

# Sermon Text for August 18, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Psalm 78:1-4, Matthew 13:31-35*

### *“The parables of Jesus”*

There is nothing more significant that we do here in the life of the church than worship. I have always said that it is from worship where our life emanates. So last Sunday we praised God by telling stories, stories about how God showed up in West Virginia and New Jersey and made a real difference in the life of a few dozen people who are a part of First Presbyterian. The stories that we tell here in this church are ones that reflect the faithfulness of God and how that faithfulness has made a difference in our lives.

The church is not about programs and it is not about social ministries, all of which we have an abundance, but it is about worshipping God in a way that in our stories we will always remember who is for us, for as Scripture tells us, if Christ is for us, who can be against us. The stories we heard last week were more than we had a good time. Rather I know that the leaders with whom I spoke described it as life changing, how a simple act on our part can lead to a revelation to someone else that God is on their side, just because we put up some boards and drove in some nails.

The life stories that we have in which we experience the living presence of God have to be told in this space, in a worship of God who allows us and wants us to have a personal relationship with Him. Jesus was at His core a storyteller. Now, let's be clear. He is the Savior of the world. Jesus is God, so he is so much more than a storyteller, but he was also a storyteller. In this entire chapter of Matthew, chapter 13 he explains to his disciples and to us why he tells stories that always contained some kind of eternal meaning. Not just a story with a good punch line which elicited a good laugh, but there was always some eternal meaning attached to Jesus' stories.

His stories explained the nature of God and how He so strongly wants us to interact and know us personally. God will do anything to welcome you into His kingdom, including die for you. But we do have a choice. We can choose to not interact with God then we miss the meaning and ultimately we miss the truth that he wants to plan within us and we are then bound to follow a truth which calls itself truth but is nothing more than a lie. Let's read.

### **READ**

So if I were to talk about a story of a two brothers and a father and the youngest son asked the dad to give him his inheritance early so that he could go and strike out on his own and

he does and he fails miserably and comes back and asks his dad to take him back in and his dad does with open arms and the oldest brother is really jealous about it, you know that story right? The prodigal son. If I were to tell you a story about a man walking on a path and he was beaten up and robbed and two religious leaders passed by and did absolutely nothing to help him because they were busy doing religious stuff and then an illegal immigrant, I mean that is what Samaritans were, came along and helped him out and gave him a ride to the hospital and paid for his hospital stay and then some you would know that story right? The Good Samaritan.

If I were to tell you a story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep and one of them was lost and so he left the other 99 and went to look for that lost sheep and he found him and brought him back into the fold and rejoiced about it you would know that story, right? The lost sheep. Those are all parables that Jesus told. They aren't true stories, like stories that actually happened in real life but rather examples that Jesus uses in his stories to demonstrate the character of God, God is forgiving and long suffering, God is gracious and abundant in blessings, God never relents from chasing after us and wants to be with us. That is part of the nature of God. These stories reflect a wisdom that has been and needs to be passed down through the ages.

Psalms 78 provides us with an insight into the nature of God, into God's character. What is God like? In vs.2 he states that he will tell us about it in parables, or dark sayings from of old. They are not to be hid, but rather revealed especially for the generations to come. He lifts up three things that are fundamental to the nature of God and we find them in vs.4: the glorious deeds of the Lord, his might, and the wonders that he has done. All of these things are well suited to story telling.

In fact, they are so well suited that Jesus uses some of these exact words from this Psalm in the final verses of the Scripture that we read this morning in Matthew. It is important to understand a few more things about this Psalm before we move on to Matthew. First of all look at the beginning of the Psalm even before you get to verse 1. What do you read, a maskil of Asaph. The word maskil means simply to teach, so maybe a teaching Psalm, but the individual is Asaph. Many think that all of the Psalms were written by David. This is not the case, and here is one example.

Go to II Chronicles 29:30 and you will find this name mentioned again right alongside that of David. So he was a well known writer of songs and he was just as valued and esteemed as David. And this only place where he is mentioned is when the temple is being rededicated after it had been forgotten by generations and the king Hezekiah is requiring the people to sing

songs of David and Asaph. Psalm 78 was used to remind the people of Israel of the faithfulness of God and the history he has had with us, his people.

Jesus mentions this Psalm 78 because of how it was used in the past, the Psalm that was used to rededicate the temple, to lift up the name of God in the most celebratory time in the history of our nation, parables are used to reveal to God's people exactly what this Psalm revealed, the true nature of God, who God really is. This is really important because if we want to have a real relationship with God the parables give us insight into what that means for each one of us personally.

Let's go ahead and look at Matthew now. Look at vs.34 and we read that not only did Jesus speak in parables in this one example that we have just read, but he always spoke in parables. Honestly, it was getting a bit confusing for his disciples, maybe even a bit annoying. Look at chapter 13:11 when he responds to his disciples who asked him the question in vs.10: "Why do you always speak in parables?" He replies by saying: "To you has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Let's not focus on those to whom it has not been given, but let's grapple with understanding what it means that God has revealed to us the secrets, or as the Psalmist states, the dark sayings of old, of the kingdom of heaven. In case any of us were wondering if we have access to Jesus, the strong answer here is yes, yes, Jesus has chosen for us to know him and he wants us to know him.

This applies to these two parables that we looked at today. These two parables don't instruct us what to do but rather speak to a faith in the God who is active in every tiny movement initiated by Jesus. He uses the example of the mustard seed that is tiny but then grows into a bush the size of an 8 foot tree with branches where birds from all over can make their nest. The same with a little leaven that is able to make a batch of dough that can feed 100 rise so much that each person is able to have delicious leavened bread.

We know that when Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven that the church is its representative here on earth. We as the church represent this kingdom of heaven that he is describing. Just a little seed, just a little leaven will allow people from near and far to make their home here. What impact can this little church in Strasburg make? Go ask the people in West Virginia, in New Jersey, in this community, in Belarus, in Turkey, in Kenya. Just a little seed, just some effort on our part makes a huge difference for the kingdom through the work of the church.

The point is that a small seed can produce a large plant. Each one of us has something to contribute, no matter how small it is. Even if it is just a few loaves and fish, Jesus can use it.

When we offer to Jesus that which we have, he is able to multiply it in ways that we would never imagine. This miracle of nature symbolized by the mustard seed and the leaven which develops from the smallest of beginnings to an astounding fullness, is similar to the reality of the kingdom as seen in the church.

The kingdom of God on earth had its humble beginnings. A persecuted people who found ways to love God and their neighbor. It's coming did not overwhelm the world, but it has grown and all sorts of crazy birds are now finding their home in it, including you and me.

So what stories are we passing on to the next generation? In our Young Adult Sunday School class a few weeks past we were asking the question of what stories are passing on in our own families. What do we tell our children about how God has been present in our lives. Do we take the religious holidays of Christmas and Easter to retell the stories of our own lives and how God has been faithful in our own lives or are we so caught up in the celebrations that there is no longer any mystery to pass on.

Today we celebrate with a picnic the life that God has given us together as a family, as a church. The lessons that we learn here together direct us to understand better our loving God, and to pass on in a more understandable way the glorious deeds of the Lord, his might, and the wonders that he has done. Praise be to God. Amen.