

## Thursday, March 2, 2017 - Day 60 – Numbers 30-32, Psalm 50, Luke 8

*Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'" Luke 8:10*

There is a strain of Christian thought, largely unencumbered by doctrine or tradition, that assumes Jesus' primary accomplishment was that he managed to be nice to everyone. This verse from Luke's gospel, generally considered one of the "hard teachings" of Jesus, challenges this facile image. Indeed, when Jesus explains that he deliberately uses parables to conceal the true nature of his message, he is being anything but "nice." Instead of affirming that the gospel is for everyone, Jesus appears to set up a dialectic between those who are "in" and those who are "out." Many Christian communities have interpreted teachings like this to condemn those who do not agree with them.

In many ways, however, this easy interpretation of this passage misses its larger biblical context. Jesus is appropriating a tradition from the prophet Isaiah. Just after Isaiah receives his vision of the Lord, God tells the prophet what he should say to his people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand." In his vocation, Isaiah is forced to acknowledge that his people are intractable, that they are not interested in understanding or comprehending the truth, no matter how clearly it is articulated. Importantly, this indictment applies to everyone. There is no righteous remnant among the people who will be spared from God's judgment. By the same token, however, Isaiah declares that no one will be excluded from God's redemption. Universal condemnation, in other words, paves the way for universal grace.

This brings us back to our "hard teaching" of Jesus. Though we might assume that Jesus is describing two distinct groups of people, it is likely that he is referring to everyone. "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God," Jesus says, but he might as well have added, "for now." There will be a time when those who are listening will also fail to comprehend and understand the mysteries of God's grace. Indeed, we see this at the crucifixion, when those who "know the secrets of the kingdom of God" betray and abandon Jesus, despite their apparent "knowledge" and their professed willingness to die with him. Nevertheless, Jesus fulfills his mission, revealing grace and redemption to those who had done nothing to deserve it.

The Christian faith is not about identifying who is "in" and who is "out." It is about recognizing that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, redeeming even those of us who cannot understand or perceive the magnitude of God's grace.

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