

Yr. A9 Prop10a: G. Gleaves July 16, 2017

Today's readings from the Old Testament and Gospel are two different styles of **story**. The first one is a kind of *recounting that sets the stage* for historical events to come – maybe even a flip-flop in our expectations of the winner! But you've got to read on a little way to find that out.

The second story is a *parable* –that slippery little format that rarely makes us feel good about ourselves as we are, and will gnaw at us until we change. Let's start with that one first, shall we?

Most of us know the parable from the gospel today as **"the Parable of the Sower."** However, one of the beauties of parables, and the frustration to some of us, is that parables may easily be heard several different ways. Thus, the Parable of the Sower may also be understood as **"the Parable of the Seeds,"** or even **"the Parable of the Soils."**

Likewise, **"the Parable of the Prodigal Son"** might better be known as **"the Parable of the Loving Father."** Or... an old colleague of mine, who perennially felt "put on" by everyone he ever met – thought that the best name for that one *should* be: **The Parable of the Older Brother.** Think about *that* one! And so on. That holds for many parables.

Knowing a parable from a different perspective might just open us up to new thought. And, when explored further, we may well not be very comfortable with how we find ourselves fitting in.

It's been said that just as soon as we figure out what a parable means, then Wham! it flip-flops, the characters change, your perspective shifts, or it means something entirely different! If it does, Good!!! Sometimes a parable should be too slippery to get a firm grip on.

Some scripture is left-brained. It's orderly and has but one meaning. The "Beggats" are somewhat that way.

For instance, our left, rational brain serves us well as we get an idea of what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount; but when he begins to slip us parables, that's a different issue.

Parables belong to the realm that owns dreams and stories. Parables rightly reside in the right brain.

No matter what we learn from a parable, God always seems to have something else for us to glean from the story, some new angle to see ourselves from. God has new healing for us, if we are willing to accept it.

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A parable has another characteristic: it is rarely necessary to explain it; for to do so, like Matthew seems to have Jesus do in today's lesson, seems to blow the point. A parable, like a good story-sermon, leaves you with something under your skin. Good stories rarely end in, "**and they lived happily ever after.**" For we know that a story –or a parable– ends right in our laps, in our lives, for us to live on into.

For me, I see today's seed sower as God sowing the Word. Then the sower flip-flops to become *the Church* as Word-bearer spreading God's Word. It ends up with *me* carrying on the task of the sower, as response to my baptismal covenant.

Likewise, when I see myself as *receptive to the Word*, I can also understand myself choked out by the knapweed of modern life's myriad distractions. And on and on. Until a parable bugs me to death. Or more precisely, bugs me to change, and moves me to find new life in Jesus Christ all over again. Heck of a hard teaching method Jesus uses!

I want us to switch over to the Genesis lesson for a moment. Today we find ourselves already into the third generation of the Abraham story that the Revised Common Lectionary has had us following for several weeks in its Track One, "In-Course" readings.

Back up the line 2 generations for a moment: as you recall, at the age of 100, **Abraham** *finally* begets Isaac, and And now, at 40 years old, himself, **Isaac** *finally* begets today's most famous twins in the bible: first came **Esau**, and close on his heels, or precisely *holding onto Esau's heel*, was **Jacob**. Hebrew names often mean something. (The names carry so much meaning of the story that's simply missed by us Sunday Morning gentiles! For instance: *Esau* means "**Hairy**," which he was, even as a baby; while *Jacob* means "**Heel Grabber**." (Those sound like uncomfortable nicknames earned in gym class!!)

From the Genesis lesson we [read] read that their mother, Rebekah, had turned to God because of the constant turmoil in her belly. Not only does she learn she's carrying twins, but which one will become more powerful!

We know the story of rough-and-tumble Esau, the hunter, beloved of his father –**you might call him "a man's man"**– who at a weak moment, sold his birthright to his wimpy brother Jacob, the cook (upon whom his mother doted) for a mere bowl of red lentil stew.

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Here the story grows complex, as the younger, weaker Jacob becomes the leader, in one of those unexpected, ironic God flip-flops that we really *should* begin to expect.

Yet God works through the tragedies of Sarah's and Rebekeh's infertility, Abraham's fathering children with three women, multiple births, strained relationships, Abraham disinheriting 7 of his 8 sons, and other things that are hardly the stuff of Hallmark family greeting cards and a family church service --but rather, of tabloid magazines.

And yet, it is the arena of God's saving activity. For, by now, we Christians, who live by redemption, should understand, even *expect*, God to redeem the *unlikely* ones.

It is through Jacob, through struggling with God and renamed Israel, through his twelve sons and tribes that our eventual salvation history will come.

In a very real way, these people look and act much like people we know, people we're related to. Perhaps people we might even condemn! Perhaps even like us, ourselves. All of us, it would appear, are of greatest value to God, who can mold us and use us, as broken as we are, for his eternal purposes.

And therein, I take some comfort. For, if God can work with the likes of them, in all of their dysfunction, can he not work with us?

God's love spreads the globe abundantly like the sower's seeds strewn with reckless abandon. Surely some of these seeds will find fertile soil when they land on our hungry hearts!