

What is the difference between a Fable and a Parable? Both tend to be exaggerated fictional stories. A Fable like Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, his Blue Ox Babe, or Aesop's The Boy Who Cried Wolf, How the Elephant got it's Trunk, How the Leopard got it's Spots, The Tortoise & Hare are all extravagant stories. Parables are also, AND Parables also have 3 characteristics: The word PARABLE comes from fishing. The BARB at the end of a fishing line is a Parable, so also the story is a baited hook to catch the listener after they take the bait. A Parable describes the way things in a way which includes and involves the listener. And, a Parable allows us to see the world differently, as if THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD. The Gospel of Mark Chapter 4 verse 11, introduces these two about seeds among a whole series of Parables, by saying: "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, to those outside everything is as parables."

At one point, I was supposed to preach at a church in California, on these Scriptures, and thought that for a Children's Moment, I would have a handful of differing kinds of seed. So I prepared this in a small bag in my suitcase. I had forgotten that when I went to the Airport, they searched my luggage and the Homeland Security Officer asked "What is this?" I responded that it was "A Baggie of Grass" that did not go over well, so I tried to clarify, "I am preaching about growing Weed" which made things worse! So, I asked that he dispose of this, and I be allowed to go to Church! I do not know if it was that he accepted this, or if GOING TO CHURCH seemed so HARMLESS he let me go. For those outside everything comes as parables.

One of the differences in Bible Study and Preaching, is that in Bible Study we take time to read all of the wonderful stories, where in preaching we only touch on the highpoints. I encourage you to take the time to read these wonderful stories about our heritage. The 1<sup>st</sup> week in June, we named that THE WORD OF GOD WAS RARE IN THOSE DAYS, and the young boy Samuel was called by GOD at night; the next week adult Samuel was confronted by the people who demanded "WE WANT A KING;" today, chapters later, the people's favorite: SAUL, turned out to not be a good or faithful King, and GOD has told Samuel he is going to take BEING KING away from Saul to give to another.

Confrontations can be hard. Deciding when and where to Retire. Leaving your independent home to live with some Assistance. Deciding when to let go the Car Keys. These, like the situation before Samuel, are challenges that we anticipate will be hard. In the case of King Saul, no longer being King will lead to War dividing the Nation between those who follow SAUL and those who follow DAVID. Samuel wrestles with "How can I do this, when Saul learns of it he will kill me." To which GOD responds, take a sacrifice with you, no one will pay any attention to you if you are going to Pray or something Holy, or look like you are! Just to make certain, make it the biggest sacrifice possible, take a Heifer! For those outside, everything comes as parables. And all the Elders at Bethlehem greeted Samuel asking: "Do you come in peace?"

Samuel goes as instructed by GOD, to Jesse of Bethlehem. Now Jesse has at home seven sons. So Jesse has each come before Samuel. And the first is Handsome, but GOD says NO. The second is strong, and GOD says NO. The third is extremely intelligent, but NO. The fourth is personable... Samuel interviews all seven of Jesse's sons, something like Cinderella's Glass Slipper. Then Samuel does what we often fail to consider, he asks "ARE THERE ANY OTHERS?" Samuel is not willing to SETTLE. And Jesse says, "YES, the youngest but he is out in the field." And Samuel takes time to wait.

When David does come home from caring for the sheep, GOD LOVES HIM, the portrayal is almost out of the Garden of Eden in Genesis! The boy is ruddy, smeared with EARTH, having been shepherding and caring for the sheep. DAVID is a reincarnation of Adam & Eve's child ABEL whom Cain slew. Samuel anoints him, as Jesse prepares the Heifer for Samuel to sacrifice to GOD. Other than to GOD & Samuel this appears simply as a PARABLE a religious ritual. To David, Samuel and GOD, a new KING of Israel has been chosen and anointed! "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God."

The Parable about the GROWING of PLANTS is not the same as the one about the Sower who went out to Sow some seed on Rock, some among Weeds, Some on Fertile Soil. In English, we describe all plants as coming from SEED or BULBS and ROOT stock. In MARK, the word here is actually SPORES, much like fungus, moss, microscopic organisms and Pollens. In our travels, we pick these up all around us. Many of us have been struggling with Allergies, others with Valley Fever, all of which come from the spores all around us. Carrying these spores on us, we do not realize, when we rise and when we lay down, we are in fact planting what otherwise, without us, would never have appeared there. The EARTH is FERTILE and sprouts without our cultivation. Just how FERTILE, a short time ago, there was a major Law Suit in Northern Arizona, because the Saudi Arabian Government had leased 5 MILES SQUARE of Desert, which with 3,000 foot deep wells to provide free water, they were growing acres and acres of ALFALFA in the Desert to ship as hay to the Middle East for their Cows. The only difference between Saudi Arabia and Arizona desert being that our WATER IS FREE until it runs dry. In GREEN VALLEY, we do not need to MOW, RAKE or SHOVEL, but if your property is like mine, we are constantly vigilant of the growing of plants we did not plant! Only when it comes to weeding, or harvesting does this seem like work. "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, to those outside everything is as parables."

MONEY always seems to breed conflict, either too much or too little. At one point, I served on a Presbytery ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION, because a congregation had been given an estate of \$30 Million Dollars. This created two problems, in the first place, people felt as though they did not need to give, the people were not necessary for the survival of the Church! At the same time, there was secrecy about who was spending money and whether this was done wisely. Having too much killed that church!

An incredible thing has happened in the life of this Congregation, which revealed a very interesting barb this week... Remember that A Parable is the BARB on the Fisherman's HOOK. We as a Congregation have been doing incredible things! In the most recent 6 years, we have changed from consistently overspending our Operating Budget by \$300,000 each year, to an Austerity Budget, to a Consistently growing Budget that we fully subscribe. THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY. Your Participation, your Involvement and your giving is ESSENTIAL to this Church. We have been in the black even during COVID throughout these five years. Across the Nation, in every different denomination and non-denomination the GOAL is to spend 10% on MISSIONS and most struggle at 7-9%. In our OPERATING BUDGET we annually BUDGET 15%, and with PASS-THROUGH ADDITIONAL GIVING that regularly becomes about 20% a little more. WOW!

This week our leaders did a series of BOLD THINGS:

Our SESSION thanked our donors and everyone who have done such hard work creating requests.

Our SESSION listened to our Congregation!

Our SESSION Said, we are Not the UNITED WAY receiving funds to give away, we are a Church!

Our SESSION said SLOW DOWN!

Our

SESSION said, if ANNUALLY we give about 20% to MISSIONS, let's use that 20% for what we give additionally to MISSIONS.

This is not changing rules, there were no rules, it is a little like redesigning an airplane, while it is flying!

The BARB is that usually our MISSIONS split everything exactly the same, instead these requests were for vastly different needs. Instead of the Session trying to play King Solomon splitting the baby, or telling the Missions which project wins and loses; the Advocates for our every Mission need to work TOGETHER, to decide together, which Missions receive what, to change their circumstance.

"To you is given the secret of the kingdom of God, to those outside everything is as parables."