

Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Harriet Burke

Reflections on **1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Rom. 8; 28-30; Matt. 13:44-52** (2014-0726)

For three weeks now we have been hearing parables in Matthew's gospels. Last week Mary Becker referred to Jesus as a jokester, sometimes using humor to get his point across. The week before that Suzanne described parables as something like an earthquake intended to wake us up and cause us to think.

Cynthia Bourgeault says parables are profound paradoxes that are intended to turn the mind upside down and push us into new ways of seeing.

Jesus was a wisdom teacher who spoke the language of story. He asked questions that brought people to new and deeper understandings by using parables that could help transform lives.

One of the things I love about parables is that they are multi-layered. Let me explain what I mean by telling you a story.

Last week I met with four friends. It was great to be together, as it is rare for the five of us to find a date and time that works. The conversation was light and joyful as we reconnected, but at one point the conversation shifted and we each began to speak more deeply about our where we are on our spiritual journey. One spoke of her mother's recent death after 14 years of being a caregiver; another asked me how long it had been since my husband Chuck's death and if it felt like a long time or simply yesterday. She wondered about

the changes I have made in my life because of the loss of my close companion. Another reflected on a new image of God in prayer at a family dinner. Husbands, health, children, friends and experiences were talked about.

We each spoke, we each listened and revered one another, and then quite surprisingly we realized that over two hours had passed in what seemed like a fraction of that time. We reluctantly gathered our things while marveling at what had happened in our conversation.

We all noticed that we had moved to another level. Our stories had brought us to a deep, enveloping intimacy—a rare thing. It was touching. As we departed we each commented how Eucharistic our gathering was. We had fed, nourished and brought life to each other. I wanted that time of intimacy to last forever.

My story touches on what I mean when I say that parables are multi-layered. Yes, we had enjoyed a great conversation, and we had also celebrated birthdays and we heard words of wisdom from the birthday women, but on a third and deeper level, I believe we were gifted with the presence of God in one another and in our midst. Who would not want that to last forever?

Looking at two of today's parables - the found treasure and the pearl of great price, I would think that the ears,

minds and hearts of the disciples were touched differently, according to where they were on life's journey. One may have heard a charming and amazing treasure story; while others might have considered that they should always be *alert* not to miss an opportunity for surprising wealth; but others got it in another way. *Jesus* was the treasure and nothing else mattered. They understood that all-consuming desire to give up everything and have a relationship with him, no matter the cost.

Each parable today starts with "The *Kindom* of God" or "The *Kindom* of Heaven" . . . What images come to mind when hearing those words?

Sometimes I go back to my Catholic elementary school education and think of a reward in the afterlife. But as adults we know that the *Kindom* of God or the *Kindom* of Heaven is speaking about God being present and working effectively in our everyday lives. It's as Luke writes, "the *Kindom* of Heaven is in your midst." I believe it is about transformation in this life—that the *Kindom* is the here and now.

Many might say to us, "There is no way *this* is heaven!" Think of the recent vicious acts: the shooting down of the Malaysian airliner killing 298 people; the reception Americans are giving to unaccompanied children coming up from Central America, or the bloodshed in Gaza. We have havoc all around us.

But parables help us to see things in a new way by changing our perspective so we can experience an intimacy with God and one another. Two recent instances come to mind when I believe I, have come face to face with the Holy, with God.

I was in San Diego visiting my granddaughter, Jennie, her husband, Troy and their three little girls a couple

of months ago. As we chatted, Jennie was nursing her four-month-old, Avalon. I told Jennie what a lovely image they were *for me* of the Madonna and child.

She said that some people make a fuss when she attempts to nurse in public. I wondered at how we, as a society, have come to idolize and idealize young women's bodies in attempts to sell everything from clothing, cars, television shows and movies, yet we are not in awe of the natural beauty of a modern day bare breasted Madonna with child. To me, both Jennie and Avalon represent a profound intimacy of nourishment, self-giving, care and compassion.

The Madonna image caused me to think of the children traveling such an unimaginable journey of fear from Central America. Wouldn't each of us in this room want to welcome them with open arms and hold them close to our hearts; to cover their ears so they wouldn't have to hear the taunts of rejection?

It seems to me that parables abound in the day to day if we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

I mentioned two instances of coming face to face with God. The second has to do knowing Dennis and Tensie Apel, who are so generous to bring marginalized people to mind for all of us by their choice of living a life of poverty at Catholic Worker in Guadalupe. It's not just that they are living on the margins *with* the poor; it is also their (Dennis and Tensie's) commitment to tell us the story of how their lives are intertwined and *forever* changed by walking with those who come to Catholic Worker for help.

After Jesus told the three parables in today's gospel, he asked the disciples if

they understood what he was saying, to which they answered, "Yes." We only have to talk with Dennis and Tenise for a few moments to know how privileged they feel to experience a relationship, a kinship, with the migrant workers and poor. Their "Yes" is to living Jesus' prayer and dream, "that we all may be one."

So what do these parables mean for us today? I would like to suggest that as part of our prayer time this week we

ponder how we have found Jesus, the *great* treasure, right under our feet.

What parables have you experienced recently? What are the deeper stories, treasure stories that have drawn you into intimacy with family, friends and God?

And do these parables call you to some kind of action?

May we continue to be blessed with eyes to see and ears to hear at our beloved Church of the Beatitudes. Amen.