

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear."

<sup>10</sup> The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

<sup>11</sup> He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. <sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

<sup>14</sup> In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

<sup>18</sup> "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

A **novice monk** came to his abbot and asked him — 'Master abbot, I had thought you would be a very serious and high minded man. But I have been here for three months, and I only ever hear you telling stories. I thought you might talk about God more!'

The abbot showed no sign of affront or surprise at this criticism, and refrained from pointing out the obvious — that Jesus was also a story teller.

'You are right, I do tell stories,' he replied. 'Stories are fun... you are musical, right?'

'Yes, I am,' replied the novice. 'But I played the flute and you did not dance. And I sang a dirge but you did not mourn!'

'That's as may be,' replied the Abbot, carefully. 'Perhaps I was listening to God's music and missed yours.'

The novice, unperturbed asked again — 'you say that stories are fun, but tell me, again, what place they have in the pursuit of God, please?'

‘Well,’ said the abbot, ‘Is God only to be found in dense theological writing? Perhaps we should only speak of God in latin? Perhaps sesquipedalianism would better adumbrate our rumination of the Christological?’ he continued with an air of persiflage. ‘I think, however, that stories tell us all we need to know of God, for those who are called to understand his mysteries.’

The novice coughed, nervously. ‘His mysteries?’

‘His mysteries,’ repeated the abbot. ‘While Matthew talks of mysteries only once, Paul talks of them many times. They do not mean unknown things, like a murder mystery, but the things that were once hidden, but which are now revealed by God — to those whom he has chosen.’

‘Ok,’ replied the novice. He was nervous that the mysteries had passed him by. Was he actually worthy of his place in the monastery? He continued in a more humble tone. ‘I think I have never understood these mysteries,’ he continued with some courage. ‘And I want to. Just for a moment I imagined being outside the kingdom, being outside God’s grace, and I realised that I wanted this more than anything!’

‘I am pleased to hear that,’ replied the abbot. ‘You see, stories can be simple *and* difficult *and* profound. If I talk about greedy sons wasting their inheritance, or seeds falling in a field, you may hear only a story of a son, or some seeds. You may ignore it. But if you know that there is a treasure of great price buried in that story, in that field, you may decide to search for it. You may, mixing metaphors, chew it over and over, wondering at the meaning of the story, until you find it — or even just some of it. You may, like a cow, ruminate again, and gain more worth yet than at first. God’s kingdom may be hidden from the quick, but be revealed to those willing to chew.’

‘I think I’m beginning to understand now. Please go on,’ replied the novice. There was fire in his eyes now.

‘You have heard it said that the one who sings prays twice? I tell you that the one who truly listens to a story learns twice, or has the chance to — though some, of course do not. The story doesn’t penetrate them, and the devil, like birds, pecks away even the memory of it. Some who hear are shallow — their enthusiasm withers in no time. Others hear the story, but the story is choked from them by care and worry. I cannot help how you, or anyone hears my stories, but I will tell them! But those who genuinely hear them are transformed by them. All the other monastics here have lived within stories, and have been recreated by God’s stories!’

‘Stories change things,’ began the novice, testing the understanding he was forming. ‘The Bible may say God is loving and faithful, but to see this illustrated in a story communicates it so much better! The song of Mary may tell me that the Kingdom of Heaven is different, but a story tells me just how topsy turvy our world is, and what right looks like! A story surprises, shocks and challenges — a story gives hope and a model to follow! The kingdom is not abstract but is of God and of people, so it must be fleshed out in story! God is not law, but love, creativity, wisdom — how better to talk of God than a love story? An adventure story? a comic book! A parable!’

‘That is, indeed, why I tell stories,’ replied the abbot, with a smile. ‘And why Jesus did, too. Now, did I ever tell you the story of the man who dreamed of going down to the river and meeting a wise man there?...’ And they continued talking for some time.

**Amen. SDG.**