promising to return and
  do even more.
• Parable also means to be like the one in the ditch who was completely open to the help he
  received that included compassion, but also involved wisdom and a change of heart. Help
  came to him from the strangest of places and he would have been changed from that day
  forward as a result of this experience.
Such a reversal connects with all our difficulties in listening to others, especially those whom our background and training has taught us to ignore or look down on or judge as heretical or evil. (from an unpublished lecture given by Sr. Michele Bisbey DP, Ph.D.)

B. The Prodigal Father (Lk 15:11-32): What Kind of Parenting is this?

- Coping with Loss: the Father and two sons:
- Consider the apparent profiles of the Characters:
  - The Ungrateful and Rebellious Younger Son
  - The Defiantly Compliant and Very Angry Older Son
  - The Pathetic and Clueless Father
- Reading the Parable from the Perspective of Faith

**Conclusion:**
“Now we must celebrate and rejoice, because (one) who was dead has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (Lk 15:32). This, like all the other parables, is told from viewpoint of resurrection. But to learn the meaning of the resurrection, we must travel with Jesus to the Cross and beyond. Parables offer a faith vision on human suffering and death, the open-ended invitation to repent, accept forgiveness and reintegrating ourselves within the believing community.

**Bibliography**


