

# **Worship Info for the Fall of 2024**

## **Considering the Provocations of Jesus' Parables**

**Our focus for the year will be on the inspiration and instruction we encounter in considering some of Jesus' parables along with some psalms of communal lament.**



'The Lord of the Parables' (2018) by Jorge Cocco Santangelo

Jesus' favourite mode of teaching, as remembered by his disciples when they were composing the gospels that have been handed down to us through the generations, was stories. We've come to call the "parables." Within the Christian community, there is a rich storehouse of interpretations of those stories which we will remember and, hopefully, add to in our conversations throughout the fall of 2024.

Ernest Van Eck is the principal of Knox College in Toronto and a student of the parables. We will draw inspiration and insight from his study of

the parables, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016). The concluding words of this provocative study of these stories provides a good introduction to our considerations this fall:

*In first-century Palestine (27-30CE) the elite (Roman and Jewish) shaped the social experience of the peasantry, social control was built on fear, and the relationship between the ruling elite and the ruled nonelite was one of power and exploitation. Because of this, the peasantry lived on the edge of destitution. In this exploitative situation Jesus spoke in his parables of a new and different world – a kingdom of God. His parables were political stories about God’s kingdom, “not earthly stories with heavenly meanings, but earthly stories with heavy meanings,”<sup>1</sup> exploring how human beings could respond to an exploitive and oppressive society created by the power the privilege of the elite. The parables of Jesus the social prophet were the kingdom, a “society” that posed a real threat to Rome’s and the temple’s rule. Eventually, this led to conflict with the religious authorities and the powers of Jesus’ day. (p.314)*

In our considerations, we will pay attention to the realities into which these stories were told and the potential for social transformation that the Spirit of our Creator’s Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, released through them.

We will consider them as love stories imagining a way of living together in justice with peace. They are stories that can still inspire us and instruct us in building communities of forgiveness and reconciliation amid the seemingly relentless ruptures of our times. They will nurture our souls to contribute to the social flourishing of our Creator’s beloved world.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from W.R. Herzog, *Parable as subversive speech: Jesus as pedagogue of the oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1994), p.3.

Here are some recommended readings on the parables from Ernest van Eck, Principal of Knox College, Toronto:

Herzog, W.R., *Parables as subversive speech: Jesus as pedagogue of the oppressed*. Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1994.

Hultgren, A.J., 2000, *The parables of Jesus: A commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Snodgrass, K.R., *Stories with intent: A comprehensive guide to the parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Schottroff, L., *The parables of Jesus*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2006.

Scott, B.B., *Hear then the parable: A commentary on the parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

Levine, A.-J., *Short stories by Jesus: The enigmatic parables of a controversial rabbi*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014.

**September 1, 2024 – Introducing the Parables  
Holy Communion at the Lord’s Table**

**Scriptures      Matthew 13:10-16  
                         Psalm 114**

**Sermon Title    Why Consider the Parables?**

**Word to Ponder      Parable**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2)**

**Hymns – 1 - Here in this place new light is streaming  
             2 - #530 I come with joy  
             3 - #563 Let us talents and tongues employ**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on parables from Amy Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, p.1-2:**

*It is a very good thing that the interpretations, if indeed Jesus did provide them, have not come down to us. The Gospel writers, in their wisdom, left most of the parables as open narratives to invite us into engagement with them.*

*Each reader will hear a distinct message and may find that the same parable leaves multiple impressions over time. ... Reducing parables to a single meaning destroys their aesthetic as well as their ethical potential. This surplus of meaning is how poetry and storytelling work, and it is all to the good.*

**Sept 8, 2024 – The Prodigal Son**

**Scriptures – Luke 15:11-31  
Psalm 126**

**Sermon Title    A Seminal Homecoming**

**Word to Ponder    Homecoming**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2)**

**Hymns – 1 Come, thou font of every blessing (SGP #52)  
2 When God restored our common life (BoP #87)  
3 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy (BoP #748)**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on this parable from Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, p.87:**

*...that is what is at stake in the parable. Those who are righteous - or think they are – are still loved by God; the difficulty is to get them to realize others are as well. Equally difficult – perhaps more difficult – is to get them to realize that God’s grace, not their own imagined righteousness, is the basis of their own salvation as well. A*

*moralistic view of the divine/human relationship stands in the way of one's own fellowship with God, and it impedes the imagination in regard to God's relationship with others.*

