

Title: "Jesus the Storyteller"

Text: Mark 4:1-20, 33-34

We are "re-introducing Jesus" this year,
-and currently we are exploring aspects of Jesus' ministry
that the Gospel writers don't want us to miss.

Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus as a healer,
-and last week at Jesus as a teacher.

Today, I want to look with you at Jesus as a story-teller.
-This flows right out of last week's focus on Jesus as a
teacher.
-Because a large part of the content of Jesus' teaching was
given in stories.

And the Gospel-writer Mark makes a special point of this in
Mark chapter 4.
-Turn there with me.
-I am going to read the first 20 verses, and then add on
verses 33-34 as a sort of tag at the end.

"With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them....
He did not say anything to them without using a parable."

That's how Mark sort of sums up the teaching ministry of
Jesus: he was a story-teller.
-He was always telling stories and parables.

And we already knew that, right?
-We are quite familiar with the parables of the Good
Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Sheep and the Goats,
-the Wedding Banquet, the Laborers in the Vineyard.
-I mean, there's so many of them that Jesus told, and we have
heard them all, right?!

And we know that story-telling is a great "teaching technique."
-People love illustrations that help clarify what the teacher is
talking about.
-Stories that put a real-life spin on the message.
-But here's the interesting thing that Mark wants to tell us
about Jesus as a storyteller:

Mark says that Jesus' stories were actually NOT helpful illustrations of what he was trying to teach.

-In fact, Mark says, Jesus' stories caused people NOT to understand what he was saying, even the disciples.

Mark goes so far as to make it sound as if Jesus was being intentionally obscure in his stories so that people would NOT get what he was trying to say!

How do you like that for a teaching technique?!

This is why I want us to be re-introduced to Jesus the storyteller today.

-Because though many of his stories are very familiar to us, the reason Jesus used so many stories is often not so familiar to us.

So the Parable of the Sower which we just read is a perfect example of what Mark is revealing to us about Jesus' use of stories.

First, it's a primary example of how when Jesus tells a story,
-this time of the farmer out sowing seeds,
-no one understands what he was getting at.
-Not even the disciples get it,
and Jesus has to explain it to them later.

Mark says in verse 34 that this is what happened all the time.

-Jesus told these parables everywhere he went, and later in private he would explain everything to his disciples.

But then secondly is the actual content of the Parable of the Sower.

-It's a parable about the difficulty of understanding Jesus.
-It's a parable about four different responses people had to Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God.

And you know the story:

-Jesus uses 4 soil types to describe different types of people who listen to his message.
-And there are three UNfruitful types of listener,
-and one fruitful type of listener.

Three who “don’t get” what he is talking about at all,
-and one group who eventually do “get it.”

And Jesus ends the parable saying, “He who has ears to
hear, let him hear.”

-And those final words are actually the point of the whole story
-some have ears to hear, and some don’t.

But you see again, what Jesus is doing, and what Mark is
explaining,

-is that Jesus was not using stories to help everyone
understand.

He was using stories to accurately describe the Kingdom of
God,

-and some people could see it, while most people could
not.

And it’s not so much that Jesus was trying to be obscure,

-to prevent people from understanding the Kingdom.

It’s just that he wasn’t going out of his way to change the
nature of the Kingdom of God

-to make it fit into people’s preconceived categories.

If people didn’t get it, it was their categories that needed to be
adjusted, not the description of the Kingdom.

Jesus even quotes the Prophet Isaiah to say that it has always
been like this.

-Whenever God’s revelation has come into this world, some
people see it but don’t perceive what it means,

-they hear God’s words but don’t understand them.

-If they did they would repent and turn to God in faith and
trust, but they don’t and so they don’t.

It’s crazy, isn’t it?

-We would think that if God came into this world to bring us
light and life and revelation and truth,

-we would all want it and love it and be open to it and
thankful for it.

But the truth is that we don’t.

