



Bringing Home the Word †

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 25, 2016

Living in Covenant

By Janel Esker

My husband and I have been married more than six years—most of the time, happily. Occasionally a disagreement morphs into an argument, which sometimes turns into an actual fight. When we eventually apologize and recommit to each other, my husband often reminds us that when we married we didn't enter into a contract—we committed to a covenant. In a contract, the parties focus on "what's in it for me"; in a covenant, each party actively works toward the other's good. When we treat our marriage like a contract instead of a covenant, our relationship suffers.

Sunday Readings

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

"Woe to those who are complacent in Zion! They shall be the first to go into exile."

1 Timothy 6:11-16

"Compete well for the faith."

Luke 16:19-31

"You received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted."

Today's readings from Amos and Luke challenge our commitment to our covenant bond. The Israelites were in covenant relationship with God, meaning they had responsibilities to God as well as one another. Unfortunately, the people in the readings didn't heed the covenant—the rich in Amos' time were oblivious and complacent; the man in the Gospel was aware of Lazarus but did nothing to help him.

We, too, are covenanted with God and God's children. We aren't just people who happen to be along for the ride to heaven; we have responsibilities to actively care for one another, especially those in need, and the Church.

Caring is about more than just occasionally handing money to a homeless person. It's also about consciously and deeply incorporating our faith into our lives—into our purchases, our political activism, our career choices, our free time.

The work of our covenant bond can't be an afterthought. As in a healthy marriage, it must be at the heart of our relationship with others and with God. †

***"We have a covenant,
not a contract, with God
and God's children."***

A Word From Pope Francis

Faith without truth does not save, it does not provide a sure footing. It remains a beautiful story, the projection of our deep yearning for happiness, something capable of satisfying us to the extent that we are willing to deceive ourselves. Either that, or it is reduced to a lofty sentiment which brings consolation and cheer, yet remains prey to the vagaries of our spirit and the changing seasons, incapable of sustaining a steady journey through life....But precisely because of its intrinsic link to truth, faith is instead able to offer a new light, ...for it sees further into the distance and takes into account the hand of God, who remains faithful to his covenant and his promises."

—Lumen Fidei, 24



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do I respond to the needs of others?
- How can I practice the corporal works of mercy this week?



The Parables That Jesus Told

By Virginia Smith

I have yet to encounter someone who doesn't enjoy a good story. One of the first phrases preserved in our memories is, "Once upon a time..." Teachers lace their lessons and lectures with fictional examples that clarify their themes. Speakers frequently lead off with an anecdote to relax the audience and whet their appetites for the meatier message. Through this inventive format, politicians woo undecided voters and parents pacify their children.

One of history's most able storytellers was a young itinerant Jewish teacher named Jesus of Nazareth, whose folktales are usually characterized as parables. The word *parable* comes from the Greek *parabole*, meaning to put concepts or items side by side for comparison. Not all authorities agree that the parable is a distinct literary form unto itself—such as the simile, metaphor, allegory, and proverb—but some things about parables are certain:

- Unlike fables, parables are true to life.
- Parables depict situations and characters drawn from everyday life.
- They differ from traditional morality tales in that there's a twist to the tale.
- They leave us with more questions than answers and open the door at least somewhat to dissimilar interpretations.
- Jesus was an innovative practitioner of this instructional art, but it was equally familiar to Jewish teachers of his day.

Estimates of the number of parables range from thirty-five to seventy-two, the higher figure including sayings that others would call similes or metaphors. The parables of Jesus are preserved almost exclusively in the synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel of John records only two parables: the Good Shepherd in chapter 10, and the Vine and the Branches in Chapter 15.

Parables deal with life right where it's lived: in the real world. Never-Never Land is off limits. Settings and characters are drawn from the listeners' normal range of experience. Unfortunately, the social scene so familiar in Jesus' day is largely unfamiliar now. Therefore, the day-to-day situations encountered by Jesus' contemporaries must be reconstructed to recapture the original flavor of the story.

While we can grasp the gist of Jesus' parables without much knowledge of life as it was lived by his peers, our insights are much richer when we place ourselves within the scene. I frequently ask high-school students to do this. They recast the story in a contemporary setting, retaining the characters, the original elements of the plot, and the moral of the story. In these versions, the abused person might be a person of color or other minority, an AIDS patient, a homeless person, a migrant worker, or a trafficked woman or child. News stories often provide the context. The respected individuals

or agencies who looked the other way become various governmental, religious, and social leaders who would be expected to demonstrate some responsibility, if not compassion. The champion of the afflicted is often the one most feared or hated by the victim.

A potential problem with Jesus' parables is the number of times we've heard them. Far from lulling us into a comforting sense of security, parables should confront us, jar us, act as an unexpected dash of ice water in the face. Parables take common occurrences down uncommon paths. They upset customary concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and objectionable.

Recast today's Gospel passage in a contemporary mold. Moving the setting closer to home may restore its cutting edge and inspire you to reexamine your life and environment anew. As new insights arise from this fresh glance at Scripture, write them in a journal and reflect on them. †



Lord, I am grateful for your example of humble service. Help me to be generous in showing your love and compassion to those in need.

—From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 26-
October 1

Mon. Weekday: Job 1:6–22 / Luke 9:46–50

Tue. St. Vincent de Paul: Job 3:1–3, 11–17, 20–23 / Luke 9:51–56

Wed. Weekday: Job 9:1–12, 14–16 / Luke 9:57–62

Thu. Weekday: Sts. Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels: Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 or Revelation 12:7–12a / John 1:47–51

Fri. St. Jerome: Job 38:1, 12–21; 40:3–5 / Luke 10:13–16

Sat. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: Job 42:1–3, 5–6, 12–17 / Luke 10:17–24