**Sept 15, 2024 – The Mustard Seed**

**Scriptures – Mark 4:30-32  
Psalm 90**

**Sermon Title The Potential of Little Things**

**Word to Ponder Seeds**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1 Many and great (*BoP* #301)**

**2 O Lord, the refuge of each generation (*BoP* #330)**

**3 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (*BoP* #321)**

**Special Notes**

**Use as Music for Reflection – words on slides**

**Bloom where you're planted (Carey Landry)**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzWHchYzM-I>**



**Lyrics:**

**Refrain**

**Bloom, Bloom, Bloom where you're planted,  
You will find your way,  
Bloom, Bloom, Bloom where you're planted,  
You will have your day.**

**Verse 1**

**Look at the flowers, look at them growing,  
They never worry, they never work,  
Look at the way our Father clothes them,  
Each with a beauty all of its own.**

**Verse 2**

**Look at the love that lies deep within you,  
Let yourself be! Let yourself be!  
Look at the gifts you have been given,  
Let them go free! Let them go free!**

**A comment on the parable from Ernest van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet*, p.83:**

*... the Mustard Seed questions religious respectability as proposed by the kingdom of the temple and undermines the imperial interests of the kingdom of Rome. The parable tells of a kingdom where God is associated with uncleanness, where boundaries are porous, and where separation cannot and should not be maintained. The kingdom of God spreads effortlessly, takes over and pollutes, bringing along its unwelcome wild and pesky intruders that subvert the kingdom of Rome (and the temple). With expansive power, the kingdom of God is*

*subverting or inverting the exploitative social system of its day. The mustard seed thus indeed has medicinal properties; it heals the cause of exclusive, exploitative, and domineering kingdoms.*

**September 22, 2024 – The Dishonest Manager  
Jim Smith preaching**

**Scriptures – Luke 16:1-13  
Psalm 113**

**Sermon Title The Economics of Grace**

**Word to Ponder Grace**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise (BoP #290)  
2. Praise the Lord (BoP 418)  
3. Jesus shall reign where're the sun (BoP #275)**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on parables from Amy Jill Levine, Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi, p.302:**

*If the interpretation does not raise for us more questions, if it does not open us up to more conversation, if it creates a neat and tidy picture, we need to go back and read it again.*

*... Jesus tells us of a dishonest manager who makes others*

*complicit in his crimes, and does so in such a way that his former employer can only commend him for his shrewdness. ... that's not a great lesson for matters of reconciliation, justice, or compassion. Something else must be going on.*

**September 29, 2024 – Orange Shirt Sunday  
Dialogue Sermon with Mary Fontaine**

**Scriptures – Esther 4:12-16  
Psalm 37:3-6 – Refrain #2  
Isaiah 55:8-9**

**Sermon Title – God Speaks in Mysterious Ways**

**Word to Ponder – Mystery**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – My hope is built on nothing less (*BofP* #349)  
God moves in mysterious ways  
Amazing grace (*BofP* #670)**

**Special Notes**

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**October 6, 2024 – The Feast  
World Wide Communion Sunday**

**Scriptures - Luke 14:15-24  
Psalm 79**

**Sermon Title Whose Table?**

**Word to Ponder Nourished**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. Jesus calls us here to meet him (BoP #528)  
2. Deck thyself, my soul with gladness (BoP #533)  
3. Shout for joy! The Lord has let us feast (BoP #557)**

**Special Notes**

**Music for Reflection**

**The wedding banquet (based on Luke 14:15-23)  
“I cannot come to the banquet, don’t trouble me now...”**

**A comment on this parable from Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, p.340:**

*The parable presents a challenge to the hearer or reader. The question it poses is whether one who hears it makes excuses in the present era, turning down the call of God in contemporary proclamation. Are other things more important than God's call to discipleship in the kingdom?*

*Excuses, resistance, and refusal are common and are to be expected. But that is not the main theme of the parable. The element of refusal is the means by which to make the main point of the parable come to light. The parable centres in the good news of God, who seeks to embrace those who have nothing to offer, who must in fact be urged to come to the banquet, the feast of eschatological salvation.*

**October 13, 2024 – The Talents  
Thanksgiving Sunday**

**Scriptures – Matt 25:14-30  
Psalm 85**

**Sermon Title    Gratitude for Wisdom**

**Word to Ponder    Wisdom**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. Come, ye thankful people, come (BoP #803)  
2. For all your goodness, God (BoP #804)  
3. O Breath of life, come sweeping through us (BoP #384)**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on the parable from Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, p.542:**

*Failure to use a gift/talent results in its loss. Such statements may be true, but this parable is not about positive thinking and use of abilities. The “law of increase” with which the proverb (Mat 25:29 and Luke 19:26) is concerned is the use that one makes of the message of the*



