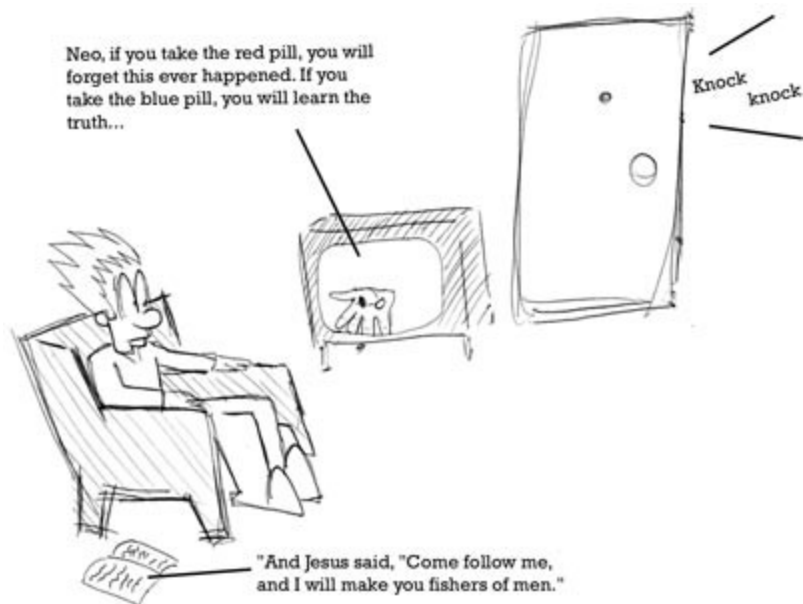


5 - Parables and Miracles



This week we are going to explore how we come to recognize the truth. We may think we see, but we never see fully, because the full truth is in fact God himself who is infinite. The more we know about God the more we realize how loved we are. The more we are transformed to love others more. This knowledge is not just head knowledge, but more importantly heart knowledge.

Why does Jesus use parables? What is a parable anyway?

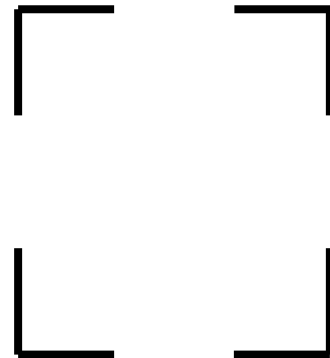
The word parable is related to the word parallel, two things lined up together. The two 'things' are the ordinary and the extraordinary, earthly realities and heavenly realities. We only have one parable explained to us by Jesus. The rest we have to work out ourselves. Part of the reason we have to work it out ourselves is because parables are open ended. There is not just one insight we can gain from them. In fact because they teach us about God, who is infinite, they will have infinite possible meanings. Since Jesus explains one of the parables, let's start there.



THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER MARK 4:1-20

Here is a summary of the parable and the explanation Jesus gives. As we reflect upon the parable, it makes us think of ourselves. Where do we fit into the parable. This is what the parable is about - YOU! Jesus is very gentle and does not make this explicit, but he does encourage you to think,

What shape do you think this is?



"Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." I'll be more blunt with the last column and put you on the spot. That's what the parable intends to do.

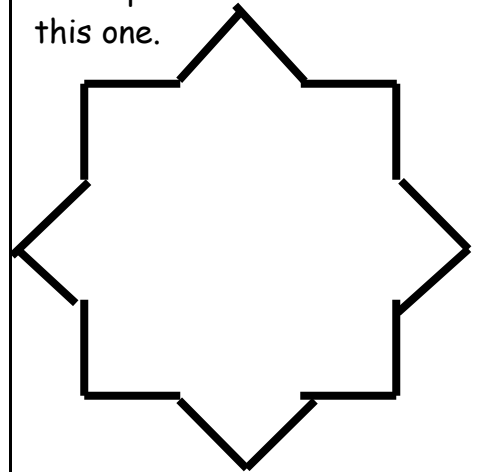
Story/Ordinary	Explanation/extraordinary	Open ended/response
Sower sows seed	Evangelist sows the Word of God	Are you sowing seed?
Some birds take some seeds away	Satan takes the word away before it can take root	Is Satan taking the word away from you?
Rocky ground, prevents the roots going deep	Some receive the Word of God, but don't persevere	Are there people around who don't persevere in following Jesus?
Thorns strangle the plants	worldly anxieties, lure of riches and distractions which choke the word.	Are you distracted in your walk with Jesus?
Seeds in rich soil bear much fruit	hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit	Are you bearing fruit? Good works, bringing others into the kingdom?

