

# A Lenten Journey Through the Parables

## 1. Introduction.

The Parable of the Sower.

The Parables of Lostness

Sunday, February 26, 2012

10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor

*Presenter:* David Monyak

*St. John in the Wilderness*

# Today

## Grouping as per *Stories with Intent*

n Introduction

n **The Parable of the Sower** (Mark 4:1-9)

n **The Parables of Lostness:**

n Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

n Parable of the Two Lost Sons (Luke 15:11-32)

n **The Parable of the Compassionate Father and His Two Lost Sons** (Luke 15:11-32)

# References

- n **The Parables of Jesus**, by David Wenham. IVP Academic, 1989. ISBN 978-04308-12864
- n **The Parables. Understanding the Stories Jesus Told**, by Simon J Kistemaker. Baker Books, 1980. ISBN-13: 978-0801063916
- n **A Journey Through the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes. Audio CD Course. Now You Know Media. **Stories Jesus Told. Modern Meditations on the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes, Liguori, 1991. ISBN 0-7648-0413-8
- n **Stories with Intent. A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus**, by Klyne Snodgrass, 2008, Eerdmans Publishing Co., ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-4241-1
- n *Audio excerpts from:* **The Listener's NIV MP3 Audio Bible**, narrated by Max McLean

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Collect for Ash Wednesday, Book of Common Prayer, p. 217

# Introduction

# Introduction

## Definition of Parable

- n *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed):
- n **allegory**: the *concrete* presentation of an *abstract* idea, typically in a narrative — whether prose, verse, or drama — with at least two levels of meaning:
  - n 1. the surface story line, summed up by stating who did what to whom when.
  - n 2. a second level, typically moral, political, philosophical, or religious
- n **parable**: a *type* of allegory. A short, realistic, but usually fictional story told to *illustrate* a moral or religious point or lesson.

# Introduction

## Definition of Parable

- n *Snodgrass [p.8]:* **parables** are stories with an intent, analogies through which one is enabled to see truth ... stories with two levels of meaning,
  - n 1. the *story level* through which one sees and
  - n 2. the *truth level*, the reality being portrayed
- n *Hughes:* a comparison, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning

# Introduction

## Aim of a Parable

### n *Immediate aim:*

- n be compellingly interesting,

- n and in being interesting, divert attention and disarm

### n *Ultimate aim:*

- n awaken insight,

- n stimulate the conscience, *and*

- n move to action

# Introduction

## Aim of a Parable

n “... they [parables] are prophetic instruments ... They are used by those who are trying to get God's people to stop, reconsider their ways, and change their behavior. ... Like prophets before him, Jesus told parables to prompt thinking and stimulate response in relation to God. Parables usually engage listeners, create reflection, and promote action. They are pointed and clinching arguments for a too often slow-minded or recalcitrant audience. They seek to goad people into the action the gospel deserves and the kingdom demands.”

- Snodgrass, p. 8-9

# Introduction

## General Format

- n 1. What is going on in the gospel when Jesus tells the parable? (**Gospel Context**)
- n 2. **Read and Listen** to the parable.
- n 3. Some historical or social background useful for understanding the parable (**Background**)
- n 4. Interpret: discuss and discern parable's meaning (**Interpretation**)
- n 5. What is the parable's "good news" or "warning" for our lives today (**Application**)

# The Parable of the Sower

# Parable of the Sower

## Gospel Context

- n There is growing opposition to Jesus.
- n Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom of God, but when the people and disciples looked at the world around them, there seemed little evidence of change:
  - n For example, Herod and the Romans continued their oppressive rule
- n Even John the Baptist wrote from prison expressing his doubts, asking if Jesus really was the “coming one.”

# Parable of the Sower

**Mark 4:1-9**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

- n Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (NIV)

# Parable of the Sower

## Background

- n Farming was relatively simple in Jesus' day.
- n At the end of a long and hot summer the farmer would go to his field, and sow wheat or barley on top of the hard ground. He would plow the field to cover the seed, and wait for the winter rain to come to germinate the kernels.
- n The crowds would have no problem picturing the farmer, with a supply of seed in a bag hanging from his neck or in a fold of his outer-garment, walking up and down his field, dipping his hand into the seed and scattering it evenly across the soil.

# Parable of the Sower

## Background

- n It was no discredit to the farmer / sower that some of the seed would be wasted. It was all in a day's work:
  - n Some seed of course would land on the path bordering the field,
  - n Some seed would fall in shallow soil where the limestone was jutting out of the earth,
  - n Some seeds would fall among the thorn plants that would come to life in the spring and choke out the growing wheat.

# Parable of the Sower

## Interpretation

- n First Impression: The contrast between:
  - n the waste of so much seed and the sowers' efforts, and
  - n the splendid harvest despite all this waste.
- n Questions:
  - n Who does the farmer / sower represent?
  - n Who or what does the seed represent?
  - n What does the ground represent?
  - n What does the crop or harvest represent?
  - n What is the parable about?

