

Come, Lord Jesus – make these words your Word, that our hearts may become your heart. Amen.

How do you learn best? Some people learn best by reading and retaining; some by hearing and discussing; some by images or logic; some by movement. How do you learn best? Long before pedagogy and educational theory were a thing, It seems that Jesus knew something about learning styles. He taught using lectures; he taught using stories; he taught using the body and the senses – on the night before he died he taught them about servanthood by getting down on his knees and washing their feet – the water on their skin a more vivid lesson than mere words would be. He was a teacher.

So far this Lent, we've looked at Jesus as all God/all human; as Healer; as Justice-Maker. Today it's Teacher. The gospels show us a Jesus who taught all the time – that was his main job. Rabbi means teacher, and really wise men attracted followers whose main desire was to learn from them. So he would teach his followers as they walked from one place to another, using the conversations they were having to take them deeper into understanding the Life of God. Disciples arguing about who among them was the greatest? Jesus used that to give them a lesson about humility in leadership. He watches a self-important leader ostentatiously put his tithe into the treasury and a poor widow put in her pittance, and teaches about sacrificial giving. A lawyer comes up to ask about how to inherit eternal life? Jesus teaches them about what it truly means to be – and accept – a neighbor. His hostess fusses at him about the fact that her sister is not helping in the kitchen – and Jesus uses that to teach that of the spiritual life is to be the priority, and that a woman's place may be in theological discussion with the men.

With his disciples Jesus often gave the lesson straight on. But with the crowds and outsiders, he often used stories, deceptively simple stories about ordinary people – shepherds, fishermen, housewives, farmers, managers, fathers and sons. He would say, "The Kingdom of God is like..." and then tell a story of one line or multiple scenes, stories that you always think you know the end to but he would end it with a twist.

The kingdom of God is like a pearl that, once you find it, you would sell every other thing you own to possess it. Huh? What kind of pearl is that?

The kingdom of God is like a manager who pays everyone the same no matter how many hours they've worked. Huh? What kind of fairness is that?

The kingdom of God is like a father who forgives the son who has disowned him. Huh? What kind of parenting is that? What kind of mercy?

Jesus also taught by example, not choosing the best seats but waiting for invitation; forgiving people many others would cast out of polite society; healing lepers and other "unclean" people; walking on water and stilling storms to demonstrate the authority God has given us over the natural world. Jesus was always teaching. How do you learn best?

Our reading today from Paul's letter to the Ephesians is an example of learning by discourse, a reasoned argument about our being saved not by our own doing but solely by what Jesus did for us: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Most of us can understand that, but it's in the head.

Look at how Jesus made a similar point, *'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.*

Jesus illustrates the point that what is most important to us is beyond our capacity – it is up to the sower. But we have a role in these good works:

But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

Radically different ways of giving the same lesson.

He wanted people to know what the realm of God is like, how it works, what its values are, and how we can connect to that fiercely accepting love.

If we want the people around us to know this love, this grace, this power, we too will learn to teach in the spirit of Jesus, sometimes in words,

sometimes in actions and by example, sometimes, maybe in subversive stories.

How would you tell someone what the realm of God is like?

Can we practice it? Take a moment to think of an example of what God-life is like. Just fill in: The Kingdom or the Realm of God is like....
And then tell someone around you.

Amen!

Mark 4:26-34

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.