So where do you fit into this parable?

The incomplete shape and the skull/woman image below are examples of how a parable operates. You think you see, but only if you look more carefully, will you actually see deeper meanings/ other possibilities. Our thinking needs to change. When we read a parable we may be challenged by it. We may face our own weakness which do not want to see. It appears like a skull. If we look more deeply and trust in God's grace, we see something of more beauty, the skull/our weakness was a false image, we see the true beauty of God and ourselves. The parable is like a mirror, it reflects our self image. But if look more carefully, we see a truer self image in God, one of beauty and love. This new image is a choice, we can choose to accept it, to become transformed by it. To accept it is to accept the truth, we are sinners, but infinitely loved by God.

In the parable of the sower, you may think you are poor ground, but you can choose to become fertile soil. Looking deeper you see God offering you the grace to change. God always offers the grace to change, always offers the beautiful picture of self to you because he always loves you. All parables have these three layers, but you might only be given one layer and have to find the other two yourself. You might have to think about what Jesus is saying/doing in the

Most likely you chose a square. But there are many other possibilities such as this one.



Is it is skull? Or...

passages before and after the parable to get the idea. The first and second parable in Mark's gospel is a good example of this. Let's look at the second - Mark 2:22.

Story/Ordinary	Explanation/extraordinary	Open ended/response (This is just one example)
Old wine skin	Israel (12 tribes)	Old group you are part of.
New wine	Jesus and the Gospel	You have new ideas
New wine needs a new wine skin,.	Jesus sets up the Church, the 12 apostles (bishops) to form the structure to hold the gospel.	You may need to set up a new group - to start a fresh.
or it will bust the old one	If he tries to convert Israel, his message will be wasted and he may even cause a lot of damage.	If you try to convince the old group, you will and they will be frustrated and you may loose heart.

This is a very important lesson. This passage is placed after Jesus has some conflict with the Pharisees, but before he is rejected by them. He clearly knew what would happen and is already starting to teach his disciples about what he will do, ie set up the 12 apostles as the new Israel, the Church. This is not explained, you have to work it out for yourself. That's the power of the parable, to invite you to think. You may gain many insights and be able to apply the wisdom in many situations through reflection and prayer. Always ask the Holy Spirit for help to understand the parables.

MIRACLES

Can Jesus really perform miracles?

This is such a non-question today, because it is so obvious. Without beating about the bush, very definitely! Here are some reasons.

1) Every modern saint must have at least 2 scientifically unexplainable miracles before they can become a saint. This does not count the many miracles they may have performed while alive. Mary Mackillop, is currently blessed Mary Mackillop. To become a saint there are three stages. The first is to be recognised by the Catholic Church as a holy person in their life. They can then be classified officially as 'venerable'. People are then allowed to officially pray to this person for their help. When Mary Mackillop was venerable Mary Mackillop many people prayed for her help. A particular woman who was dying of leukemia and doctors could not save her life was miraculously cured through people praying to Mary Mackillop. You can read the full story here:



<http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/03/nov/16/14.html> This miracle was accepted by the Vatican 10 years later and allowed for Mary to become a 'blessed' which is the second stage of being a saint. With one more miracle she will become canonised a 'saint'. If we think of the thousands of saints that pope John Paul II has declared, we are talking about thousands of miracles.

