

The Veiled Language of Parables

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalms 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34

In the Disney film, "Mary Poppins", one of the more aggravating qualities of the magical nanny, to Mr. George Banks, is that he cannot understand her eccentric ways that seem to energize his children as he, their father, never could. When he asks her to explain the madness of a band of chimney sweeps taking over his home, she responds simply, "I never explain anything", leaving her friend Bert to clarify in a way that leaves Mr. Banks dumbfounded and shamed at his own lack of adequate fatherhood.

One of the more frustrating qualities of Jesus' preaching, especially to his detractors, is that He, too, does not clearly communicate much of His message regarding the Kingdom of God. He cures the sick while ordering them to tell no one. He speaks of a kingdom while rejecting any effort to make Him

king. He tells his listeners to read the "signs of the times" without clarifying what signs to look for. Finally, Jesus engages in indirect, artistic descriptions; parables that communicate both His message and the nature of the Kingdom He preaches, but rarely, except in the parable of the sower, relates a clear metaphorical meaning to each item, character and situation of the story.

Rather than clarifying a difficult point or concept, the parables of Jesus seem designed to *create* difficulties to enhance the mystery of the Kingdom and to make it more compelling for the listener even though the listener does not fully

understand. Jesus does not make the truth of His message immediately apparent. Rather, He hides the truth through veiled language and comparative images, leaving the listener to ponder more deeply the mystery of His message.

To the disciples, Jesus explains everything in private, although, with few exceptions, the evangelist does not tell us what the explanation is. To the crowds, understanding would come after the Resurrection, when the Holy Spirit clarified everything for the purpose of evangelization, but not without full assent of faith to the

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message and messiahship of Jesus Himself. For the rest, their inability, or in some cases refusal, to understand is due to a hardness of heart, which motivates Jesus to speak only in parables, so that "seeing they do not perceive, and

hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand" (Matt 13:13).

As an artistic means of communicating His message, Jesus' use of parables creates in us a yearning to understand. It motivates us to search that we may find, and to ponder that we might discern the significance of the Kingdom that is at the heart of the message. To communicate something that is completely foreign to this world, Jesus uses something familiar to it to describe its attributes and communicate its qualities. Moreover, these qualities are so far beyond our comprehension, that it requires a letting go

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of this world to fully embrace it; a letting go of the hardness of heart that binds us to this world so that we can come to comprehend the other-worldliness of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus does us a great favor in refusing to spoon-feed us. Jesus "never explains anything." Rather, He draws us in, coercing us to search for that Kingdom; compelling us to turn away from the worldliness that hardens our hearts, so that

our hearts can embrace the other-worldliness of the Gospel given by Christ through Matthew, John, Luke and Mark -- becoming hearts of true human beings made in God's image, hearts with a faith that soars like an eagle, hearts of faith that are as robust as an ox, and maybe even, the heart of a lion.

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