

❖ Other Voices ❖

Parables are best defined as stories with two levels of meaning: the story level provides a mirror by which reality is perceived and understood. In effect, parables are imaginary gardens with real toads in them.

KLINE SNODGRASS, “Parables,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (1992)

Then the students came and asked [Jesus], “Why are you giving it to them in Comparisons?”

“Because,” he said, “they have not been let in on the secrets of the God Movement like you have. When a man has them, he’ll be given more and will have plenty; when a person doesn’t have them, he’ll lose even what he has. The reason, then, that I give it to them in Comparisons is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or catching on. This passage from Isaiah applies to them:

‘They strain their ears and never catch on;
for the hearts of these people are hard,
and their ears are dull,
and their eyes are dim.
Otherwise, their eyes might see,
and their ears might hear,
and their hearts might understand,
and they might turn around,
and I’ll make them well.’

But you, you should be truly thankful that your eyes see and your ears hear. For indeed many sincere and just men of God would have given their eyeteeth to see and hear what you are experiencing, but they never had the chance.”

MATTHEW 13:10-17 (Clarence Jordan, *Cotton Patch* translation, 1970)

Conversation takes place when one party has something new and interesting to say to the other.... One must say something engaging and original, something with an element of mystery. The Church must sound strange to the world if it is not to be dull.

KARL BARTH, *Karl Barth's Table Talk* (1963)

Evangelization for Jesus was generally by means of parables that were often so bewilderingly allusive that his disciples would ask further explana-

tions of his meanings.... Parables invite the hearer's interest with familiar settings and situations but finally veer off into the unfamiliar, shattering their homey realism and insisting on further reflection and inquiry. We have the uneasy feeling that *we* are being interpreted even as we interpret them.

RON HANSEN , *A Stay Against Confusion: Essays on Faith and Fiction* (2002)

The language of metaphor or poetic images yields not one-dimensional meaning but an expansive suggestiveness or elasticity of meaning. Though parables are not Rorschach tests for undisciplined free association, we can rightly think of a certain polyvalence of meaning in them. They may invite us to more than one trajectory of reflection, more than one possibility for decision.

PAUL SIMPSON DUKE , *The Parables* (2005)

The exploration of Jesus' parables in conjunction with comparative texts from both Jewish and Hellenistic-Roman narratives is not merely an exercise in literary and historical "priority" or "superiority." Instead what we can learn is that the parables of Jesus were not told in a literary, cultural, social, and historical vacuum. The parables were created and preserved in conversations with their cultural environments, and they partake, vigorously at times, in that dialogical social discourse.

DAVID B. GOWLER , *What Are They Saying About the Parables?* (2000)

Parables are metaphors for God. Speaking them, Jesus was "throwing alongside" (*para-bolē*) the Infinite these earthy images and strange plots.... Such an enterprise has its limits: "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, as though we were alike?" (Isaiah 46:5). No image encapsulates God; no metaphor is adequate to divine mystery. This is why Jesus, like the prophets, sages, and psalmists before him, could not limit his figurative speech for God to one or two metaphors, but sang out a superabundance of them. He did not "throw alongside" God an image and say, "There it is!" He flung great sprays of them, like stars, and left us looking up in wonder.

PAUL SIMPSON DUKE , *The Parables* (2005)

Michel Quoist reminds us that "If we knew how to listen to God, if we knew how to look around us, our whole life would become prayer." Yes, that is precisely what we want to have happen. We want to *see* and *listen* so that all of life becomes a prayer. Jesus told parables precisely to get people to do so.

E. GLENN HINSON , "Improving our Seeing and Listening," in *Mysticism, Christian Reflection* (2005)