

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (7/19-20/2008)

Wisdom 12/13-19, Psalm 86, Romans 8/26-27, Matthew 13/24-43

A CONVERSATION ABOUT PARABLES

Me: I've got a problem, Jesus; actually I have several but just one I want to talk about now.

Jesus: I'm reasonably god – I mean, good - at solving problems. Shoot.

Me: Well, our Gospel messages these weekends feature some of your parables, and I have a small complaint about the parables.

Jesus: That's not news; from the beginning, people have had a hard time with them and, frankly, I can't understand why.

Me: My problem is that you are always talking about a most exalted subject, the Kingdom of God, but you use the most bland examples to explain that Kingdom. A farmer struggling with weeds, a woman kneading yeast into dough, a mustard seed, for heavens' sake!

Jesus: Well, let's see now. Am I to understand that you would prefer that I use exalted theological language when I speak about the Kingdom? I could, you know.

Me: To be honest, yes, it would seem much more appropriate. After all, our ordinary language isn't worthy enough for the mysteries of God. I think you ought to talk about the Kingdom in language like popes and theologians and exalted preachers employ. Use words that stretch our vocabularies and our minds a bit. Be more scholarly.

Jesus: Sorry about that but you're wrong, dead wrong. The Kingdom of my Father is not a complicated idea to grasp. Drawn from Jewish historical experience, it means that God is at work in this world of ours. His will is in operation even as we speak. In fact, this mystery of His presence is so awe-inspiring that no ordinary words can even express it. And that's precisely why I tell parables or stories, because they convey both the simplicity of God's presence and the ongoing mystery of it.

Me: Jesus, sometimes your stories are so simple that they minimize the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is an electrifying idea, but the way you present it dulls the excitement.

Jesus: So according to you, a farmer and his weeds, a woman and her yeast, a

mustard seed take away from the grandeur of the concept of Kingdom, right? I can see your point, but my parables have another purpose as well. They are meant to get you thinking - like you are doing right this moment. They don't present everything laid out nice and logical; they don't let you off the hook. They want you to participate.

Me: Please understand me, Lord, I do take them seriously, but...

Jesus: No buts! The fact that you are asking for clarification is proof of what I am saying. As I understand it, you can't quite see God's power being exercised in such - as you call it - bland ways. You seem to think the everyday world around you is not totally worthy of God's attention or presence. Lots of people think that way. And that's where we differ. My Father does operate on a grand scale in this creation - He is Creator, after all. But His attention to detail extends to the least created being in the universe. Nothing escapes His ongoing love, not a weed, a loaf of bread or even a mustard seed. Not a sparrow falling to earth or a stray hair on your head.

Me: I hope I haven't offended you, Lord, and you have given me lots to think about.
Thanks.

Jesus: As the Irish say, "Sure and isn't that why I told the parables in the first place."

Keep on thinking. Keep on asking questions. You're just at the beginning.