

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Pastor at First Baptist Church of Bainbridge, NY and serves on the Executive Boards for NYS Ministers Council and the American Baptist Churches NYS Region.

Living the Faith

The Parables in Matthew 13 lend themselves to a thoughtful revisiting of our life in the Spirit and our role as those who profess to follow the Christ as seen in Jesus.

As we read our Bibles daily we often read them with a lens of confirming our own bias and justifying our own actions. You are probably not surprised to learn that the Bible - if you have a mind and heart to read it that way - can: promote slavery, defend the right to keep woman out of leadership roles in the church, justify hate and killing, affirm that it is ok to have more than one wife, and condemn homosexuals. **However**, you can also read it in a way that speaks the love and mercy of God, forgiveness for all who seek to know him, and God's preferential treatment of the poor and destitute ON EVERY SINGLE PAGE, if you've a mind and heart to read it that way.

And so I ask, which is more *true* to the God that we worship? For me, I choose to worship the loving and merciful God who forgives me not only the sins that I *confess*, but the sins that *I don't even know I'm committing, and also forgives the sins of my neighbors, my friends and my enemies as well.* That is the God I preach and that is the God I serve. The *preaching* is easy - I can say "God is Love" and show you through scripture how that statement is true. Now the *service* - that is something else again. The *service* means that I am *living* what I *preach*. Someone said to me once, *Preach Jesus and use words if you have to.* That means you *live into* your faith in Jesus, you *mirror* his life.



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My favorite Desert Monk, Carlo Carretto, speaks of Jesus as "devising the best way of making himself understood and of carrying out the divine plans [of God]." (Guide to Prayer, p. 234). We know that Jesus told parables. This was the best way he knew

of getting his message across. When you are talking to people who till the land for a living, who sow seed and grow crops, then a parable about the sower and the seed becomes relevant to your life - you *get it*. And so Jesus tells these parables about sowers and seeds and growth and weeds. And because he knows that the grain produced from the seed is used for making the main staple of that society - bread - he talks about yeast and leaven and flour. And because he knows that fish is also a staple of the diet he talks about fishing and netting and catching. Jesus makes his preaching relevant to his audience.

But what makes Jesus unique among his peers, what makes him unique among the other preachers and teachers that are out there, is that Jesus actually LIVES what he preaches, and he uses the scriptures he grew up with - the Hebrew Scriptures - our Old Testament, to justify his actions and fulfill God's purpose. Now his contemporaries - the Pharisees and the Scribes - they read their scriptures differently, with pride and arrogance and privilege. But Jesus reads the scriptures and sees only the Love and Mercy and Forgiveness of God - thereby fulfilling all righteousness. (Matt. 3:15) He *lives* the words of his Father God, and the people who need THAT Good News begin to follow him.

We still need *that* Good News today, we need to *see* in those who profess to follow Christ Jesus the love of God that he lived. Carretto says Jesus "lived his message before he spoke of it. He preached it by his life before explaining it in words...The most effective method of preaching the Gospel is to live it. Especially today, people no longer want to listen to sermons. They want to see the Gospel in action." (ibid p. 235)

Jesus' didn't see a person's color, he didn't see borders on a map, and he never turned anyone away; he defended the poor, the destitute and even the sinner, in loving service to his Father, God. And Jesus says when *we* are good soil, when we receive the his words and live into the kingdom, we can bear fruit "one hundred fold." (Matt. 13:23)

Amen

Reference: Carlo Carretto, *Letters from the Desert*, as quoted in *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants*, pages 234-5.

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