

“The Parable of The Heart”

The Rev Drew Willard
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2 Samuel 12:1-7a

Mark 4:1-20, 33-34

“With many parables of this kind, Jesus entertained the people;
But for revealing their meaning, he explained everything to his disciples.”
Mark 4:33-34

Let us pray... O God,
Help us to be open to the Good News that you are still speaking;
Help us to listen for and hear your message for us in our time.

Amen

Last week, I suggested that Jesus’ parables were a form of rap music
and I demonstrated this by telling a parable that way.
Perhaps some of you are disappointed that I didn’t do the same this week
for our Gospel lesson this morning...
Oh...good.

I am inclined to believe that – even among those of us gathered here,
there is a great variety of different styles of music that’d be preferred.
Yet I still think that given a choice – on the average,
it would not be rap.

Let’s see... “Montovani or Tupac Shakur...., Montovani... Tupac Shakur....,
Hmmm...

It is true that many popular forms of rap are filled with word images
that sensationalize drugs, violence, and disrespect to women,
but perhaps we should not dismiss all rap music
just because it has – well, a bad rap.

Rapping has actually been around a long time as a form of
‘spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics’ with or without accompaniment.
The word ‘rap’ itself may have its origins with the word, ‘repartee’
as in the sense of ‘fast, witty’ talk.

But rap as we have come to know it, started to become popular
in the African-American community around the late 1970s
as the ‘Old School’ period of themes celebrating good times.

This gave way to the ‘Golden Age’ of the late 1980s to early 1990s
when rap took on a harsher edge
of social commentary and outright vulgarity.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapping>

Willard, p.2

I had heard that one reason rap music caught on with school children during this time was because music programs were being cut in schools. They didn't have to have musical instruments to accompany a rapper when they could make sound effects by mouth to a percussive beat. The form itself was fun to do.

It was at a youth camp event – at a talent show,
when I first saw rap used in a positive, creative way.
This was a week-long activity at a conference center in New Hampshire as part of a summer tutoring program for inner city Boston children. One of their teachers got up on stage, with two of the kids doing back beats, while she sang,
My name is Luselena and can't you see; I do my rap so viciously.'
Needless to say, those kids responded with squeals of laughter.

So, was Jesus a rapper?
Not in the sense of being an entertainer –
though his parables would've been entertaining,
and certainly not with the kind of disrespect used these days.
But look at how rap is identified with a particular group –
black youth especially, but it's popular with white youth, too;
And these days young people throughout the world
are attracted to its rebellious style and themes of liberation.

Rap seems to be designed to keep outsiders out,
while teaching its particular values to insiders by using a unique lingo.
Jesus' parables seem to be used in the same manner –
keeping the hard-hearted Pharisees annoyed on the outside
while he explained the finer points of the Kingdom of Heaven
to his disciples on the inside.

And Jesus had to literally interpret this particular parable –
which is traditionally called, "The Parable of The Sower",
by going line by line.

Though I've heard that a better title for it ought to be "The Parable of the Soils",
I am inclined to think of it as "The Parable of The Heart".

It is the central story as you will see in this epic
"day in the life of Jesus" of Mark 2-5 that begins with
a cold reception by the Capernaum synagogue
despite Jesus' healing of someone,
followed by his fiery repartee in reply
to the Jerusalem scribes' deliberate insults.

Willard, p.3

Through the metaphor of different kinds of soil or ground,
Jesus compares this with various conditions of a person's heart.

The seed that is sown is the Word of God – or the Good News,
and the first example has the seed landing on a road;

This is the example of someone who has been hardened by life –
“street-smart”, so to speak, hard, packed down– nothing's growing there;

And the birds are those enemies in life who use ignorance
to maintain oppression and exploit others.

The rocky ground is like a person who avoids deep commitment
and doesn't really take anything to heart;

They're OK in fair weather, but too shallow to hang in there
when the going gets tough.

The patch of weeds and thorns is like someone caught up in addiction,
or whose heart is troubled by all kinds of cares and has no room
for others' concerns outside of their own.

You would think the sower would have just thrown seeds only onto
fields that had been plowed to begin with – but no!

Except that we wouldn't see how these other examples apply
to us from time to time;

And we probably wouldn't get around to asking this question:

Who is supposed to prepare the ground for the sower?

Who is supposed to plow the hard ground, dig up the rocks,
and pull up the weeds?

And who will do the harvesting?

I attended a retreat this weekend featuring renowned theologian,
John Dominic Crossan.

