



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



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One of the things I love and indeed envy about Jesus Christ's ministry was his ability to tell stories. Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables, he did not say anything to them without using a parable. Matthew 13:34.

Jesus created stories to help the people come to an understanding of truth. "The Bible indicates that Jesus seldom taught the people without using a story." In the New Testament we never read of Jesus doing a Bible study in which each disciple or follower is seated with his written Scriptures in hand. He never asked his audience to turn to a reference. He never seemed to expect his followers to become literate. Jesus adapted to the people. Jesus was an oral communicator.

Though he could read and write, he knew his audience consisted primarily of non-readers. He occasionally read Scriptures to the people but also spent much time quoting memorized Scripture, telling stories and teaching. Though Jesus mastered Hebrew he told stories and taught in Aramaic the language of the common man, the mother tongue of the people he addressed. Jesus created stories to help the people come to an understanding of truth. The life of Jesus, his actions and movements themselves became stories.

Much of the Bible is narrative and can clearly be shared effectively through storytelling as Jesus modelled for us. Jesus gave us a model of addressing the message content within the cultural setting of the people. Many of the people of his time were part of a rural or peasant culture. Jesus chose stories and symbols from that culture or life-style to illustrate his message and the truths he wished to teach. Jesus was not only a storyteller but He chose his stories carefully to reflect the life and times of his target audience. As we see in the book of Acts his apostles too became tellers of the stories of how Christ lived and fulfilled God's plan. The apostles' stories and oral speeches led thousands to become believers and followers of Christ. We have a clear indication in Scripture that teaching and discipleship were carried on in oral forms from house to house and that it was through an oral tradition that the story of Christ was handed down until well into the first century AD. We must explore seriously our own roles as storytellers. Jesus was a master at it. For us it may be something we need to aggressively study and acquire, even struggle to achieve. Nevertheless we have a Biblical model from the greatest teacher of all time.

Let's take a few moments this morning to remind ourselves as to what has happened up to this point. Jesus has arrived once again in Jerusalem and it is a matter of days before he is taken and crucified. Jesus first of all annoyed the religious leaders by clearing out the court of the gentiles. This would have hit them in the area of their finances because a lot of the revenue that would have been brought in by the money changes and those selling animals would have been taxed heavily by the chief priests and the Pharisees. This was the day Mark tells us that the Pharisees decided to have something done with Jesus. This was the day they decided to make moves to have him killed. And yet, the next day we found Jesus walking in the Temple courts again.

We thought about this last week how the religious leaders came to him in front of everyone and demanded that he revealed to them where he got the authority to do such things. Jesus tells them that since they could not tell him where John's authority came from he would not be telling them where his came from. Once again they were humiliated in front of their people – people who were quickly becoming Jesus' people. In today's reading Jesus tells these same religious leaders a story. Not a simple straightforward story but one which had more than a twist in the tail. A story that was more than a story but one which had a very large and particular barb in it.

As we thought a few moments ago – Jesus never told a story simply to entertain but rather to make a point. Earlier in Mark's Gospel we read about Jesus telling the parable of the sower and the seed. This was a story about the advancement of God's kingdom in people's hearts but few people could really understand it. One of the big differences between that parable and the one we are looking at today was when it was told the disciples didn't need to have it explained to them. Back in chapter 4 verse 10 we read:

10When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.

So, what is the difference between the two of them? A simple answer – this one was easily understood by all who heard it.

For us as we sit in a Presbyterian church in the 21st century we perhaps find it slightly harder to understand because we are not in touch with our 1st Century Jewish ancestors. Nor are we perhaps as well read in our Old Testament as they were, especially in the book of Isaiah chapter 5. There we can read:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

When Jesus started to tell today's parable he was simply picking up a thread of a parable used in Isaiah. Bear in mind that this was Isaiah speaking for God and this was the comparison that God was making – his chosen people were the vineyard and so for those listening to the parable as Jesus told it, for them the finger was pointing to Israel's religious leaders.

I don't in any way to insult your intelligence but let me tease this parable out in case there might be some misunderstanding.

