

Words matter. Words are the bridge between our reality and our imagination. Words unite the Divine and the mortal. According to the Prologue of the Gospel of John: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Here there is declaration that Jesus spoke in parables, and did not say anything to anyone without.

So what is the difference between a METAPHOR, An ALLEGORY, A FABLE and A PARABLE?

A METAPHOR is an illustration where ONE Thing is mentioned to represent Something Else. Shakespeare describes a Riddle: What walks on 4 legs, later on 2, and finally on 3? The answer is a baby then and adult, then using a cane. It could be any person, male or female.

An ALLEGORY is like a METAPHOR except that the THINGS named have Specific REPRESENTATIONS.

The first verses of Ezekiel Chapter 17, begin ***"Son of Man, propound a Riddle, speak to Israel an Allegory: Thus says the LORD GOD, A Great Eagle, with immense wings, long pinions and rich plumage of many colors came to Lebanon and took the top of the Cedar, carrying the twigs to a land of trade in a city of merchants. Then planted the seed in a rich soil, beside abundant waters. It sprouted and became a low spreading vine. BUT there was another Eagle with great wings and plumage; and the Vine bent its roots toward him, shooting forth branches that this Eagle might water it."*** In this ALLEGORY, the Cedar of Lebanon is Israel. The first Eagle is Babylon who carried off the top branches of Israel. The Second Eagle is Egypt, whom Israel turned to as a possible rescue from Babylon. Then our Scripture passage of verses 22-24 describes GOD as The Eagle, that will carry the very top of the Cedar of Lebanon and plant it atop GOD's High Lofty Mountain where it will bear much fruit, and birds and animals will come for shelter.

A FABLE is a Clever Story intended to teach a life lesson. Think of Aesop's Fables with ***"The Boy Who Cried Wolf"*** and ***"The Tortoise and the Hare"*** or Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories with ***"How the Elephant Got Its Trunk in the Great Grey Green Greasy Limpopo River"*** and ***"The Cat Who Walked By Himself."*** You listen to the Fable, caught up in the word imagery and the lesson is immediately apparent and memorable.

A PARABLE imparts TRUTH which is difficult to Share, a Mystery, possibly Controversial. The word Parable comes from a baited hook in fishing. The bait attracts the fish, and only after biting, do we realize there is a barb that catches us and will not let us go. That barb on a baited hook was called a Parable. Ordinarily, a Parable has a face value of describing cultural genre; but then there is a deeper meaning; much like playing Chess or reading Alice in Wonderland. That you later come to realize were not intended for children. Biblical Scholar Eugene Peterson describes a PARABLE as a NARRATIVE TICKING TIME BOMB. You hear the parable: TICK. You wonder about the story and characters: TICK. You think you understand it on face value: TICK. Over the course of the next day or week, you cannot stop thinking it through: TICK. When all of a sudden the TRUTH Jesus meant to preach, the GOOD NEWS, strikes home: BOOM!

I recall in Seminary, questioning why people thought Jesus had been trained to be a Carpenter, because he never used illustrations about "straight, level and true," he never spoke of the difference between differing kinds of wood, or used Chairs or Tables as an image; however he routinely spoke in parables that seemed to be about agriculture and nature. The irony of the parable about growing grain this morning is that it really is not about farming.

This is not a "SOWER went out to SOW SEEDS."

Quite literally what the text says is "IN LIKE MANNER THE REIGN OF GOD IS AS IF A PERSON DROPPED SPORES UPON THE EARTH." On face value this is a parable about the ways of nature for hunter-gatherers.

Spores and Seeds both come from plants for reproduction, but that is the end of the similarity. Seeds are bigger; seeds have a hard shell; and I am told like an egg, seeds have all the elements necessary inside that husk like a self-contained habitat for the plant life to begin. Seeds can fall anywhere and, even where there is a crack between rocks, they will grow. Seeds grow into trees and bushes that produce flowers and fruit. Seeds are often carried by, or ingested and redeposited, by animals. SPORES are tiny even microscopic, they form on the bottom of leaves and float on the wind or fall directly beneath a plant. Spores need to land where there is moisture. Spores grow to be moss and ferns without any fruit. The point of this distinction is that different from the Parable of The SOWER WHO WENT OUT TO SOW, the person identified here is not intentional about planting or growth! Different from the story emphasizing the SOWER, by using the word SPORES, Jesus described something invisible to us, so what the person did is not the primary action we care about. The SPORE is created for growth. The SOIL created by God is fertile. The Human role only becomes intentional at The HARVESTING and sharing THE BOUNTY.

