



The Bell

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Monthly Newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

PERSPECTIVE ON THE PARABLES

by Lynda Butek

The Oxford Dictionary defines a parable as “a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.”

“Simple” it says. But to me a parable was anything but simple. But that was probably because I am not used to hearing people speak in parables. In fact, the only place I have ever heard about parables is in the Bible because Jesus chose to use them to illustrate a lesson. Why didn’t he just come out with the lesson? Maybe he wanted his followers (including us) to think about what he was teaching and using parables would make us think to get his true meaning.

It took me many years of hearing the parables over and over to really get at what He meant. During that time I took the parables at face value and they didn’t make sense to me. Nor were they meant to make sense in and of themselves.

Take the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). In this parable the landlord hires laborers to work in his vineyard. He hires the first men early in the morning, the second men at mid-day and the last group about 5 PM. When the time comes to pay them, the landlord paid each man the same wage – a denarius – even though the first men hired worked all day while the second men worked only half a day and the last men worked probably about an hour.

THAT’S NOT FAIR! The men who worked longer should be paid more. It’s not fair to pay them all the same. But as this parable shows us, God isn’t fair. A least not in the way we think of justice. He doesn’t operate according to our standards of fairness. We are usually taught that we get what we deserve. If we follow the rules and work hard, we should get ahead. We should get the good grade, the promotion, or the raise. We should receive recognition for our years of loyal service. Those who are idle or lazy should not expect to receive the same rewards.

This parable focuses on the generosity of the vineyard owner who pays each laborer what he needs, no matter how many hours he has worked. This is a parable not about money but about the kingdom of God. And God is not fair. God does not play by our rules. God does not give us what we deserve. And thank God for that! For if each of us got exactly what we deserved, where would we be? In fact, God lavishes grace and mercy on all of us, no matter how late we have come to the vineyard. The parables are all about the grace of God and how he gives it fully to us even when we don’t deserve it.

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Likewise each of us receives everything we have as a gift from God, not as something earned. How easily we forget that, and begin to think that somehow we deserve what we have. When we forget that all we have is a gift, we become resentful of God's generosity to others.

It took me many years to finally figure out that the parables aren't about money or lost sheep or the prodigal son. They are about you and me and our relationship to God. It's that simple.

WE HAVE OPTIONS FOR ATTENDING CHURCH ON JULY 14

On Sunday, July 14, our regular church service in the Sanctuary will be replaced with an ecumenical service at the Northern Wisconsin State Fair beginning at 10 AM.

There will be no services or Bible study at our church that day. But there are ways we can participate and attend church.

Of course, you can go to the fairgrounds and listen to professional speaker Terence Terrell who will conduct the service in conjunction with our local pastors.

If you would rather, you can come to our church and view the service on Zoom which will be shown in our sanctuary. If that is your preference, and if enough people choose this option, we will have fellowship immediately following the service as usual.

Or you can Zoom the service in your own home using the links that will be on the church website.

Our final option is to do nothing and play hooky that day.

If you choose to go to the fairgrounds, view the service on Zoom at home or not go at all, we don't need to know that.

BUT if you wish to come to the church to view the service on Zoom in our sanctuary and join in fellowship afterward, **we do need to know that**. Rick Koepke will be here as will the ladies of Hospitality Team 6 if we have enough people tell us in advance that they will be here too. If this is your choice, please tell Pastor Ed who will be sure the church is open and the coffee is hot.

JUST A REMINDER

We will NOT be having our usual first-Wednesday-of-the-month picnic in Ericson Park in July.

The first Wednesday in July will be July 3 and since it is so close to the holiday, it was decided that we would skip the picnic for one month. But the picnic will resume in August assuming Mother Nature cooperates and the weather is fine and no water emergencies occur. However, if the weather doesn't cooperate, plan to come to the church that evening and bring your favorite potluck dish.

SYMBOLISM IS ALL AROUND US

If you are looking for symbolism, a church is usually where you will find it. Our church is no different although in some ways it is very different from other churches.

Many Christian churches were built to resemble the inside of a boat turned upside down probably because many of Jesus's followers made their living as fishermen. But our church is different in that it was built to resemble the inside of a barn rather than a boat. Perhaps that design paid homage to our rural setting where farming replaced fishing as the way to earn a living.

When you sit in the sanctuary and look toward the ceiling, you can see what the builders had in mind in making our sanctuary resemble the inside of a barn. You can see where the hayloft would have been and the doors to that loft would have been where the large round window is facing Island St.

Then we move to the stained glass windows. In many churches, the windows show images of saints and important figures from the Bible. In our church, however, each of the windows facing east and west is meant to remind us of the sacraments and important times in the life of Jesus.

The west facing window carries the symbols of baptism in the seashell, the dove, fire, water and the cross. That window also reminds us of communion with the chalice, sheaves of wheat and a bunch of grapes.

The east facing window symbolizes the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. His birth is symbolized by the manger, the hay and the Star of Bethlehem. His death is symbolized by the cross and empty tomb.

That window originally was on an outside wall and so was illuminated by natural light. When the remodeling was done, additional rooms were added on the east side of the sanctuary, putting that window on an inside wall unlit by sunlight. Today we have fluorescent lights behind that window so it glows day and night.

The large circular window at the back of the sanctuary depicts a large anchor again harkening back to the fishing culture of the time and the fact that Jesus is the anchor of our lives. Throughout the windows are other colors including, blue, red, yellow, white, purple and green.

All of the stained glass windows in the church were donated by members memorializing loved ones. Originally each window bore a brass plaque with the name of the donor and the memorial for which it was given. Over the years, many of those brass plaques have been lost and the windows have lost the identities of their benefactors. One exception is the window in the southwest vestibule to the sanctuary at the corner of Island and Central Streets. That window was endowed by Pat and Ray Andress in memory of their son, Mark. For some reason, the original plaque remains on that window. We still have many of the original brass plaques but have lost information about where they belonged so most of the windows remain unmarked.