

Apoplectic and Twitterpated about the Parabolic

**Sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper
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Apoplectic means unhinged. Aggravated. It is not a positive intensity but a negative intensity. It is different than twitterpated, which is a positive form of intensity. When we are twitterpated, we are beyond enjoyment. We are glad at the arrival of the surprise. We feel blessed.

The parabolic is the adjective that goes with the noun parables. Parables are stories about material matters that have a spiritual point. Jesus loved to speak in parables. He never saw a seed or a barn or a piece of fabric without also seeing a spiritual meaning. Seeds planted well yield good fruit. Barns that are too big indicate that someone is hoarding not sharing. Sewing a nice piece of fabric on an old rag doesn't work. It is unsustainable behavior.

Some popular parables (of the 16 total) are the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Sower, and the Parable of the Talents. In the Good Samaritan, we are all walking down a road and come upon a man who might be George Floyd. We are the priest, the lawyer, the Samaritan. One of us stops and gives our expense account to the beaten man. We bandage, house and feed him. Then we say to the innkeeper, if he needs anything else, let me know. We go overboard. We do more than is necessary.

A great way to interpret parables is to play each part. You could be the innkeeper who is given an open line of credit by the Samaritan. You could be the Samaritan, often scorned. You could be the priest, so impressed with his virtuous resume that he just walks on by. He has done enough good for the day by waking up, one great definition of privilege. Likewise, the lawyer. Or you could be the road, that has seen so many before, stranded, where everybody just walks on by. Or you could be the inn, wondering if your tenant will survive the night.

In the parable of the sower, you could be the good ground or the dry ground or the muddy ground. You could be the seed. You could be the rain. You could know what it takes to ripen and flower and you could know what it is like to be dead on the vine.

With the rich fool, young and full of himself, you could be the barn, the one he wants to tear down so he can build a larger one and fill it up with his great crop of crops. At the same time he is bragging about his surplus and considering his storage alternatives, he wants Jesus to get his brother to give him his inheritance. Jesus uses the storage unit to shame the man in his greed. It never occurs to the rich fool to give away his excess. Jesus condemns him for his stupidity about his excess. The rich young fool was apoplectic. He could have been twitterpated.

Parables, says Jon Dominick Crossan, are always 100% religious and 100% political. They take the material and show its spiritual meaning and take the spiritual and show its material meaning. Don't be greedy. Pay attention to the people who are hurt. Live in ways that help things and people to grow, to mature, to fruit, to ripen. Choose life not death, blessing not curse.

Don't just see a fish in the net. See the net. See the fish. Don't just see a pearl or a mustard seed or a lost sheep or yeast or the wedding banquet or an unfruitful fig tree or a shrewd manager. See more than is visible. Attend the invisible. Think about the hidden treasure of the talent. Hear the one with the fewest talents tell the manager, "I am afraid of you. You reap what you did not sow. I hid my talent so that you wouldn't even take what little I had away from me." Talents, in the parable, are actually weights and are forms of money. They exchange for silver. They can be invested. They can be used for reparation.

Is the virus a parable? You betcha. We may be apoplectic about its meaning. We may know its curse. But it tells a spiritual story about who cares and who doesn't, who matters and who doesn't. Are the uprisings a parable? You betcha. If George Floyd hadn't died a brutal, visible death at the hands of the police, we would have all been too put down, pressed down, held down to howl in protestation. Instead the horror of his death became a parable. Its name is ENOUGH. Its name is how we turn curse into blessing.

Did the virus yield the uprisings? Maybe. Both have political and spiritual meaning. The virus perplexes, apocalyptically. The uprisings draw our deepest respect. They are parabolic and show us how to walk down roads, which barns to build, which seeds to sow.