

Lenten Series 2019

A Parable Journey: The Stories Jesus Told, and the Stories We Tell Ourselves

This is a Lenten series about journeying through the wilderness, using the parable of Jesus, and how sometimes we tell ourselves stories that aren't quite what Jesus taught. We tell ourselves the "cliff notes" version, the easy-to-understand way, because when we go deeper, we find it is much harder. The road is longer than we thought (or as Bilbo Baggins once said, "The road is ever long"). But in the end, though the journey is hard, it is worth it, and we understand more fully the story of God, what Jesus has taught us, and our own, true story as Christians.

Imagery: road maps or GPS, water bottles, wilderness plants, a winding path

March 10, 2019—First Sunday of Lent

Starting In the Wilderness

(The Wilderness, and the Parable of the Sower)

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13; Luke 8:4-15

Jesus went into the wilderness, where he faced temptation. Our season of Lent begins with this story in Jesus' life, and our 40 days of Lent (not counting Sundays) from Ash Wednesday through Easter is a time of reflecting upon our own wilderness. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus speaks of how a sower went out to sow and some of the seeds fell on soil that didn't nourish it, but others fell on good, fertile soil, and grew. We often read this parable and assume we want to be the good soil that holds fast and firm to the seed from God. But perhaps we can read the parable differently, and that we are being called to go into the wilderness, where the soil is difficult for the seeds to take root. Perhaps we need to shift our thinking from focusing on ourselves and how God's spirit is growing, and instead look to the needs of the wilderness around us and be present there. We will be wandering together for the next six weeks, to see where God needs us to help things grow. With the theme of the wilderness, we know that things grow differently in the desert and wild places than they do in farmlands. If we pick up and try to plant what we know, it may not grow. Instead, we must pay attention to the wilderness, even when it's wild and unfamiliar, listen to the stories there, and help God's seeds to grow.

March 17, 2019—Second Sunday of Lent

Stopping Along The Way

(Parable of the Good Samaritan)

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

When Jesus was questioned by a lawyer first on what he must do to inherit eternal life, and then asked "who is my neighbor," Jesus told this parable of a man who fell into the hands of robbers and was left for dead on the side of the road. Neither the priest, nor the Levite (an associate of the priesthood) would stop to help the man, but a Samaritan, from a religious group outside of the Jewish people, someone they would have seen as an enemy, someone they would've despised. We read this parable and often see the faults of the first two who passed by the wounded man. But what if the wounded man

was a drunk, or a drug addict? What if they were chronically homeless or mentally ill? Would you still stop to help the one in need?

March 24, 2019—Third Sunday of Lent
When We Think We've Gone Far Enough
(Parable of the Rich Fool)
Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Someone asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide his family inheritance with him. Jesus replies with a question of his own: "Friend, who set me to be a judge over you?" He then warns them to take care of all kinds of greed, and tells a parable of a rich man who had so much grain he didn't know what to do, so he built bigger barns to store it in so he'd have many years of prosperity. That night, God told him that his life was demanded of him, and now, who would own the wealth he'd accumulated? Who would get to enjoy it? Jesus warns against storing up treasures for themselves. We try to live as Jesus taught, but we continue to build bigger barns. We continue to worry about not having enough for ourselves. We continue to make our own plans for the future while our siblings on the streets go in need.

March 31, 2019—Fourth Sunday of Lent
Straying From The Path
(Parable of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son)
Scripture: Luke 15:1-32

This collection of three parables were told after some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day began grumbling about the people Jesus was eating with, particularly tax collectors, and "sinners." As with Luke 5:29-32, Jesus makes it clear he didn't come to hang out with religious people. Religious people know their way. Instead, Jesus has come to find those who are lost, like the forgiving father who runs out to meet his returning son. So we are called to go out, to seek, and to welcome those who may have left or those who have struggled in their journeys. We are called sometimes to be the ones that stray, in order to seek those who are lost or left out.

April 7, 2019—Fifth Sunday of Lent
Taking the Risky Route
(Parable of the Pounds/Talents)
Scripture: Luke 19:11-27 (or Matthew 25:14-30)

(Matthew's account uses talents, Luke's uses pounds, but both are measurements of money). This is an unsettling parable, one in which a nobleman has entrusted ten of his slaves with a pound. The first two have taken the pound and have made more, but the last one did not do anything with his, afraid of losing it, and afraid of this "harsh" master who reaped where he did not sow. The parable has a rather harsh ending, for those who did not want the nobleman to be king, they are slaughtered in his presence. Jesus tells this parable in Luke's account right before entering Jerusalem, and he knows that he himself will be slaughtered instead. When Jesus speaks of reaping where he did not sow, some scholars have

indicated he's speaking of the future ministry among the Gentiles. However, seeing how this takes place right after staying with Zacchaeus, a tax collector, Jesus seems to be indicating that God is reaping wherever religious folks have assumed God is not present. God is with the outcasts. God is with those we forget to think about or don't want to think about. And if we aren't willing to risk our reputations and our routines, we are bound to lose. If we hold on to what we have to save ourselves, we will lose it all.

April 14, 2019—Palm Sunday

A Different Way

(Entry into Jerusalem, and the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants)

Scripture: Luke 19:28-40; 20:9-19

Jesus entered Jerusalem, not on a war horse, but on a donkey. The prophet Zechariah in 9:9 alludes to how God's chosen would enter Jerusalem, in humility rather than in power, on a donkey instead of a horse. After Jesus is in Jerusalem, nearing his death, he teaches in the temple and tells a parable of a vineyard, drawing similarities from Isaiah 5:1-7. While the parable is an allusion to Jesus' death, it is also a window into a different view of atonement: that God sent Jesus, knowing that he would be rejected, but God's purpose in sending Jesus was to proclaim the reign of God. While much is made of Christ's death as a sacrifice to atone for sins, the Gospel accounts themselves simply tell the story of what happened. This parable opens us to other possibilities, including knowing that our loving God did not want this to happen, but it happened, and how do we make sense out of the story of Jesus' death? How do we make sense out of the violence that is still occurring in our world? How do we find a different way other than retribution? Jesus, after quoting Psalm 118, that the stone rejected has become the cornerstone, declares that those who fall on that stone will be broken. When we reject the people that God has included, we will break apart. When we seek violence and retribution, we will be crushed. Jesus has shown us a different way.