So what is the meaning of this PARABLE? We really cannot define, explain or teach: FAITH IN God. Primarily, we can only create an illustration of what the Reign of God is like.

Second, when we receive the donations of others and sort the stuff of the Patio Sale=The reign of God is happening all around us. When as Stephen Ministers we are actively listening and caring for others = The reign of God is being nurtured for harvest. Can you not smell the fertility of our Choir members' spores waiting to sprout in singing for the last year!

Something amazing happened this week! I was in a Synod Committee meeting discussing the geographic boundaries of our Presbyteries (could anything be more bureaucratic) when a woman described that: Twenty years ago, she had been a young mother with a 5 year old, and she was in crisis. She had been born in Japan, and she and her husband had followed the promised of a job for him. But after relocating several times, her husband described how unhappy he was, that he had severe headaches which his doctor diagnosed as a tumor, and that he wanted a divorce because he was more attracted to men. She went to see the pastor of the local church, who listened. The pastor described that she sounded overwhelmed by too many circumstances, that no one person could manage for themselves. The Pastor made a referral for her to a local doctor for an appointment regarding stress that afternoon. The Pastor found someone safe to take care of her 5 year old. And while they waited for the doctor's appointment, the Pastor listened and provided affirmation as she described contacting her parents in Japan for support; her desire to work, and her desire to work in advocacy for refugees to find support in America, possibly going to Seminary to be a pastor. Her parents had come from Japan to care for her daughter and support them as a family. While her husband had gotten the divorce, he stayed with her, as she cared for him on Hospice care. Her daughter graduated this Spring with her doctorate in Psychology. The Mother had gone to Seminary and was now Chaplain of a College in San Diego, and she credited me as being the pastor who saved her life. All that I knew was having listened one afternoon as someone had come in need. A PERSON DROPPED SPORES UPON THE EARTH.

The Parable of THE MUSTARD SEED has become so accepted in our culture, we know the story even if not that it came from Jesus. Like the earlier descriptions, compared to bigger, stronger, more decorative, the mustard seed is the tiniest, most insignificant of seeds that can grow into a bush 3-4 feet tall! So on first hearing, the parable is about good things coming from small packages, do not overlook the weak and small among us, even the most insignificant acts compared to the world's needs can bring about the Kingdom of God.

However, American Catholic Scholar **John Crossan** describes that it is not so much that the Mustard Plant grows to be a Tall and Robust Plant, as that this is an invasive weed, imagine Mint on Steroids! In its natural

state Mustard from a Mustard Plant has the kick of raw Horseradish, where a tiny amount goes a long way! All the Mustard commercially grown throughout the world for Grey Poupon to Fleishmans and Golden's Yellow Mustard, comes from Nepal and Canada. The Mustard plant grows an enormous root system of interconnected shoots three and four times as large beneath the surface, as the bush above the surface, so if even large birds roost or nest on its branches the plant will not topple over. So as charming as this parable makes it sound, what Jesus was really saying was that The Kingdom of God is like a pungent shrub, uncontrollable and messy! Like an invasive weed, Faith has no boundaries in your life and ultimately will invade protected fragile elements as well. You cannot have just a little bit of faith in God!

So I have been looking for a parable to illustrate the circumstance the world has just endured. Growing up I had 3 brothers, and in a large family, when one person got a virus, everyone seemed to catch it. One night my eldest brother came down with the Flu and rushed to the bathroom. Afterwards he went to our parents, to tell them he was sick. Urging self-reliance my father did not get out of bed but called back "Leave a light on in the hall" anticipating that this would not be the last person to get up during the night. Except, what my brother heard was "Go lay down in the hall!" After which, when each brother became ill he ran toward the bathroom and tripped over him. Whereupon he repeated that he was told to lay down in the hall.

Question what you hear.

Question what it means for you and what it means for others
who may get tripped up by where you make your bed.

And PLEASE LEAVE A LIGHT FOR OTHERS!