

Pastor's Ponderings - March-April 2024
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“His disciples were so baffled they were beside themselves.”
- from Mark 6:51 (Common English Bible)

In our Lenten Bible study this year we are studying the Gospel of Mark. In Mark's gospel there is no story of Jesus' birth. The gospel begins with John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, after which Jesus spends two short sentences in the wilderness being tested by Satan and attended by angels, and then he is healing people by the middle of page two and teaching in parables. Jesus taught only in the parables the writer tells us. And there is only one parable in the New Testament that is explained by Jesus (and it is here in Mark).

Jesus explains the parable of the sower and the seeds to his disciples. The seed is the word, Jesus' message. Some falls on a hard path and is immediately eaten by birds, gone to the devil. Some falls on rocky soil and sprouts up quickly and dies quickly as soon as adversity arises. Some falls in among weeds, starts to grow, and is choked out by worries and greed and worldly desires. And some falls in good soil, takes root in understanding, and produces a crop worth harvesting—some produces a harvest 30 times what was sown, some 60 times, some 100 times.

Mark says Jesus explained his parables to his disciples in secret and shared with them other secrets also. They left behind their former lives and followed him wherever he went. They saw his miracles, heard his teachings both public and private, and, the gospel says, *still* they did not understand. Not even his disciples understood. They were “confused” by his teachings, “amazed” (as if lost in a maze) by his miracles, “baffled” by his life in general—by his being.

The Gospel of John tells us, and I believe it, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And I believe the way and the truth of this life are baffling. Do *you* understand why good people can die bad deaths? Why innocent children suffer? Why a seed grows into a plant and produces a flower, or a crop worth harvesting? Where *do* babies really come from (how did your child, how did *you*, come from *that*)?

I don't blame the disciples for being baffled. I'm baffled too.

This is precisely why Jesus taught in parables. Parables are riddles, stories with a confusing twist, word pictures that cause you to see things differently, lessons that provide no answer. Jesus is trying to teach the way to truth and life. And that truth—those deep and ultimate and eternal ways and truths of life—*are* and always remain baffling. Awe and amazement, and baffling bewilderment are appropriate responses to the reality of God, and the deep and ultimate reality of life.

Look at life and be amazed at what God has done! And do not expect to understand it. Look out the window and wonder why the bluebird is beautiful. Consider the sun and the fact of life on an Earth floating in space. Examine your own life and acknowledge it is, you are, as mind-bogglingly miraculous and confounding as every other reality in this world. Read the Bible and be baffled. Therein lies the truth.

Amen.