

Parable: *a revolving door that can convey you beyond or right back to where you are*

July is our month of parables. A parable is a brief method of not just instruction but of *stimulation*. In other words, you don't just *read* them; you are expected to react to them – as if you were *struck* (physically) or jettisoned by them into a new sense of self – a new way of being and behaving. They are brief narratives, like tiny grenades that can cause a minor explosion in your brain, your imagination – unless they become a dud thanks to your absent-mindedness. In literature outside the Gospels our modern short story may pass as a parable. Consider Eudora Welty's "A Curtain of Green".

Here we are told of a Mrs. Larkin who in a small Mississippi town spends her time working her garden despite the extreme heat of a summer's day. People watching from windows wonder how she can stand the heat, her hair uncombed, eyes dull, tirelessly chopping away. She is angry – and understandably, since her husband recently died in a freak accident, leaving her looking for anything to do – like planting *every kind of flower she could order from a catalogue* chaotically, frantically. On this day her grief reached a climax; she raised her hoe to strike her helper Jamey as he stooped to his task. [Now the revolving door] *At that moment, the rain came . . . like the wings of a bird alighting . . .* Mrs. Larkin fainted, to possibly awaken to a sense of life as soft and refreshing as the rain?

But then Eudora Welty has this other parable about "A Campfire Girl" named Marian, who, perhaps to acquire a merit badge, pays a visit to an Old Ladies Home. She brings a plant and an apple as gifts. She is escorted to a room inhabited by two "old ladies" – one feebly up and about, the other bedridden. The one snatches the potted plant; the other referring to it as "Stinkweeds". The women get into a screaming argument; they apparently can't stand each other – or more likely their aged condition – so closeted. One begins to cry. [Revolving door?] *Marian ran from the room, . . . past the nurse . . . out into the cold air. 'Wait for me!' she shouted* to a passing bus. Once on board, she ate the apple she had kept for herself.

In each case a critical event that summons each out of the confusion of existence into a more gracious way of being. Such moments amount to the seedlings that the Gospels sow that can take root and fructify or - as in Marian's case – land upon trodden or rocky soil and dry up. Or as in next week's Gospel parables: of a merchant seeking fine pearls who finds one valuable beyond his wildest dreams – and sells all that he owns to own *that* pearl, indeed his life *renewed*. Or a man stumbles across a buried treasure that invites him, challenges him to take advantage of it and radically change his life (in ways more than just economical). Both "revolutions" that advance one's humanity!

However there is another very old version of the buried treasure parable that says that the man in whose field it was buried without his knowing it, then left the field to his son who also unwittingly sold it to another who in plowing *did* discover it and invested it to increase his wealth. In other words, those first two had a chance, a summons to become rich human beings in Christ's sense of rich – but ignorantly by passed the chance. So beware: life ain't that long!

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