Part of his presentation was to compare the ministry of John the Baptist
with that of Jesus.

According to Mr. Crossan,

John the Baptist proclaimed the end times were going to happen soon,
that God would impose a violent retribution,

and that God hadn't acted yet because the people were to blame
for their sins and needed to repent,

and it was up to John to baptize everyone.

But when John was assassinated, his movement ended.

Jesus on the other hand said the Kingdom of Heaven is already here,

that God is nonviolent and would transform rather than destroy,

and that all people are to benefit but they need to get involved
for the Kingdom of Heaven to become evident.

Willard, p.4

The point is that salvation is not something God does for us,
but it is something that God has enabled to happen
for us to do in collaboration with God.

And that this work is not limited to personal salvation,
but for the transforming liberation of communities as well.

Our church is already doing so many wonderful projects
like Prayer Shawls, Mission Kits and Food Pantry donations,
the suitcase drive, CROP Walk and in many other ways.

These activities can bring us into contact with our surrounding communities –
and help us get out there to meet and get to know people
who are like you and me – just in a different situation.

That's another function of parables –
creating empathy for others by hearing their stories – and our own;
And this may lead us to change what we're doing, like King David.

This leads to more cooperation and a broader understanding
within our community and within ourselves
about what it means to be human and
about what God's love means for us all.

To do that we need hearts that are open to welcome the truth
and affirm people to be who they are –
to have a heart that can hear.

And whoever has hearts that can hear these days,
really needs to be listening.

Amen

*In our lesson today from 2 Samuel 12:1-7a,
the prophet Nathan tells a parable to King David
that awakens in him empathy for someone else
and remorse for his own wrongdoing.*

¹And [the Lord] sent Nathan the prophet to tell this story to David:

"A rich man and a poor man
lived in the same town.

²The rich man owned a lot of sheep and cattle,
³but the poor man had only one little lamb
that he had bought and raised.

The lamb became a pet for him and his children.
He even let it eat from his plate and drink from his cup
and sleep on his lap.

The lamb was like one of his own children.

⁴One day someone came to visit the rich man,
but the rich man didn't want to kill any of his own sheep or cattle
and serve it to the visitor.

So he stole the poor man's little lamb and served it instead."

⁵David was furious with the rich man and said to Nathan,
"I swear by the living LORD that the man who did this
deserves to die!

⁶And because he didn't have any pity on the poor man,
he will have to pay four times what the lamb was worth."

⁷Then Nathan told David:

"You are that rich man!"

Inspired by Mark 4:1-19, 33-34

AND JESUS WENT BACK
TO TEACH BESIDE THE SEA.
AS A GREAT CROWD GATHERED BEFORE HIM,
HE, THEN, GOT INTO A BOAT JUST OFFSHORE
TO SIT DOWN WHILE ALL THE PEOPLE REMAINED ON THE BEACH.
AND HE TAUGHT THEM THROUGH MANY PARABLES
AND IN HIS TEACHING, HE SAID,
“LISTEN...IMAGINE...
A FARMER WENT OUT TO SOW AND WHILE CASTING SEEDS,
SOME FELL ALONG THE STREET.
BUT BIRDS CAME AND ATE THEM UP.
THEN OTHER SEEDS FELL ON ROCKY GROUND
WHERE THERE WAS NOT A LOT OF DIRT.
AND SOON AFTER, THEY SPRANG UP
DESPITE THE SHALLOW SOIL.
BUT WITH THE RISING OF THE SUN,
THEY WERE SCORCHED.
SO, HAVING NO DEEP ROOTS,
THEY WITHERED AWAY.
THEN OTHER SEEDS FELL AMONG THE BRAMBLES
WHERE THE THORNS THRIVED
BUT THESE SEEDS YIELDED NO GRAIN.
AT LAST,
SOME SEEDS FELL INTO THE PREPARED GROUND
WHERE THEY GREW UP AND YIELDED GRAIN
30 TIMES, 60 TIMES, EVEN UP TO 100 TIMES
AS MUCH AS WAS PLANTED.”
AND JESUS SAID,
“WHOEVER HAS EARS THAT CAN HEAR,
HAD BETTER BE LISTENING...”

AND WITH MANY PARABLES OF THIS KIND,
HE ENTERTAINED THE PEOPLE,
BUT FOR REVEALING THEIR MEANING,
HE EXPLAINED EVERYTHING TO THE DISCIPLES.