

Six Parables to Explore 9 Pentecost, July 26, 2026.

Open my ears: Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your word. Give me a listening ear and a heart that truly hears.

Good morning. I think they should name the 7, 8 and 9th Sundays after Pentecost the Parable Sundays, because we hear so many of Jesus' parables.

Parables always bring a picture to my mind – of a young, relatively unknown teacher – a rabbi - from a poor family, a poor village and yet one who speaks with all the authority of a scholar many years his senior – in fact, a man who not only explains the Scriptures but instills it with new meaning. And this young man, son of a carpenter, gathers around him not the rich, and well educated – not the priests, and the Pharisees, but rather the common persons – farmers, tax collectors and fishermen. His parables are aimed at them, although both priests and Pharisees could learn as well had they “ears to hear”.

In using parables as a teaching tool Jesus follows in a long tradition. Many parts of the Old Testament use parables although we don't always identify them as such. They appear in the books of Judges, Solomon and Isaiah, among others, and the book of Proverbs is a

long list of parables So Jesus is not outside of the norm in his use of this teaching method but it is interesting that at several times he says he uses parables to confuse or that the people listening do not have ears to hear or eyes to see. It's hard to understand what that means. And in Matthew 13:13, he says his parables weren't to prevent people from understanding, but because the people "already didn't understand"

Some scholars think that Jesus uses parables for his messages rather than speaking more directly because many would not be ready for his message and might harden their minds against it. Those who are ready to hear, understand the parables and those who are not may find room for interpretation and thoughtful consideration. There is a long tradition about the Old Testament parables in the Jewish Midrash (commentary on Scripture) that parables are told to two different groups at the same time. One group who understands only the simple explanation and another who delves deeper into additional meaning. This certainly could be true as we look at these parables. And yet to our modern ears many of the parables seem fairly clear. Last week's parable of the good seed sowed by the farmer and the weed seeds cast by his enemy is easy to understand even if we're not farmers or gardeners. And, it doesn't hurt that this seems to happen in my garden too. 😊

The six parables that Jesus tells today are a little more complex. Let's take a look at them.

The parables are told in sets of two. The first tells of the mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds, which grows into a great tree. The second the smallest amount of yeast which when added to flour can produce large amounts of bread. Both of these seem to have a message that from small beginnings great things can come. Was Jesus telling his listeners that a small deed could grow and have great results or that small acts of kindness can have profound results on the hearts of those who receive them? Was Jesus perhaps looking ahead to the church that would one day bear his name to all of Christianity? A church that would arise from a small group of disciples, who were following him that hot summer in Galilee?

The next two are again a pair – in one of them someone finds a treasure hidden in a field and goes out and raises all the money he can in order to buy that field. And the second a merchant finds a pearl of great price - the most beautiful pearl in the world and he goes and sells all that he has to be able to buy the pearl. Again to audiences there could be two meanings. One of them is that a treasure or the pearl represents the kingdom of God and we should be willing to give away all that we have in order to obtain a place in that kingdom. But for the listeners who do

not understand the kingdom of heaven, what could that mean? Is it worth giving all that you have to obtain something of great value if the message says nothing about what to do with what you've obtained? Might the pearl seller hide that priceless pearl away in his house so that no one else could see it? Might the treasure seeker keep his treasure buried in the field, lest robbers come and steal it? Perhaps the message here is not that a pearl or the treasure like the kingdom of heaven but rather that it is worth giving all that you have to obtain the kingdom of heaven.

But would most of Jesus' listeners give up all they had to follow Jesus? The disciples did - we know the reading in which Jesus says to James and John put down your nets and follow me and they do. But how many in the crowds who come to hear Jesus would do so.

But perhaps these two parables can be understood in another way. Some scholars argue that God is the man who finds the treasure in the field or the merchant who finds the pearl. And the treasure or pearl? That would be you and me. God in his steadfast love for each of us continues to seek us out and counts it a great joy when one of us chooses to try to live a life in harmony with God. As the psalmist says "Make your face shine upon your servant." (119:135)

The fifth parable is about the fishermen who threw their nets into the sea and caught fish of all different kinds. They threw back the fish that weren't of value and kept only the useful fish. Jesus offers an explanation here that the fisherman are like the angels of God who "will come and separate evil from the righteous."13:49.

And having told these five parables to his disciples and the crowds around him Jesus then says "have you understood all of this". They answered yes – Certainly a bit of a stretch for those in the crowds around him – even a bit of a stretch for the disciples themselves. But Jesus doesn't question their answer instead he goes on to tell another parable Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the "owner of a household who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old". Scholars teach that when speaking of scribes Jesus is speaking of his disciples and the treasure old and new are the treasures of what has been taught in the old testament and what is being taught by Jesus. Treasures – or testaments – old and new

The hardest of these parables for me is the fifth - the one with the fish that are kept and the fish that are thrown away A clear parable about the righteous and the evil which is followed by this explanation "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and

separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.” (13:49)

It’s hard to hear this parable, to hear the explanation and understand it, especially when we look at ourselves. Are you one of the righteous ones? Am I? The answer is clearly no - not totally, but our faith tradition teaches that faith in Christ and a continued attempt to live your life as he taught, can make one accounted among the righteous. Do we think that since each of us seem to incorporate both the righteous and the evil, we can try as best we can in our lives to grow the righteous part of ourselves and starve off the evil and in the end the angels will help us finish that job by helping us to separate the evil in our nature from the righteous? Well, that is not a scholars interpretation that I found – it is simply me trying to understand the parable so that I can answer, yes, when Jesus asks, “Did you understand this?” But, understanding these parables would take many Bible studies.

Today’s reading from Romans could be the basis for a number of homilies, but the very first lines of it tell us that nothing can separate us from God’s love. Verse 27 reads “And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” We may not be sure that we are all righteous ones, but our faith tradition teaches us that we are all saints of God, and

that God, who sees our hearts and the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us, will be present on that day of reckoning.

And in the reading from First Kings, I'd like to think that Solomon was given a pearl of great price when he was given an "understanding mind to govern" and "the ability to discern between good and evil." (3:9) God was pleased that he had asked for this, not for himself, not to discern the right path to help him be wealthy, or well regarded, but rather to help him make righteous decisions to govern God's people.

I like to think that this reminds us that should we be fortunate enough to find a treasure of great value or a pearl of great price that we will see that as a gift to be used for others and the kingdom of heaven will grow from our small acts of kindness and love.

Amen