

The Mind of Jesus

Matthew 13: 3-9; Matthew 25: 14-31

This is another sermon with a presumptuous title! How can we know the mind of Jesus? Actually, there are several ways. We can know ourselves honestly and, thus, become aware of the presence of the Holy within each of us. We can be open to know other people by learning to listen as they share with us the meaning of their lives – a very intimate, very powerful, and very generous transaction that is at the heart of what we do as church.

There is another, maybe easier, way to know the mind of Jesus. That is by hearing Jesus' parables and other teachings from the Gospels. Today's *Ask Jack* question is: "What are the implications of the parables of *The Sower and the Seeds* and *The Ten Talents* to Christians today?"

We heard these two parables read earlier in the service. According to most reputable biblical scholars today, not all the parables in the gospels were originally spoken by Jesus, certainly not in the form we have them today. This is not to diminish their importance to the early Christians and to us. It reflects an honest assessment of the history of how the Bible came to be, based on several factors.

These include an understanding that the teaching style of an itinerate rabbi such as Jesus would have included short, pithy sayings and brief parables. For example, the long and extended style of the parable of the talents reflects a later editor's hand. The parable of the sower, seeds, and soils, however, is the sort of parable Jesus might have told. It is short, undeveloped, and challenging. The fact that it is included in all four of the biblical gospels and the Gospel of Thomas adds to its credibility as an authentic Jesus' parable. The interpretation of this parable, found in the biblical gospel accounts, is not original with Jesus. The whole idea of a parable's meaning comes as each of us enters the story for ourselves.

The Sower, Soil, and Seeds

This is a story about four types of soil or four types of people. Perhaps it is about four aspects of each person. As a farmer scatters seed on the ground, the parable concerns what happens to the seed as it falls on each of the four types of soil. God plants seed in our lives. The seed is that which has the potential of growing and flourishing. Where the seed is unable to penetrate or find fertile conditions, it is unable to grow. Where the seed penetrates and is able to germinate, there is an abundant harvest. What is the meaning for you in this parable?

The Talents

The image of money is a symbol for all our resources. This can include finances, talents (what we do well), passions (what we love to do even if we're not good at doing it), what we're good at (even if we don't love it), and our dreams. All these images comprise what we might call our "giftedness". In this story, three people are entrusted with resources (money) from the boss. Each one gets a different amount. The most gifted (\$5,000) fully invests this giftedness, using every bit of the large amount of the resources and develops even more. This is hyperbole in which things are exaggerated to make a point. This servant has a huge amount and uses it perfectly, ending up with twice as much to return to the boss!

The same is true of the somewhat less-gifted person. Proportionally, this person also fully invested all that was given and also doubled the original amount to return to the boss. The

least gifted person, though, fails to invest at all and hides what they've been from everybody's view, including his own. This servant digs a hole in the ground to keep it out of sight, trying to play it safe by doing nothing. What's the result? There is an unhappy boss and, consequently, an unhappy servant who suffers several losses: the loss of the original giftedness, the loss of the responsibility that had been given, and the loss of his place in the community of the other servants.

What is the meaning of this parable? Again, the meaning comes as you and I enter the story for ourselves. This is a longer and more involved story than *The Sower* and contains many nuances in its interpretation. There are some things to remember, that would have been clear to first-century readers, about its meaning. This parable is not about salvation. The story was part of the early church's instruction for those who were already committed to becoming members of the church – candidates for baptism. These new disciples knew they were accepted by God and by the community of faith. It would have been clear to them that the result of this story was not the loss of that acceptance.

There is another way of being lost. You can lose your way by failing to realize the potential of your life. We can lose our reason for being by failing to invest ourselves in becoming what we can be. There is much to be gained by investing ourselves fully. The payoff is: more giftedness, more opportunity, and more responsibility. The faithful servants then received more of whatever God gave them in the first place: more to be invested. In terms of meaning for this parable, doing nothing is doing less than the least and far worse than failing while trying. Ultimately, the meaning each of us finds depends on where we find ourselves in the story.

These two parables use a similar image: burying something valuable in the ground, but for very different purposes. *The Sower* plants a life-giving Word. When the soil is fertile, there is a bountiful crop. The servant with only \$1000 to invest (one talent -- representing his or her gifts or resources) buries it in the ground in order to keep it safe. In reality, it was an attempt to avoid the responsibility and the risk of investing it. Both these stories challenge us today.

How creative are you in "hiding" your potential? What are you willing to do to realize your possibilities and live abundantly? This is the message of Jesus, the message of the church, and the message of the Holy within each of us. Don't hide it. Invest it. This is God's calling for everyone, for each of us, to the dance, to life.

You are now pretty familiar with this message from me. You've heard me talk many times about realizing potential, investing ourselves fully in our lives, and living large. We continue to be inspired that quotation from Marianne Williamson, often attributed to Nelson Mandela, that "our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure...." I reaffirm that message today.

This has been a long way to come to get to the final point of this sermon. Last Sunday, I used the image of driving from the back seat to illustrate the role of women in the early church and throughout church history. I suggested that it is often necessary to drive from the back seat when you have no access to the driver's seat – to the seat of designated power.

This question arose from last week's teaching: how to "drive from back seat" without being manipulative or destructive? So often, this is exactly what happens. Driving from the back seat becomes an exercise in *willing* the person in the driver's seat to do things your way. We may ask, "how can we reach our potential and realize our possibilities when we don't have an abundance of giftedness, when our lives are not especially rich and fertile soil?" How can we drive the vehicle in which we find ourselves in cooperation with the Holy who lives within us,

God who calls us? How can we drive from whatever seat we find ourselves without being manipulative or destructive? I have three simple suggestions.

First, live within your own boundaries, inside your own skin. You do this by not over-functioning -- that is, taking responsibility for someone else's happiness. You may be committed to their happiness, but you can't be responsible for it! You stay in your own skin by not over-functioning and by not under-functioning -- that is, allowing someone else to take responsibility for your happiness. When you live within your own personal boundaries, your dreams and your vision are yours.

Second, stay connected to the other significant people in your life. Emotional cut-offs actually bind us to others in unhealthy ways. Avoid communicating with someone through someone else. Keep the lines of communication open through focusing on one to one relationships with the other people in your life.

Third, don't be willful. Being willful means trying to get someone else to be or act the way you want them to be or act. Willfulness usually results in the people you're trying to will doing just the opposite of what you want, and in your feeling more anxious.

Three simple steps and you're free! -- free to support and celebrate the significant others in your life. You're free to invest yourself in your own life and in your partnership with God. Your life may look large or small in others' eyes, but it will be the abundant life Jesus promised us. It will be the fulfilled potential of the life God has entrusted to you and me.

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine.... (Marianne Williamson)

Courage means to put [our] whole heart into the practice [of living; to live in the truth that we] are links with the past and [also] the seeds of the future. But the seeds have to fly with the wind, with the Spirit, in order to fall on other unknown grounds and yield fruit. (Raimundo Panikkar, *Letter to a Young Monk*)