2) There are some saints that have performed many miracles during their lifetime. One recent example is Saint Pio, also known as padre Pio who performed many miracles during his lifetime and died in 1968. He was a stigmatist (he had the wounds of Christ most of his life), he is reported to have been in two places at one time (called bilocation), when

St. Peter 'walking on water'



people went to confession to him, he knew their sins and would say them if the person did not mention them. These are just some of the many miracles. You could read more about padre pio at <http://www.ewtn.com/padrepio/>. There are many saints who throughout the centuries have performed many miracles.

There are so many other examples of miracles in the Catholic Church that it would take too long to explain and explore them all, the point is, if Jesus can bring about modern day miracles, he can certainly have performed miracles in his own day.

WHY DOES JESUS PERFORM MIRACLES?

"The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him. They invite belief in him. To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So miracles strengthen faith in the one who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God. But his miracles can also be occasions for "offense", they are not intended to satisfy people's curiosity or desire for magic. Despite his evident miracles some people reject Jesus; he is even accused of acting by the power of demons." (CCC548)

Miracles teach us something about Jesus. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus asked, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he said to the paralytic- "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." and so the paralytic was healed. Jesus used this opportunity to reveal that he could forgive sins. He himself used the opportunity as a kind of proof of his power to forgive sins. Actually the miracles are not the important thing, but Jesus is far more important than the miracles.

When someone gives you a gift, do you love the gift or the giver of the gift more?

We are meant to love the giver of the gift more. Catholicism is all about people, the dignity of people. People are more important than any material thing. The miracles are signs of

God's power, that point to God. We are meant to love the giver of the gift far more than the gift. Ultimately our love is to be just in the giver of the gifts and not in the gifts at all. Then we will be free, and love purely. Then we will be trusted to receive many gifts, because gifts are always meant to be shared. The more we share them, the more we receive.

Miracles invite and strengthen belief in Jesus. They are not 'proofs'. Jesus resists the temptation to 'prove' himself to people, since faith and love are based on trust. Proof would be a way to force people to believe. God always offers, invites, never forces.

This also raises the question then on how reasonable our faith is. What is the relationship between faith and reason?

FAITH AND REASON

Faith is reasonable. These miracles are helps for us to believe, they give us reasons to believe, but belief is a decision of the will to accept faith. Faith is a personal decision that God helps us make, but does not make for us. We make the decision. It is the best decision of our lives.



Knowing faith is a gift frees us to trust God, but also orients us to seek his help above all to bring faith to others. No matter how hard we try, we can't make anyone believe in God. That gift is for God alone to grant and for them to accept. Our love can help make it more reasonable for them to believe. Let us love others as much as we can, so they can have every reason to believe in God and follow him.

You may like to pray for someone now to receive the gift of faith. Maybe you need to ask for more faith yourself.

ONE OF THE GREAT MIRACLES OF LAST CENTURY -FATIMA

On the 13th May 1917 Our Lady appeared to three poor shepherd children in the small town of Fatima in Portugal. She visited on the 13th of each month for the next 5 months. She gave the children three secrets with instructions. Our Lady promised a miracle at the last apparition, so "that all may believe". It rained heavily that day, yet countless observers reported that the clouds broke, revealing the sun as an opaque disk spinning in the sky and radiating various colors of light upon the surroundings, then appearing to detach itself from the sky and plunge itself towards the earth in a zigzag pattern, finally returning to its normal place, and leaving the people's once wet clothing now completely dry. The event is known as the "Miracle of the Sun".

The Catholic Church Document, "*The Message Of Fatima*" from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith goes into detail about the messages. Here is the explanation of the first two secrets. This is a translation from sister Lucia's account, one of the visionaries.

"Well, the secret is made up of three distinct parts, two of which I am now going to reveal.

The first part is the vision of hell.

Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in a huge fire, without weight or equilibrium, and amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repulsive likeness to frightful and unknown animals, all black and transparent. This vision lasted but an instant. How can we ever be grateful enough to our kind heavenly Mother, who had already prepared us by promising, in the first Apparition, to take us to heaven. Otherwise, I think we would have died of fear and terror.

We then looked up at Our Lady, who said to us so kindly and so sadly:

"You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end: but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world".⁽⁷⁾

Further in the document Sister Lucia gives the account of the third secret.

"After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: 'Penance, Penance, Penance!'. And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it' a Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father'. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled

the souls that were making their way to God.” From http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

Sister Lucia has confirmed that Pope John Paul II has consecrated Russia as requested. In fact he consecrated the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Pope John Paul II was almost assassinated on 13th May 1981, the same day as the first apparition of Fatima. John Paul II attributed his miraculous survival to Our Lady, which sister Lucia agreed with. Communism was behind the attempt. “On 2 March 2006, an Italian parliamentary commission concluded that the Soviet Union was behind the attempt, in retaliation for John Paul II's support of Solidarity, the Catholic, pro-democratic Polish workers' movement, a thesis which had already been supported by Michael Ledeen and the United States Central Intelligence Agency at the time.” (Wikipedia, John Paul II) Pope John Paul II went on to place the bullet in the crown of the statue of Our Lady in Fatima. John Paul II had a crucial role in supporting Solidarity which brought down communism in Poland. Once Communism was defeated in Poland, it began to fall in other communist countries.

Here is part of the announcement made by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary Of the Vatican State, “The successive events of 1989 led, both in the Soviet Union and in a number of countries of Eastern Europe, to the fall of the Communist regimes which promoted atheism. For this too His Holiness offers heartfelt thanks to the Most Holy Virgin. In other parts of the world, however, attacks against the Church and against Christians, with the burden of suffering they bring, tragically continue. Even if the events to which the third part of the “secret” of Fatima refers now seem part of the past, Our Lady's call to conversion and penance, issued at the start of the twentieth century, remains timely and urgent today. “The Lady of the message seems to read the signs of the times—the signs of our time—with special insight... The insistent invitation of Mary Most Holy to penance is nothing but the manifestation of her maternal concern for the fate of the human family, in need of conversion and forgiveness” (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the 1997 World Day of the Sick*, No. 1, *Insegnamenti*, XIX, 2 [1996], 561).”

I would like to make the following points and recommendations.

- 1) This is a church approved apparition of Mary which has been followed and been successfully fulfilled, though there is still more work to be done.
- 2) God calls us to prayer and penance, particularly the Rosary. If you are ready to pray a rosary regularly, ideally daily, then go for it!
- 3) God invites us to consecrate ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. You have already been invited to consecrate yourself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I now invite you to consecrate yourself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Just as simple. “*I consecrate myself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*”. I now invite you to consecrate all major endeavors to both the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For example, “I consecrate this group to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Jesus name, Amen.” This is my personal secret of spiritual success, consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This week's passages

All the time Jesus is building up his disciples and apostles. The first 'cycle' is when Jesus is ministering, teaching and healing. Jesus is rejected by the Pharisees who plot with the Herodians to kill Jesus. Jesus responds with establishing the 12 apostles, the foundation of the Church, a new institution. This week we will see that he is teaching them using parables and we gain insight into what the first one means. Jesus does not explain the parables except for this first one. We will explore what the dynamics of the parables this week.

Day 1: The Sower Mk 4:1-9 and the Sower explained Mk 4:10-20

This is a crisis parable. To understand it you need to be in the crisis of faith. Will you believe or not? What kind of seed are you?

Maybe you are not ready to believe. There is a right time for everything. But this parable paints a very clear picture of belief and the need to be vigilant, to protect the seed of the word and let it grow. How do you think you can protect the seed and let it grow?

