

Proper 12 A

Our minds are among God's first and greatest gifts to us.

Indeed, our capacity to think (to remember, consider, analyze, and plan, among others things) is what we are speaking about when we say, as Genesis does, that we are made in the image of God.

We are like God in the ability that God has given us to reflect on all the stuff that happens, to celebrate and regret, to seek better outcomes, to be creative.

Poor fishermen will often say that they have been skunked by highly educated fish, like the big trout that rest under the bridge that goes over the Davidson River at the hatchery near Brevard.

The truth is that those fish have tiny brains and cannot really learn a thing.

They are all muscle, gut, and instinct.

They do not remember or plan; they do not rejoice or regret.

They survive.

But not us; we are made in the image of God.

Thus we are capable of much, including simile and metaphor.

The Kingdom of God is like...a mustard seed, a measure of yeast, treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price, a net full of fish.

It is more than a little wonderful that Jesus tried these and many other parables out for bringing the hope of the Kingdom into the minds and lives of the disciples.

If Jesus, doing the will of his Father, had wanted to, the Kingdom of God could have been reduced

to five bullet points on a screen or three paragraphs in a persuasive essay.

Hey disciples, memorize this and you're good to go!

Or as the worst self-help books promise, there might have been a few easy steps (and three installment payments of \$19.99!) toward the Kingdom.

Instead, there was teaching, and not even straightforward teaching;

it was simile and metaphor, parabolic teaching that comes alongside the great reality and gives the learner a chance to make the jump from the simile to the great reality.

Isn't that the awesome thing about parables, that they ask something of you intellectually?

That they are demanding?

Jesus paid it all on the Cross, as the bumper sticker says, but he also asks us to take up the Cross.

And his teaching is never easy stuff that does all the work for us.

It makes us think. The Kingdom of God is like...

Over the past few summers, my wife has been teaching our old son to water ski, on this beautiful lake behind me.

Bend your knees, keep your arms straight, lean back (but not too far), let the boat do the work.
Sometimes, she was in the water, trying to position him.
Early on, there were tears and yelling, then two-ski success.
This was the summer of the slalom, and I think the guidance became much more Christ-like.
You'll know when you're ready; you'll just have to get the feel.
A 15 year-old lake neighbor probably got him over the hump with this advice:
getting up on one ski is at least 50% determination.
A ten-year old, tired of listening to his mother and father, was inspired by that.

Someone can show you; someone can tell you, but ultimately,
water skiing happens when a person gets the feel,
the interplay of motor, water, rope, muscle, and balance that produces that magic of a human
flying across water.
The parables of the Kingdom that Jesus told are like that;
his repeated and vigorous attempts to catch our imaginations,
to fire our intellects,
to locate the sparks of the divine in us,
and to make us burn with a holy passion for the cause of his kingdom.

These wonderful parables, then, are naked little things,
imaginative hooks,
invitations to intellectual activation and conversion.
Sure, we can say we know what they mean, that kingdom may start small and humble but will
grow mighty;
that it begins in the ordinary, like the making of bread, but grows by unseen power,
that it is hidden and much to be sought after;
that only some will be proven worthy of it in the end.
Every parable has a plausible meaning, but also many plausible meanings.
You are never done with them, as you are never meant to be done with Christ and his kingdom.

These parables were shared on the shore of the sea of Galilee,
then as the apostles crossed the Mediterranean.
They were shared on the banks of the Tiber, Rhine,
and as a ship brought missionaries to the foot of the white cliffs of Dover.
And the Holy Spirit of the living God reveals them anew to you on the bank of a little lake in the
mountains,
in a setting where Jesus' talk of birds, shrubs, trees, seeds, fish, and bread
still resounds with our lives and can capture the wonderful capacity of our minds.

Jesus was a brave preacher.
When I get done preaching in Greenwood, I say "Amen," and tell them that it is time to say the
Creed.
When Jesus was done with this preaching, he actually asked them if they understood.

And then that bunch of liars said they did. “

Yes,” they answered. I don’t believe them,
and I might bet that Jesus didn’t believe them either.

Oh sure, the Kingdom, its like a ketchup bottle of great price, hidden at the bottom of the sea.
Better to just say “yes, we get it,” even if they didn’t.

And they didn’t get it, because parables are not to be gotten, and the Kingdom itself cannot be contained. But Jesus loved them, so he let them get away with their little lie and thus kept their minds in the game. He kept them learning.

Indeed, he suggests, at the end of our passage, that we are going to join him in a similar ministry.
“Every scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what his old.”

“Scribe” is a funny word, but we who follow Jesus Christ are all being trained by him,
taught by him,

by the wonderful, parabolic methods of his choosing.

What we see in the parables, we also see in our lives,
that our most important lessons are learned indirectly,
not by the parental lecture or the domineering boss

but by looking back at our lives or looking at someone else come alongside,
by seeing our failures or theirs, our joy or theirs.

By such means we come to know those deepest things that cannot be reduced to bare explanatory words.

By prayer, by scripture, and by spiritual practice, we learn to find our treasure and to share it.

No treasure is greater than Christ and his kingdom.

Keep your mind alive to the wonderful possibilities of Christ and his kingdom,
and your witness will bring others to wonder, to love, and to eternal life.

You yourself can be one of Christ’s parables;

the arc of your life bending back to him,

a means by which others may trace the way to him.

The Kingdom of God can be like...you.