

“A Hidden Wholeness: The Power of Metaphor”
Matthew 13:10-13, 45-46

When you hear the expression, “The boy who cried wolf” what comes to your mind? Why do we tell such stories and not just stick to the facts of life? That seemed to be the question which the disciples asked of Jesus according to Matthew 13:10-13,

“¹⁰ Then the disciples came and asked him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ ¹¹ He answered, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³ The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.”’

Why do you speak to them in parables? Such a good question! Why not just tell them the truth straight? Why not be in their face about what you believe and what God has given to you? Why parables? Jesus’ answer is important to us today. When people’s minds are made up and their hearts are closed, more information or confrontation will not do anything to transform them. “Seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.”

Part of the work of discovering our inner and hidden wholeness is being invited to the mystery of the soul through stories, poetry, metaphor, or art. Parables speak the truth because they invite the listener to participate in the truth. They have the choice of how to interpret and interact with the story. They have the ability to make a connection between the parable and their own experiences of life.

One great example that comes to my mind from the Bible is the story of King David who lusted after a woman by the name of Bathsheba. She was married to Uriah, one of his army generals. So King David got the man killed so he could marry Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan could have come and told the king that what he had done was wrong but instead, he came and told him a parable about a ewe lamb which a rich man stole from a poor man. When King David was so upset about the injustice committed against the poor man, Nathan told him, “You are the man.” That is when David finally realized what he had done.

Jesus knew that the people who were hardened by life and by their own justifications of violating the dignity of others were not going to just back down if he gave them convincing evidence or facts or strong theological explanations. What they needed was to go deeper than their own defenses and opinions. The truth told slant, as poet Emily Dickinson wrote, was the tool for moving them into that place of soul.

Parker Palmer writes, “In Western culture we often seek truth through confrontation. But our headstrong ways of charging at truth scare the shy soul away. If soul truth is to be spoken and heard, it must be approached ‘on the slant.’ I do not mean we should be coy, speaking evasively about subjects that make us uncomfortable, which weakens us and

our relationships. But soul truth is so powerful that we must allow ourselves to approach it, and it to approach us, indirectly. We must invite, not command, the soul to speak. We must allow, not force, ourselves to listen.”

This is the invitation for us in our daily life and in our world today. In our time when confrontation seems to be the only way forward, the wisdom of God is for us to teach our children and to practice ourselves to listen to the voice of inner truth through poetry, music, art, and other ways that help us to see things symbolically. In our time in history, there is so much value put on facts and our ability to analyze and control reality. The problem with this approach is that it often leaves us trying to tie life to a chair with rope, torture a confession out of it, and beat it with a hose. We want to control our health, our children, our jobs, our environments, our relationships, and even our feelings. One of the illusions of life is that control is possible and will give us happiness. We even try this approach with faith. We want certainty about life, the Bible, our beliefs, and the way God is present in our lives. Some churches and Christians go as far as asking their pastors and members to sign on to a list of beliefs and doctrines to make sure that they are following the strict and narrow theological worldview of that church. Yet, if we are to truly go deeper into the heart of God, we must find a way to let go of that need for control in order to learn to walk in mystery and awe. The language of God and the Spirit is always symbolic.

I was reminded of this recently. After my brother’s passing to more life, his wife and I were driving to their house and a huge hawk swooped down over us and over their garage to land on the chimney. My sister-in-law stopped the car and knew immediately that it was a sign of his spirit being with us because she often spoke to him about being like an eagle or a hawk in his wings of protection over his family. That is how God speaks to us. It is often through signs in nature, art, Bible verses, music, and other symbolic elements.

Today we are going to practice this kind of power through listening to one of the short parables told by Jesus in this chapter. Let’s listen to Matthew 13:45-46. This is Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God:

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

What is this parable about for you? How does it connect with your life at this moment? Is there a word, a phrase, or an image here that speaks directly to your condition? How does it help you listen to your inner teacher?

I will end with a poem that connects with the heart of this parable for me. It is about the centrality of the love of God. Once we have that as our priority, it changes everything.

Fall in Love

By Fr. Pedro Arrupe

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in Love
in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.
It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in Love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.