

A parable is a word picture that teaches us to spot God's presence in the world. Jesus said over and over, **"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near."** (Mark 1:15) It is still near. The fervent prayer of the Church is for the kingdom to break through into human affairs and put right what is not right.

People of faith also acknowledge that one of life's mysteries is the absence of God from our senses. Even people of great faith, who seem closest to God, admit to dark times when God seems absent, non-existent. The psalmist prayed: **Do not hide your face from me, or I will be like those who go down to the pit.** (Psalm 143:7) We welcome any help we can get in recognizing God's elusive presence in the world. Jesus gave the parables to help us. They are not exactly what we expect.

The Purpose of the Parables

A child can follow the story a parable tells. That's part of the problem with the parables. They are too simple. They are offensively simple to people in a certain frame of mind. They are also brief. The longest can be read in less than three minutes, the shortest in less than 15 seconds.

On the other hand, people of great intelligence might easily miss the meaning of the parables, might think that Jesus spoke down to them, might dismiss the parables as unworthy of a man of the world and a woman of high accomplishments.

For those and other reasons we might ask as Jesus' disciples asked Him. **"Why do you speak to the people in parables?"** (Matthew 13:10) His answer introduced the surprising purpose of the parables like this: **He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."** The purpose of the parables is to reveal God, but also to hide God. Very tough!

It gets tougher. Jesus went on to say: **"Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."** (Matthew 13:11-12) The parables reveal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to some people and gives them more, and it hides the kingdom from others and takes away what they had, which would help them to recognize God in the world.

The Peril of the Parables

That's the peril of the parables. The preceding context in Matthew 12 helps us to understand this peril. A decisive opposition to Jesus had taken root in official Judaism with its inevitable influence in the lives of ordinary people. The authorities accused Him of breaking the Law of God. **"Your disciples are doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath."** (Matthew 12:2) Some **Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.** (Matthew 12:14) **Pharisees** explained away Jesus' miracles by saying, **"It is only by Beelzebub (the devil), the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."** (Matthew 12:24)

This official and expanding hostility prompted Jesus to speak in parables. He said, **"This why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.'"** (Matthew 13:13-15)

This people's heart has become calloused. What calloused their hearts was not

their failure to understand the parables. The 12 disciples were as clueless about the meaning of the parables as they were. What calloused people's hearts then and now is a their hostile response to Jesus.

You would not be here, if your hearts were hostile to Christ. Most people in your neighborhood do not celebrate your coming to worship each Sunday. Your very being here testifies to the openness in your heart toward Christ. But you could become calloused. So, guard your heart. Don't let anything get between you and Jesus.

The Promise of the Parables

The parables of Jesus are for you. They give you knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. That's the promise of the parables. Here's what Jesus says about that. **"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."** (Matthew 13:16-17)

We are privileged. Privilege like that takes some getting used to. The daily routine can make our privilege seem unlikely. That's why our Sunday routine is crucial to our spiritual well being. We worship together. We encourage each other, and Sunday-by-Sunday, parable-by-parable the Holy Spirit will take us beyond our daily routine until our inexpressible privilege smites us with undying gratitude and obedience.

Take Away

The Lord who uttered these parables is here with us by means of the Gospel of Matthew and by means of the bread and cup of Holy Communion. We hold in our hands the revelation of Him who said then and says now, "Watch me and you will see what God is like. God is with you. The kingdom of God is really close. Don't miss Him!" As you hold the bread and cup and commune with Jesus, I want to give you something to think about. It's something for you to do this week. Doing it will keep you close to Jesus.

Listen to this: **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**" (Galatians 6:2) One more time: **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**

Look around you this week and see who seems to be carrying a heavy load. Start with those closest to you. If someone wants to talk about that heavy load, you can do any of the following. You may be able to do something to relieve the person's load. You may not be able to do anything, but you can always listen. Listening is a great gift that you can give. You can offer to pray with people. They may think you are an angel that you can would that for them. And you can ask them to come with you to BVBC on Sunday. The worship and kindness of this congregation and the message from the Bible will do wonders for them. Act. Listen. Pray. Invite. You can make a huge difference to someone, who is weighed down by life.

One more time: **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.** Does anything else matter as much? The Apostle Paul didn't think so. He said in Galatians 5:6: **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** Make a difference in someone's life this week. And if it's your enemy, even better! It will keep you close to Jesus and will prepare your heart to hear His incomparable parables.