

“Things Hidden Since the Creation of the World”
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost ~ July 26, 2026
Dorothy Whiston

Genesis 29: 15-28; Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Luke 13:31-33, 44-52

Have you ever been told, or said to someone else, “you’re too darn smart for your own good!”? Well, it’s true! We humans are too “smart” for our own good! We’re so smart, we think we can determine with utter certainty, what – and who – is good or bad. And woe is us!

In her inspired sermon last Sunday, Jennifer talked about the evolution of human consciousness as the real root of the crises facing our world today. As well as the way beyond them. We’re stuck in dualistic thinking -- either/or, black and white, good and evil. Literal dead ends, all. Our healing, in the form of transformed human persons and culture, will arise as we allow God’s unitive thinking to mature in us. As we take on the mind of the universal Christ.

Commentators suggest we thwart our full understanding of the parables when we read them only as allegories. They certainly having meaning on that level. But to encounter the fullness of what a parable can teach us we must approach it much like we would a Buddhist Koan. That is, beyond dualistic thinking. Beyond “does it mean this or that?”

We’re meant to get inside a parable and let it get inside of us. To let it come alive in our bodies, our emotions, and the fullness of our minds. Not just our rational minds, but also our intuitive minds, our mystical minds. Our unitive minds that can hold, and even appreciate paradox, uncertainty, mystery.

This way of reading the parables reminds me of the German poet Rilke’s advice to the young poet he wrote to. Rilke suggests he be patient with everything unresolved in himself. To love and live the questions now rather than look for answers. Answers, Rilke said, only come gradually, maybe without our even noticing, as we find ourselves living them.

Perhaps we might take one parable a day – or a week or a year – and meditate with it. Or just call it to mind now and again. Not looking for a specific meaning or message, but just allowing the images to live in us. Might an open-ended encounter with the mustard seed, the yeast, the weeds and the wheat be one gentle way of inviting our thinking to be transformed?

I’d also suggest bringing the people thrown into fire and the weeping and gnashing of teeth into your parabolic musings. I’m pretty sure there’s nothing straightforward about those images either!

Like the weeds and wheat, last week’s gospel is completely intertwined with what we heard today. Unfortunately, when the lectionary compilers pulled out bits for us to chew on, they

left in the weed pile some very important words from Matthew. In the middle of Jesus telling all these parables Matthew wrote:

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables;
he did not say anything to them *without* using a parable.
So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:
“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things
hidden since the creation of the world.”

So these simple little stories must be way more important than they appear at first glance! If we can come to understand what we’ve been blind to from the start, we might be able to get back on the right path. We might become more fully human!

Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World is the title of one of the late scholar Rene Girard’s books about mimetic theory. I’ve been exploring this interpretive tool for understanding human culture for decades now. And John and I just spent a week in Chicago at back-to-back mimetic theory conferences. So I’m primed to share one glimpse of what’s been hidden from us since the creation of the world.

Like most higher animals we humans learn primarily through imitation. Monkey see, monkey do. Science has now discovered the mirror neurons in our brains that make us such good imitators, and thus so smart. These neurons are set off more or less intensely depending on the kind of stimulus activating them.

One of the strongest stimuli for human mirroring is seeing another person reaching for something, or somehow showing interest in it. Humans pretty much automatically, and mostly not consciously, imitate gestures of desire, at least internally.

We begin doing this when we’re just a few days old and we never totally give it up. We learn what we desire from imitating others’ desires. This is so much a part of us we even learn how we think about ourselves – our very identities – from those around us.

Very often, for reasons too complex to go into here, our models eventually become our rivals. The word rival comes from the Latin word meaning “one who uses the same stream or river.” Now that’s a pretty basic trigger for competition, especially in dry years. Or I guess in wet years, too, if you’re contending for the only dry land around.

Rivalry promotes dualistic, either-or, thinking. Either you get the water you need or I do. Either your family stays safe and dry or mine does. Needless to say, this is not God’s wholistic and interdependent way of perceiving the world. But if we’re not very attentive, it’s our default.

The Garden of Eden allegory shows what happened when we ignored God's warning not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In eating the forbidden fruit, which we couldn't yet fully digest, we foisted our tendency toward rivalry onto our relationship with God.

If left unchecked, human rivalry results in open conflict, even violence. In many clans of proto-humans, this in-fighting was so intense the whole group was wiped out in an all-against-all melee. And that was the end of their line.

But those who would survive to become more fully human discovered a way to ward off these free-for-alls. They discovered the power of judgment and blame. They made the whole mess someone's fault. They relied on that oh-so useful duality of us and them.

Then violence could be channeled toward the one or ones we collectively pointed fingers at. We had created the first scapegoat, and human society survived.

When the scapegoat was killed, an awesome peace arose from the chaos. So much so that the murdered ones were deified. They became our first god(s) – gods of both order and upheaval, of life and death.

Eventually we learned we could ward off utter chaos by killing a scapegoat as our community **began** to unravel. And so sacrificial religion was born. The first altars were piles of stones that buried sacrificial victims.

Who'd have thunk the very birth of human culture is so completely tied up with violence and murder? We have, in fact, pretty much kept this hidden from ourselves since the foundation of the world!

First, we sanctified our supposed "good" violence in God's name, and now we do it under the guise of patriotism and civil society. And woe is us.

Understanding this evolutionary process takes us beyond the traditional interpretation of the allegory of the garden of Eden. The "stain" of original sin becomes simply a mistake. It describes a necessary, though not inevitable, choice we humans made to survive. Back when we **really** were too smart for our own good!

Thankfully, God has been working to get us back on track ever since. Jesus came to reveal this hidden foundational murder in his teaching, in his healing, and ultimately by offering himself as the world's scapegoat, once and for all.

God resurrected Jesus to free us from this dualistic, oh-so-human way of organizing and protecting ourselves. To set us free to reach our truly human potential. To love everyone and everything with the wholistic, mystical mind of the risen, universal Christ. I still find this both utterly shocking and oh, so hopeful.

I'll conclude this morning with a beautiful articulation of the power of divine love to claim and reclaim us. To help us become truly human. The poet, Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer, experienced an agonizing and amazing re-birth in the years after her teen-aged son killed himself. She now shares this journey through her poetry. May we all join her in being born again, trusting that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The Possible

Starting here, I want to remember
 the spaciousness that emerges in me
 when my heart knows itself as an expression
 of the one great heart. In those moments,
 when the *I* slips away and the *we* is all,
 when love is unbound from the walls
 of my chest and expands across mountains
 and deserts and oceans and returns
 with the peaks and tide in each breath,
 then the rightest parts of my being unclench
 themselves, as if all the bars of the inner prison
 dissolve and what's left is freedom
 to love beyond judgment, beyond should
 and should not, beyond how my one small heart
 is capable of loving. I remember the first time
 I felt love carry me through a moment
 I knew I could not meet alone. Since that time,
 I am learning to trust that the heart of all hearts
 can rise up in any moment to illumine the path
 I do not yet see is possible. Since that time,
 I am still surprised but not surprised when
 the spaciousness opens me again
 to loving what feels impossible to love.

Thanks be to God.