# Parable of the Sower



## Interpretation: Mark 4:13-20

*Voice of Max  
McLean*

- n Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”

# Parable of the Sower

## Interpretation

- n Who does the farmer / sower represent?
- n Who or what does the seed represent?
- n What does the ground represent?
- n What does the crop or harvest represent?
- n What is the parable about?

# Parable of the Sower

## Application

- n How might this parable apply to us today, acting as God's "hands and feet" in the world?

# Parables of Lostness

**Parables of Lostness:**  
**The Parable of the Lost  
Sheep**

# Parable of the Lost Sheep

## Gospel Context

- n The Pharisees and teachers of the Law have accused Jesus of fraternizing with sinners: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2)
- n In Luke’s gospel, Jesus tells this parable and the other parables of lostness in response.

# Parable of the Lost Sheep

**Luke 15:4-7**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

- n Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (NIV)



ALFRED H. SPOON

# Parable of the Lost Sheep

## Background

- n Sheep and shepherds were very much a part of everyday life in rural Palestine.
- n 100 sheep was a sizable flock, maybe belonging to several people but cared for by the one shepherd.
- n The shepherd would care for the flock, leading them across the often dry hillsides to suitable grazing pastures and bringing them back to the village at night.

# Parable of the Lost Sheep

## Interpretation

- n Was it reasonable for the shepherd to leave the 99 sheep in the open to find the 1 lost sheep?
- n Who does the shepherd represent?
- n Who does the lost sheep represent? Who does the 99 other sheep represent?

# Parable of the Lost Sheep

## Application

- n What group do we belong in:
  - n The 99 sheep?
  - n The wandering sheep?

**Parables of Lostness:**  
**The Parable of the Lost**  
**Coin**

# Parable of the Lost Coin

**Luke 15:8-10**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

n “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (NIV)

# Parable of the Lost Coin

## Background

- n The woman's ten silver coins were part of her dowry and were worn as ornamental decorations on her headdress.
  - n The modern equivalent might be a woman's engagement ring or wedding band with studded diamonds.
- n Houses of the poor were constructed without windows. Near the ceiling a few stones might be left out of the wall to provide ventilation and a little light.
  - n Even in the middle of the day it would be dark in the house.
  - n The woman would have to light a candle in order to search for the coin somewhere on the stone floor.
- n Broom used probably made of branches.
- n Modern equivalent of the search difficulty: searching for lost contact lens.

# Parable of the Lost Coin

## Interpretation

- n Who does the woman represent?
- n Who or what does the coin represent?
- n Having found a lost coin, was it reasonable for the poor woman to spend money to celebrate with her friends?

**Parables of Lostness:**  
**The Parable of the**  
**Compassionate Father**  
**and His Two Lost Sons**

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

**Luke 15:11-32**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

**Luke 15:11-32**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

**Luke 15:11-32**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

**Luke 15:11-32**



*Voice of Max  
McLean*

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’”

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Ἡ ΠΑΡΑΒΟΛΗ ἘἰΣ ἸΟΥ



# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Background

- n A son would normally only receive his inheritance at his father's death.
- n So the younger son in demanding his share and turning it into cash was:
  - n flouting convention
  - n ignoring his God-given responsibility to care for his father and mother,
  - n insulting his father, saying in effect: 'I wish you were dead'
- n By frittering away the inheritance, the younger sons disgraced the family

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Background

- n To Jesus' hearers, feeding pigs for a foreigner was about as low as one could go: pigs were unclean animals according to Jewish law.
  - n As a Jewish rabbi put it bluntly, 'Cursed be the man who keeps swine'.
- n The fact that the father saw the boy while he was still far away suggests he has daily been looking for his son.
- n For a father to *run* to his son was a *very* undignified action.

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Background

- n Only free men worn shoes. The father's order for sandals for the boy's feet puts an end for son's idea of being treated like a servant.
- n The "fattened calf" was the animal reserved for the next big family occasion, such as a wedding with many guests.

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Background

- n The elder brother's role in the feast, according to the cultural rules of the time, was to be the master of ceremonies:
  - n mingle with the guests, monitor the supplies of food and beverages, keep the celebration going through the evening and into the night
- n The elder brother publicly insults his father by:
  - n Refusing to go into the feast
  - n Refusing to address his father as "father" and to refer to his brother as "brother"

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Interpretation

- n Had the younger son shown repentance for the waste of his inheritance, or was his rehearsed speech just a self-serving ploy to get better food and lodging? Does it matter in interpreting the parable?
- n Who do the two sons represent? In what ways are they “lost” sons?
- n Who does the father represent?
- n What is the message of the parable?

# Parable of the Two Lost Sons

## Application

- n In what sense is this parable “good news” for us?
- n How should this parable apply to the mission of the church and the church’s use of resources?