- Because of sin and the hardness of the human heart, God's light comes into the world and we decide we are really more comfortable in the darkness.
- This is what Jesus' stories expose.

They are not so much illustrating truths Jesus wants everyone to understand about the Kingdom of God.

- Rather the stories Jesus tells ARE themselves the truth of the Kingdom of God,
- and those who do not understand them,
- or do not want to understand them reveal themselves to be soil that is hardened to the Kingdom.

So Jesus the Sower, the storyteller, is simply out there everyday telling these stories of the Kingdom,
-he is sowing the word everywhere he goes.
-He is casting the seed out there willy-nilly.

And he does so knowing full well that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the seed is going to fall on unfruitful types of soil.

- 75% of the people who hear his stories are not going to get them.

-It's simply that the stories expose how many people don't understand the Kingdom of God.

And what I want us to notice, is that the people who don't initially understand the Kingdom of God is everybody!

- Even Jesus' closest disciples didn't get it.
- Jesus said to them, "The secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you,"
- but the disciples said, "Well, we're glad to hear that, but can you tell us what the heck the Parable of the Sower actually means? We don't get it."

So Jesus explains it to them....and then they get it....sort of.

-All through the Gospels, Jesus' own disciples are struggling to get what Jesus is talking about just as much as anyone else.

-But you know what makes them "fertile and fruitful soil" over the long haul instead of unfertile soil?

They ask for help.

They admit their categories don't fit what he is saying,
-and so they invite Jesus to help them form new ones.

My friends, that is really the chief characteristic of a disciple of Jesus then and now.

-Disciples admit they don't get it, and ask everyday for help.

And look what happens, Jesus answers them every day.

-He explains things to them.

-He reveals what they need to know.

-He coaches them along.

-He guides them in their understanding and in their behaviors.

Other people prove to be unfertile and unfruitful soil,

-because like in the parable, for all kinds of reasons they don't stick with Jesus and ask for help along the way.

-They either just don't really care about God or His Kingdom, and think Jesus' little stories are dumb fictions anyway.

-Or they are perhaps initially intrigued by God and curious about what His Kingdom might be like,

-but they're too preoccupied with their own lives and all they have going on to take it the next step.

-Or they actually believe in God and have had a taste of His Kingdom,

-but as Jesus says, "the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things" come in and choke the word that was growing in them and snuff it out.

But you see, all that makes the fruitful soil fertile is a willingness to receive what the sower is sowing.

-And if you don't understand the story Jesus tells, you ask him to help you understand.

-And you join the community of other disciples who are asking Jesus to help them understand,

-and in that community we learn together.

-And where two or more are gathered in his name, Jesus is there in their midst,

-and somehow then, these stories of Jesus come to life.

-They are no longer obscure, but clear as day.

And they ARE the truth about the Kingdom.

- People hear in different ways, and to those who have a heart for the Kingdom of God,
 - their hearing is accompanied by faith and trust and they will end up “getting it” even if not at first.
- To others who do not have a heart for the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ words and stories and his entire ministry will just be an enigma.
 - They won’t get it.

So what kind of soil are you?

As we come to the communion table today, we have the opportunity to invite Jesus to cultivate the soil of our hearts and minds so that we might become fruitful soil in which the Kingdom of God can take root and grow.

We get to ask Jesus for help with our lack of understanding.
We get to invite him to do:

- whatever plowing work needs to happen in us to break up the hard places.
- whatever digging needs to happen to get out the rocks.
- whatever weeding needs to happen to remove the weeds.

And as we take into ourselves the bread and the juice of the New Covenant,

- we invite Jesus to come and dwell in us by His Spirit to plant the seeds of the Kingdom anew,
 - and then nourish and cultivate them so that we might become fruitful and multiply.

So what kind of soil are you?

- Let the Jesus the Storyteller work this Parable of the Sower into your life so that you might be among those who “get” what the stories are about.
 - The Kingdom of God.

Let’s pray.

