

The Power of the Parable

16th Week of Ordinary Time – Matthew 13:24-43

Jesus is on a mission to call forth the Kingdom one disciple at a time. His use of the power of parable is at an extreme high this week as the gospel opens up three significant and vivid stories that give the listener an ever increasing image and meaning to the Kingdom of God. A parable is a story that provides for the listener a moral lesson which is set in the context of everyday living. Jesus' use of seeds and weeds is a great illustration of how this type of genre works.

There is nothing more beautiful than to drive across Iowa in the summer and see the fields full of corn and soybeans. There is a sense that everything is right with the world when the seed has flourished and the harvest looks abundant. When crops fail due to the lack or abundance of rain, pests or an infestation of weeds, our lives can change dramatically. Seeds have the potential to produce fruit and grain for both human and animal life. We need seeds to live. We depend on a bountiful harvest to sustain, not only our lives but our livelihoods. If the crops of Iowa fail, it impacts everyone, not just the farmer.

Jesus' first parable of a man sowing seed, only to have his enemy sow in weeds, is an unbelievable story. Who would be so cruel? Who would be so sinister to actually sabotage another person's livelihood? Yet, it happens today just as it did at the time of Jesus. Today the parable might be about a small town business whose computer is hacked and personal information of customers is stolen and compromised or a virus is uploaded only to destroy the good work being done. Evil is still evil no matter if it is packaged as weeds or a computer virus. Evil is still alive and well and living in our high-tech, digital world. And yet the lesson, the moral of the story, is that the final judgment is not ours but God's.

We are called, as Jesus illustrates, to be like the mustard seed, the smallest seed that produces the largest bush. The Kingdom of God is about the potential that each one of us holds in terms of the good that we can do. We all have the potential to be full-grown Christians, ever ready to meet the demands and suffering of the world for the sake of the gospel and growth of the Kingdom.

Like yeast, we are called to grow and expand the Kingdom in our own lives. We are called by Christ to be his disciples, permeating the world with the leaven of Good News about God's love and mercy. Yet in this little parable of the yeast lies the truth that to work yeast into flour, to kneed the dough and allow it to become bread takes effort, patience and a life-time commitment to do the work of God. To advance the message of Christ demands a lot of work by each disciple.

The parable is a tool that scripture scholars say Jesus uses to illustrate a teaching. The power of story can charm and enchant the listener, opening them up to accept the truth that is hidden and imbedded in the narrative. The power of the parable calls the listener to think, to reflect and to discern what Jesus is saying about the Kingdom of God and what that means for our lives. In doing so, seeds become the children of God, yeast becomes our work for the Kingdom and the smallest of seeds becomes the largest potential to bring forth the fullness and power of the Kingdom of God.

Blessings!
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