

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The Money Lender

Sept 18, 2011

**Psalm 145:1-9 and Luke 7:36-50
(Hymns – 474, 326, 682, 652)**

I want to talk a little bit this morning about where the parables happen,
where Jesus tells these stories
that were remembered and passed around for forty years
within and among the Christian communities
until they were written down and compiled in the four gospels.

Jesus is travelling around.
He is moving from town to town throughout Galilee
(refer to map on p.369 at back of pew Bibles) –
Capernaum at the beginning of ch 7 near the north end of the Sea of Galilee
and Nain in vs.11 toward the south end.

His reputation as a wise and provocative teacher
is spreading rapidly and drawing crowds.
In chs 6 & 7, he is with the apostles,
a large number of disciples, and a large crowd of people
from all over Judea, from Jerusalem,
and from the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon.
In addition, he is constantly attracting opposition
from the Pharisees and scribes,
teachers of the law in the Jewish tradition
who find Jesus more and more irritating.
He is challenging their interpretation of the law,
their position and their power within their community.

People had come over 100 kms
to experience the wisdom and presence and power of Jesus.
There was healing and guidance in that presence.
People who were normally outcast
and on the margins of the community
found full acceptance with Jesus.
They were respected and honoured for who they could become.
Their past did not separate them from God.
They were welcomed into the presence of Jesus.

People sensed that God was with them
in an especially intimate way
in the presence of Jesus Christ.

And they were right.
God was with them in the flesh,
“full of grace and truth” as John would say in his gospel,
establishing a kingdom that would never end, as Luke says in his gospel.
That what all the teaching and the conversations it provoked were about –
a community or kingdom full of grace and truth
because of the constant presence of God in Jesus Christ
through the continual working of the Holy Spirit.

So, the presence of God in Jesus draws a crowd –
apostles, disciples, the curious, and the contentious.

There is also a lot of indifference.
As a proportion of the population of Judea in those days,
even a large crowd would constitute a small minority.
Awareness of, interest in, and loyalty to Jesus as the Christ
spread slowly – person to person.
People talked about what they had seen and heard,
what they had experienced in Jesus’ presence,
what others had seen and heard and experienced.
They created a ‘buzz’ that intrigued and attracted people.
They witnessed and testified –
it was simply talking sincerely about what was important to them –
about the intimacy with God they experienced in Jesus presence.

That closeness or intimacy, as Thomas Keating wrote,
is beyond anything we could dream or imagine on our own.
It’s “a closeness that is totally loving, concerned,
nourishing, supportive, sympathetic, empathetic –
every human relationship that is beautiful and good and true
all rolled into one and multiplied millions of times over.”

So the parables happen in the midst of the crowds
as they begin to experience the fullness of God’s presence.
They also happen in the midst of ordinary, daily life.
Jesus is coming to meet people on their own turf.
He’s not waiting in some Temple for them to come to him.
He’s walking the roads, teaching on the hillsides and beaches,
resting in the shade, accepting invitations to dinner.
In all of those places, he’s engaging in conversations.

The kingdom of heaven that is so loving, concerned,
nourishing, supportive, sympathetic, and empathetic
spreads one conversation after another.

That is how the Holy Spirit works her wonders –
connecting people to the source and sustenance of their being in Jesus Christ
one conversation after another.

Where the parables happen and have their impact
is in those conversations.

The story of the money lender happens
in the midst of a conversation about who's in and who's out,
who's acceptable and who's not,
who shows appropriate appreciation and gratitude and who doesn't.

Love in human beings arises out of gratitude for a gracious gift –
forgiveness of debt by the money lender,
acceptance of the prostitute by Jesus.

The prostitute lavishes Jesus with the most outrageous attention
and he accepts it with grace and humility.

Not only that, but he sees in the woman
his opponents, like Simon the Pharisee, miss.

He sees her faith, her great love,
her deep gratitude for the acceptance that carries with it forgiveness,
the salvation and the peace that opens up a new life for her.

The parables are stories about this kind of life,
this kind of community – the kingdom of heaven –
where acceptance, forgiveness, salvation, and peace happen.

They are stories about the kind of life and community
that is experienced in faith here at Brentwood Presbyterian Church.

There's not a big crowd here – yet.

But there is a faithful and friendly group of disciples,
followers of Jesus Christ keen to learn more
about how to be Christ's church in and for the world.

The reason Jesus told these stories in the places he told them
was so his friends and followers could become these parables
for themselves and others,

so we could see more clearly

what the presence of Jesus Christ enables us to be in and for the world.

I trust something like that has happened for you this morning.