*kingdom.*

*The theme of faithfulness must be brought directly into relation with Jesus' teaching about the present and future kingdom. The Knowledge of God's reign and salvation brings with it added responsibility. To accept the kingdom and its salvation is to accept a trust. It enlists on as an agent on behalf of the kingdom, and all those enlisted will be rewarded or judged in terms of their faithfulness to their tasks.*

**October 20, 2024 – The Vineyard Labourers**

**Scriptures – Matt 20:1-15  
Psalm 58**

**Sermon Title    Gracious Collaboration**

**Word to Ponder    Collaboration**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. For the fruits of all creation (BoP #802)  
2. Thy kingdom come, on bended knee (BoP #784)  
3. O Spirit come, our hearts inspire (BoP #404)**

**Special Notes**

**Perhaps ‘One Love’ as the music for reflection**

**A comment on this parable from Amy Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, p.237:**

*If we take away the complacent anti-Judaism that so marks parable interpretation, we can keep Jesus in his own social context. If we refocus the parable away from “who*

*gets into heaven” and toward “who gets a day’s wage,” we can find a message that challenges rather than prompts complacency. If we look at economics, at the pressing reality that people need jobs and that others have excess funds, we find what should be a compelling challenge to any hearer. And in that story, we learn what it means to act as God acts, with generosity to all. And that is what parables are supposed to do.*

**October 27 – The Unforgiving Servant**

**Scriptures – Matt 18:23-33  
Psalm 74**

**Sermon Title    Settling Accounts**

**Word to Ponder    Forgiveness**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. Amigos de Cristo/Friends of the Lord (BoP #476)  
2. God forgave my sin/Freely, freely (BoP #751)  
3. Where charity and love prevail (BoP #692)**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on the parable from Ernest van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet*, p.182:**

*... Jesus uses the parable to question first-century Mediterranean social relations based on balanced reciprocity and the pivotal value of honour. A world based on the values of honour is dominated by the powerful and ensures the preservation of privileged positions and power, and, because it is fundamentally unbalanced, leads to*

*exploitation and debt. This world is not the basileia. On the contrary, the basileia of God is present when debt forgiveness – when the act itself rather than the socially prescribed role – becomes honourable. At the end of the parable, this option is left open before the hearers, implied by the rhetorical question in 18:33.*

**November 3, 2024 – The Lost Sheep**

**Scriptures – Luke 15:4-6  
Psalm 44**

**Sermon Title    How Do We Get Lost?**

**Word to Ponder    Lost**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. There were ninety and nine (BoP #347)  
2. My shepherd is the king of love (BoP #691)  
3. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love (BoP #706)**

**Special Notes**

**A comment on the parable from Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, p.110:**

*... this parable deserves attention [in] its focus on joy. Christian worship often lacks any sense of joy. It may have form, tradition, energy, or novelty, but joy is in short supply. Joy deserves focus as the true mark of Christianity, for it is directly connected with the theological awareness*

*of the character and attitude of God as one who seeks and celebrates recovery. At some level Christian worship entails entering into God's own attitude at finding and establishing a people for himself. Join the celebration!*

**November 10, 2024 – Remembrance Week**

**Scriptures – Isaiah 11:1-9  
Psalm 46**

**Sermon Title Remembering What?**

**Word to Ponder Peace**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. O day of peace that dimly shines (*BoP* #732)  
2. For the healing of the nations (*BoP* #736)  
3. Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel (*BoP* #122)**

**Special Notes**

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**November 17, 2024 – The Rich Man and Lazarus**

**Scriptures – Luke 16:19-26  
Psalm 123**

**Sermon Title    Lessons Learned**

**Word to Ponder    Compassion**

**Opening Chorus – Tell me the stories of Jesus (348 v 1 & 2 & 1)**

**Hymns – 1. God of grace and God of glory (BoP #490)  
2. Lord, whose love (BoP #722)  
3. Brother, sister, let me serve you (BoP # 635)**

**Special Notes**

**Music for Reflection**

**There is an everlasting kindness (Compassion hymn)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMR85VnEluM>**

**A comment on the parable from William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, p.130:**

*The use of Abraham in the parable reinforces its purpose as codification.<sup>2</sup> By selecting a figure whose value for legitimizing the social order was great, Jesus increased the shock value of the representation while enlisting Abraham as advocate of the desperately poor.*

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<sup>2</sup> Herzog uses the idea of “codification” to refer to the ways the ruling elites legitimized their actions by claiming they had divine sanction for the way things were. In the case of this parable, the blessed wealthy claimed to be in control and the cursed poor deserved to suffer from the consequences of their sin.