

## Jesus and the Cosmic Christ

Probably the most common spin we give to today's parable is "it's never too late to get saved."

Whether you show up at the beginning of the day or the end, in your childhood or old age, God is always waiting for you, always ready for you.

We've all seen those movie scenes where the really bad guy is taking his last breaths and the priest hears his confession just at the last minute, ensuring that Mr Nogoodnick is now on the right side of God.

And all of this is fine, as far as it goes.

But, truth be told, it doesn't go very far at all; because it's all tied up with a very private, very "me and Jesus" take on my relationship with the Creator of all things.

But what if Jesus is getting at something very different indeed?

What if Jesus is asking us to look hard at our own economic systems on the one hand; and what if he's also challenging just how we envision salvation; not only for ourselves, but for the whole world, and everyone in it.

In some ways, this parable can be seen from two points of view: from Jesus the itinerant Galilean prophet who meets and heals ordinary people every single day; and from the point of view of the Christ; the Word of God, in which all things hold together.

It's at once a parable that is very down to earth, and a parable with cosmic implications...

Let's begin with the "down to earth" part.

This part begins with a warning, a warning not to take these parables at face value, because, as Clarence Jordan says, "Whenever Jesus tells a parable, he lights a stick of dynamite and covers it with a story."

So here's a question for you: what might this latest stick of dynamite be saying about how we run our economy today?

Not only are we a society that worships "me," (have you seen those selfie sticks??) but we also worship "more" — as in, I can never have "enough!"

Just look at the pay rates for big bosses and the pay rates for the ordinary Joe and Jane.

"Between 1978 and 2014, CEO pay increased by almost 1,000%, according to ... the Economic Policy Institute.

Meanwhile, typical workers in the U.S. saw a pay raise of just 11% during that same period, making the ratio between CEO pay and worker pay 300-to-1.

In 1965 the ratio was 20-to 1." *Fortune Magazine*, 6/21/15. (Modified).

We are living with the results of this monstrous disparity which sees a vast swath of the country now underemployed and underpaid, leading to envy and resentment, creating the breeding grounds for the politics of fear and despair.

Sadly, those most impacted by this disparity usually focus not on the wealthy few who pad their own nest with unimaginable wealth, but on their fellow victims, who happen to be of a different ethnicity or religion or race; which is fine and dandy for the guys at the top (and

they are almost always "guys"), since as long as we're fighting each other, the bigwigs have little to fear.

The first stick of dynamite Jesus lights today seems to be aimed at these rich and privileged folks.

Don't think of the landowner who hires the men as a stand-in for God.

Let's see him as simply a landowner who has more than enough.

And he sees to it that everyone who works for him has enough, whether they work the whole day or just for an hour.

What might our society look like if we insisted that everyone be provided with enough?

What might things look like if everyone is guaranteed a minimum livable income?

These I think may be questions Jesus asks us to wrestle with in this society of ours that tends to see wealth as something the individual owns, and is entitled to, forgetting that God owns this world, and any wealth that may come my way comes to me as a trustee, someone expected to use it for the benefit of others, because at the end of the day, it all belongs to God.

Jesus isn't asking us to wrestle with this because it's an interesting intellectual exercise or a lovely question of philosophy.

Listen to how the parable begins:

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a householder who went out early to hire laborers..."

He's telling us what God's kingdom is like; and its got nothing to do with fancy celestial condos or endless rounds of heavenly golf...

God's kingdom is like this fellow, this generous fellow, going out to hire workers....

Meaning, if you want to live in God's kingdom happily, you gotta start learning how they think in God's kingdom!

Just like last week's parable where the fellow forgiven a bazillion dollars ends up in the clink, NOT because God put him there, but because he puts himself there!

By rejecting generosity and insisting on bean counting, our poor fellow last week made a real mess of things.

If you can't learn to love the upside down way of God's hilarious grace, if you insist that beans be counted and scores settled, and that everyone gets their just desserts, well then, where are you going to end up?

You'll end up like the first hired hands in today's parable, who walk away from the generous master all mad and salty, because they refuse to see the world and their fellow human beings through the eyes of the compassionate landowner.

If we hope to one day live within the kingdom of God, we better start practicing kingdom thinking, and kingdom living, here and now, or when the time comes and the invitation is made, those who haven't made the shift will most likely take a peek inside heaven's gates -- and see only hell.

That's the "Jesus" take on today's parable.

What about the "Christ" point of view?

Every time I stand here and preach what I hope is the word of the Lord, (and not David's word!), I am confronted by our gorgeous stained glass at the back of the church.

It bears the symbols of all the world's major religions.

For some of us, it means we welcome people of all religious traditions to worship here.

But for others, it means that we are invited to dive deeply into the mystery of Christ.

This Christ in whom we live and move and have our being.

This Christ who is the second person of the Trinity.

This Christ who is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

And when we go there, this beautiful stained glass reminds me that all faiths, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Taoist and so on, all theists and all atheists, all animists and Shamans and Wiccans; that all of creation is indeed on the road to Christ, who came that the world might have life; who, when he is lifted up on the cross, draws the whole world to himself.

Seen cosmically, the parable today is about the folly of religious wars and fights and claims of superiority, as God, like the landowner, calls all humanity home.

If we are the beloved of God, it's not because of what we have done, it is because of what God has done for us — in Christ.

Look into the night sky with its trillions of stars, its billions of galaxies and wonder — if this stunning magnificence is the creation we live in — then what must the creator be like?

Beyond all of our imaginings...beyond all of our imaginings...

Perhaps today, the good news is we can forget about deserving the good things God has in store for us; we can forget about deciding who's early and who's late, and smile at the pure graciousness of this loving God, who frees us not because we are good, but because God is good.

+amen.

