

PARABLES FOR PREACHERS: YEAR B, by Barbara E. Reid, O.P.
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Even people who are not very familiar with the scriptures have some knowledge of the parables. Many are able to paraphrase a few—the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, or the Prodigal Son. Our culture is comfortable with parables for they seem like such endearing and cozy stories. But in reality, they are powerful and sometimes shocking vehicles of communication by which Jesus helps us glimpse the in-breaking of the realm of God into our world. They are not just the quaint tales they seem on first blush. In *PARABLES FOR PREACHERS*, Barbara Reid, a New Testament scholar at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, sets out to help preachers hear the parables anew and as a consequence, be stimulated to creative approaches in preaching parables.

This book is timely for it addresses the parables that will appear in the Lectionary as we read Mark's Gospel through this new liturgical year. (Subsequent books will treat the parables in Luke and Matthew, the Gospels for the next years in the liturgical cycle.) In the Introduction she invites the preacher, "to try out parabolic techniques of preaching." What this book intends to do therefore, is to revitalize the preacher's engagement with the text and, as a result, to spur creativity in preaching the parables. The book certainly provides ample information and insights to make this goal a reality.

Here's how she does it. The Marcan parables are treated in the order they appear in the Lectionary for year B, first in the Sunday and then in the daily cycle of readings. The introductory chapter addresses the genre of biblical parables showing what parables are and how Jesus and the evangelists used them. But she also points to how the preacher can recontextualize the parables' message for our contemporary situation. That is the strength throughout this treatment of the parables; it is quite clear that this approach to parables is to first help the preacher appropriate the parable for him/herself, and then to be able to preach from the parables.

What is clearly stated in the introductory chapter is that Jesus' parables invite the hearers to identify with the margined and to take a stand with them.

One of the most crucial tasks of the preacher today, particularly in gatherings of those who are comfortable financially and socially, is to take up the perspective of those who are marginalized and invite the congregation to do the same. The point is not to make people feel guilty, but rather to move them to see from the perspective of those most disadvantaged and to

ask then, what would love require of me? If one is not poor then Christian discipleship demands solidarity with the poor, service to the needs of the least, and readiness to suffer persecution that follows from these actions.
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Chapter Two addresses the nature of parables and presents traditional and contemporary methods for interpreting them. For those of us who had our biblical training “a while back”, we may be still using just the historical critical method in our biblical interpretation. This chapter gives brief reviews of more recent methods and shows how they would be used in interpreting the parables: these include, social science, literary and liberations approaches. The treatment of these is brief but, as throughout the rest of this book, footnotes provide ample opportunities for further study. Chapter Three gives an overview of the Gospel of Mark which will prove helpful not just for the parables but for whatever Marcan passage the preacher will encounter throughout this Lectionary cycle.

After these introductory chapters the book dedicates a brief chapter to the study of each parable. The pattern is the same in each chapter: first the parable context in Mark is explained and then the historical background is given. In the light of this background, the parable is then analyzed and preaching possibilities are explored. Usually more than one preaching possibility is suggested. This schema is helpful; first you get ample background along with some fresh exegetical insights and then the preaching is addressed. Each chapter closes with a section called “Lectionary Context” which shows how the placement in the Lectionary provides a new context for the Gospel passage. The other readings are also given brief treatment, a bit too brief to address preaching, but more to give a general sense of the readings and any relation they may have with the parable being studied.

The book intends to outline some new directions for interpreting the Marcan parables as a result of recent biblical studies. It also aims to spark creativity in the preacher to help find contemporary meanings for the parables. I think it has succeeded in these goals. Reid stands by the side of the preacher, not imposing but indicating avenues the preacher might take so as to hear afresh parables that, when first heard, either disturbed the comfortable or delighted those who needed to hear good news.

---R.B. Williams, OP