

“Why do you speak to them in parables”

The early church ran into much opposition from the defenders of orthodoxy, namely the Pharisees who held to a strict, legalist conformity to the Law of Moses. Jesus and his closest disciples were much too loose for them. Jesus often spoke to the people *not* in the standard idiom of Pharisaical language, warnings, cautions, retribution, *but in parables*. He told stories, described episodes and said: “That’s what God’s kind of world is like and the story also tells you a lot about yourself.”

Of course people, used to catechisms, may have had a hard time with Jesus’ story approach – because it left an element of mystery for them to figure out – or discover. And that meant changing the way one thinks - which is what the Gospel word for conversion (*metanoia*) means.

So when he says the realm or world of God is like a treasure buried in a field he is not simply describing the realm or world of God but describing how a person will feel if he or she, while spading the ground, finds a chest containing countless “pieces of eight”. One will experience an awakening, astonishment, suddenly rich in understanding what life is about, what our world is about. And he will also be surprised to realize that the treasure is himself, buried for so long under fear of God, constant defensiveness, amounting to nobody or nothing – as when a teacher told him he was stupid for chewing gum in line. “No! Jesus tells me I’m a treasure that has been buried for too long. Time now for me to step into the world as the benefit I can be to all.”

As if that were not enough to rejuvenate someone, Jesus tells a similar story about a pearl (it had to be a rare natural pearl if it was “of great price.”). Again, as with the discovered treasure, discovering what God’s world is like in terms of finding such a pearl, should knock one head over heels. So again, Jesus is not describing the world of God (although he is the walking presence of it), but describing *the effect* its discovery can have on the way you live and think and love. This parable also presses closer to home in so far as it describes *you* – not as a face in the crowd, ordinary, your life a throwaway but as a pearl worth a fortune. But do you ever feel that way? And why not, since that’s what you are?

And then there is his story describing the realm of God, God’s kind of world, like the casting of a net into the sea – and up it comes full of fish, containing a catch that is both worthwhile and unmarketable.

Too often we read such a parable as if we are the worthwhile fish and *other people* are the unmarketable and unremarkable. (And we secretly relish their fate.) Bad habit. For we are *everything in the net*; we are so very worthwhile but there is much about you and me that we’d like to throw back: bad habits, crankiness, moodiness, arrogance, intolerance, cheap. Things we may want to sort out over time until we are as whole as Christ would have us BE.

Don't let the Pharisees mess up your minds. Listen to stories designed to surprise you, and clarify what our world and we ourselves should be like. And how excited we should be.