

The Parables and Advent – 1

1. If you are particularly bad at noticing things, you might not be aware that Christmas is coming in just under two months. Some people have a visceral reaction to any mention of Christmas or the sound of Christmas music (all 8 songs) before Thanksgiving. I get that. You're terribly wrong and a very bad person but...I get that.
2. Advent sermons usually begin in December, but I wanted to do something different this year. I wanted to look at the teachings of Jesus and see how Advent – the coming of Christ into the world – changed everything.
3. We need to answer the question “so what?” after we hear a lesson or read a passage in scripture. We need to think about “so what” after our songs for they call us to think, feel, speak and behave in a certain way. We need to bring the words into reality; we need to clothe the stories with skin and act them out. So, we will go to the stories Jesus shared with us: the parables.
4. I've never heard the parables used as Advent sermons, but I think this will work. Jesus had a limited time to speak with us so any stories he shared should be treasured, memorized, and, once we answer the “so what” question, acted upon.
5. But first, let's look at the spread and use of parables in the Gospels. This will seem like a data dump, because it is, but we will get to the stories soon enough. It is important, I believe, to understand how important the first generation of Christ followers considered the parables.
6. When we talk about the parables, we need to narrow our search to just three books: Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are no parables in the Gospel of John nor are there any quoted in the rest of the New Testament. Paul, Peter, James, Jude, John the Revelator, nor the writer of Hebrews refers to any parable so this is a Gospel phenomenon.
7. Parables make up 1/3 of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels. **[ONE]** Remember, synoptic means “to take a common view” and just

means that these Gospels cover the same general time period and stories in the life of Jesus. Don't be fooled by that name, though, as they are very different.

8. There are 11 parables that are only in Matthew. [TWO]
9. There are 2 parables that are only in Mark. [THREE]
10. There are 18 parables that are only in Luke. [FOUR]
11. There are 4 parables that are in Matthew and Luke. [FIVE]
12. There are 6 parables that are in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. [SIX]
13. Matthew records 22 parables. [SEVEN]
14. Mark records 10 parables.
15. Luke records 10 parables.
16. Why did Matthew record so many more of the parables? We don't know. It is certainly true that the Jewish people then, as now, love a story and use stories to teach and even argue their point more than do most cultures. Greek influenced cultures prefer the argument, logic, and disputation (or asking a series of questions, arguing from absurdity, etc.).
17. We will start today with a parable that you might not have noticed WAS a parable: the Parable of the Lamp. It occurs in Matthew and Mark. Here is the Matthew version: [EIGHT Matt. 5:14-16]
18. The Jews were God's chosen people. They had no need to evangelize and, in fact, protected their unique status – understandably so! Some would notice their lives and holiness and asked to be added to their number. They were generally welcome and some of those proselytes became rather well known in scripture like Caleb in the OT.

19. Now that Advent was here – Jesus had come – the followers of Jesus were to be lights, a city on a hill, shining with a light that cannot be ignored and establishing communities of faith that are so filled with goodness that those outside will praise God...and come inside.
20. The first Advent, or collision of God and the earth, was, of course, in Genesis 1. The creation, the chaos, the coming of the Spirit, and then...LIGHT. Now, Jesus has come. The Holy Spirit went ahead of him into the not yet born John the Baptist. The Spirit continued to direct the words and life of John and cleared the way – removed the chaos – so that the Son of God could bring light into the world (as seen in John 1 and in [NINE] Hebrews 1:3).
21. We are not to shirk back from our duties. We are the light bringers, the light carriers. We are the community of Christ charged with releasing goodness into the universe with our every decision, our every action.
22. Mark records a different version of this parable and it comes with warnings [TEN] Mark 4:21-25]. God's light is intended to shake things up. When you turn on the lights, the cockroaches scatter (crimes and other things done in the dark). Luke gives us a slightly different version: Luke 8:16-18.
23. Jesus came to bring light into the world. We who carry that light must not be surprised when some are attracted to it while others are repulsed by it and work to fight and extinguish the light. Notice, as well, that Jesus didn't come to hide messages in codes (ELEVEN Mark 4:22). Those who claim to find new, hidden messages in scripture are just wrong. While scripture can be notoriously difficult to understand in some places, it isn't because it is in code. Jesus brought light.
24. [TWELVE] Mark 4:24-25 is not as easy for some to understand as the other parts of this parable. People have seized upon it and tried to make it a health and wealth gospel verse but that is mangling the message. In short, share what you have – goods, mercy, time, love – and you will attract more. If you choose to hoard your goods, mercy, time and love you will one day realize you don't have any at

all...for they were created to be shared and they disappear and die if not shared.

25. Advent changes everything. Don't just hang lights this season – BE lights in every season. And if the world is getting darker, shine brighter.