It may seem that God has decided who will believe and those who don't, but in fact it is up to us. Every decision we make leads us closer to God or further away. The question is do you want to be one of those who is granted the secrets of the kingdom of God or not? If you do want those secrets, then just ask for it and keep making decisions to read, reflect and seek God's love and light in your life and you will receive. Take a moment now to ask. You may like to write a prayer to ask for understand God's secrets.

Just to finish. Each day you read, you should ask for God to reveal his truth, wisdom and guidance to you particularly when you read the Bible and pray.

Day 2: Lamp and Stand Mk 4:21-25

The more you give, the more you will receive. Can you give an example of this?

God wants everyone to share. The poor can be so happy and the rich so sad. There is such a joy in giving.

Again a crisis, a decision, will you give?

Day 3: The Seed Growing Secretly Mk 4:26-29

If you give, God will work miracles around you. Remember Jesus has just formed the 12 apostles and is teaching them how to build the Church. By giving love and of themselves, the Church will grow and others will be transformed. The Church by giving will build a better world. Give and you will see change around you in others and in you - more than you could have asked for or imagined, in a mysterious way, in God's way.

Day 4: The Mustard Seed Mk 4:30-34

Do you sometimes think what can I do to change the world?

You are a small seed. But if you give of yourself to God, then through you, God can bring about amazing change in the world. Just look at saints like Padre Pio. The more you become little before God, and rely on His strength and help, the more you will change the world and build the kingdom of God on Earth.

Day 5: Jesus Walking on the Water 4:35-41

Who is Jesus that can command the wind and the waves?

Jesus wants to prevent natural disasters and stop plagues and drought. Our prayers to him can do this. We should pray for the world and those in drought, because he wants to give the rain. Take a moment to pray for those experiencing drought.

In fact, when Pope John Paul II after John Paul II beatified Mary Mackillop, there was a large amount of rain in New South Wales, much needed rain by the farmers. It was seen as the first miracle of Mary Mackillop after her Beatification. see

<http://www.catholicvoice.com.au/198/POPEPAGE2.PDF#search=%22Mary%20Mackillop%20Osdney%20rain%22> for more info.

Day 6: The Demoniac of Gadara Mk 5:1-20

The previous miracle and this exorcism and the following miracles all point to Jesus power. How does Jesus use his power?

Jesus has power. He uses his power. There is nothing wrong with power in and of itself. It all depends on how it is used.

Who does Jesus send to tell the good news of his healing to?

We should also tell our friends the good things God does for us.

Day 7: With Jairus Mk 5:21-43 and Rejected in His Own Country Mk 6:1-6a

Does Jesus know everything?

Here we have an insight into Jesus knowledge. He does not know who touched him, but he is aware 'power' has gone out of him. Jesus is limited to his humanity and to the power the Holy Spirit gives him. The Holy Spirit could have revealed who it was to him, but didn't. Jesus had to rely on others to call out to find out. This allowed the woman to come forward freely. She was afraid because according to the Law she was unclean and should be separate from the people, because she was bleeding. People would have rejected her if they knew. She risked being caste out when she told the truth, but Jesus did not reject her and sought her out actively. So too does Jesus seek out all those who feel rejected - he wants to heal and give peace. So much does Jesus love. He wants to give us peace and heal us.

Take some time to think about how each of the people felt being healed. How much Jesus wanted to help take other people's pain away. Jesus wants to keep doing that for everyone including you.

Jesus can even raise the dead. Death is no barrier for Jesus. If our life is in Jesus' hands, we should have no fear of death, since Jesus has control of even death. Again Jesus says to not say what happened. He wants to try to hide his power. All of this grand healings and miracles would have left an incredible impression on his disciples.

We finish with Jesus again being rejected. This brings an end to the second cycle. The first was when he was rejected by the Pharisees and Herodians. Now he is rejected by his own family. This would have been painful. But does it stop Jesus?

As we will see, it only seems to bring about more grace. Jesus will soon give his apostles the same power as him. There is no stopping grace. There is no stopping Jesus.

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