1He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. (This man represents God - The vineyard represents his chosen people – the nation of Israel.) He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented

the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. (The farmers represent the religious leaders of Israel) 2At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. (These servants represent the faithful prophets who came and spoke God's word to his people throughout history) 3But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. 6“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ (The son represents Jesus – God’s only son) 7“But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

You could almost miss this last group of people – the others are the gentiles – effectively you and me!

Even here at this point in time God was planning for our salvation – we were not an after thought but part of God’s plan from the beginning of creation was to extend to wonderful gift of salvation to those outside his chosen people.

Three very brief points of application form this story. Bearing in mind Jesus this was a parable quite simply Jesus was telling the religious leaders that he knew what they were planning and because of what they were trying to do i.e. kill him, God would severely punish them.

Firstly, nothing is hidden from God. God knows the motives of our hearts and minds. Perhaps we don’t know what people say about us behind our backs but God knows. God knows the thoughts that we have in church as we sit and listen to shi message, as we sing his praise and as we leave this sanctuary to serve him in our daily occupations. We can hide nothing from him. This in itself has two implications, God knows all the things we would rather he didn’t know therefore creating within us the acute knowledge that we need to e forgiven, but secondly God know how we are feeling and the emotions we are perhaps struggling with that we are afraid to mention to others. This makes it so much easier to approach him in prayer to ask for comfort and understanding.

Then secondly we need to note: Jesus infuriated the Jewish leaders because He claimed to be the “stone which the builders rejected.” This is a reference to the building of Solomon’s Temple. It took 30,000 workmen over seven years to complete the temple. According to I Kings 6 all the stones were quarried far away from the building site, so there was no sound of hammering heard there. Jewish tradition says one day the building superintendent saw an unusual stone being delivered. Because it was cut in an odd shape, he thought it was flawed. He had it rolled away into the Kidron Valley where it lay untouched and unnoticed. Years later, the builder sent word to the quarry that he was ready for the main corner stone.

The quarry master came and reported, “Why, I had that stone delivered years ago. When they began to search they discovered the discarded stone in the valley was the main cornerstone. It was covered with debris and moss. It took many men working hard to raise the massive stone out of the valley. When they raised it and set it, it fit perfectly! The chief cornerstone was the very rock they rejected. That is why Paul states in Philippians chapter 2, the portion we looked at last Sunday evening:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Please don't be tempted to reject Jesus simply because you believe he doesn't fit into your belief pattern or indeed for that matter, your current lifestyle. Invite him in, give him the place of greatest honour and very soon you will become aware what you have known as to how you ever survived without him in that special place in your life...

But thirdly they wanted to arrest him we read in verse 12:

12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

But they couldn't because they were afraid of the crowd who had become impressed with Jesus teaching. They wanted to get him somewhere no one could hear him. They wanted to silence him, to shut him up as we might be tempted to say today. He was speaking against them and losing them support and credibility. He had to be muzzled. But they were unable to do it.

Satan along with the religious leaders thought that the fateful day Jesus was crucified, that they had finally silenced him but my friends Jesus is still speaking today even though it is over 2000 since he walked on this earth. Jesus Christ cannot be silenced. He is clearly speaking this morning, to us speaking to you this morning. For come he is saying, "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

To still others hear this morning he is saying, "'Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Perhaps you need some assurance at this time Jesus is still saying clearly, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus has an individual message for each and every one of us. On this day in question he was speaking to the Pharisees, the chief priest and the teachers of the law, but this morning, right here and now he is speaking to you.

What is he saying?

Are you listening?

Are you prepared to be obedient as we thought last Sunday night at our communion service or are you trying to ignore him or looking for a way of silencing him?

You cannot silence Jesus his voice is eternal. By listening to him and trusting him you too through faith can be eternal also...

When you lie on your death bed, if you are given the opportunity will your life tell its own story because it will be able to bear testimony to God's love in and through you or will you have nothing to tell because you wasted your life on things that will have no eternal significance, at least in Heaven...

LET US PRAY