

*Stories Jesus Told*  
***Mother's Day Parables:***  
***The Leaven, The Coin and the Persistent Prayer***  
Luke 13: 20-21; 15: 8-10; 18: 1-8

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God is at work. God is at work in the world. God is at work in your life. Jesus deeply affirmed his Father's interest and concern for his world and his people. Yet we don't always see it. Because much of God's work seems hidden. It occurs over time. It takes hold of unlikely people. Jesus told stories to show us his Father at work. He gave us word pictures that we grasp immediately. Yet their deeper meaning unfolds throughout our lives. On Mother's Day, I thought it would be fun to consider three stories of Jesus which have women as main characters. These parables will help us appreciate the good mothers in the world. But also appreciate the goodness of God and the mission he gives to us.



**1. The Leaven.** Jesus said that the Kingdom of God can be compared to a woman kneading yeast into a lump of flour. The Kingdom of God is itself a word picture. It means what the world is like when God actively and fully reigns. Evil is subdued. Justice, peace, worship and love prevail. This Kingdom got started when Jesus came. It is still coming, still growing. We usually think of kings taking control with mighty armies. Their swords subdue evil and enforce good order. But Jesus describes the Kingdom of God working in hidden ways. From the inside out. The way you take a pinch of yeast and work it through a lump of dough, then wait for the bread to rise.

That's all pretty clear. But the twist in Jesus' story is that the woman is kneading yeast into "three measures of flour." That's about fifty pounds of dough. Enough for a hundred personal loaves. Kneading bread without the help of machines is tedious work. One woman working by hand on fifty pounds of flour has a huge and time-consuming task. It's a long-term project. Many will be fed by her labor, but very few will notice what she went through to make it possible.

Think of the way mothers' love works into our lives. From the first laying of the newborn upon her chest, the mother impresses love within her child. A baby

with a loving mother sees her gazing at him. She looks at him steadily, smiling, with love in her eyes. The child knows she is seen and valued. What creates confidence and resilience in a child is the security of loving relationship. That begins with mom. And most of it is unnoticed work. A thousand diaper changes. Hundreds of baths and clean clothes. Sleep-deprived hours of 3am feedings. All of it kneading love into the child that causes him, like good bread, to rise.

This continues through the years. Teaching gratitude. Expecting honesty. Modelling politeness. Enabling independence by giving chores. Keeping faith with every pickup and drop off. Peace settling over the home by its order and fairness. All of this children take for granted, precisely because this leavening love is freely and faithfully given. Years later they understand why they know how to make friends. Why they can overcome setbacks. Why they have a work ethic. Why they can trust and achieve and pass along. Because a mother's love was worked into the very bones.

This, of course, is a picture only perfectly worked out in God's love. Our heavenly Father could easily have made us fully formed, all done, just perfect. He could with a command change the world. But that wouldn't be the fix he wants. He wants our participation. He wants change from the inside out. He loves the slow, hidden work of spreading more and more through our hearts and souls.

And this is the mission Christ gives his church. Jesus spreads his love through our relationships. Through love lived out over time. Most of it is not splashy. Not grand gestures, but consistent care. Showing up. Noticing. Giving. Valuing. Praising. Thanking. Over time, such love moves mountains.



**2. The Lost Coin.** Luke tells us that the worst sort of people was drawn to Jesus. Sinners found Christ to be utterly attractive. The religious leaders, though, despised the way Jesus seemed not to care about the company he kept. In fact, they thought Jesus was bad leaven, bad yeast, infecting the whole measure of God's people. In reply, Jesus told them a story about a poor woman who had ten silver coins saved. Somehow, she lost one of these coins. The woman was distraught, even though the coin was worth but a laborer's daily wage. She risked the expense of lighting an oil lamp in her dim house. She got down on hands and knees and swept under every piece of furniture. She just had to find that coin!<sup>1</sup>

Now the coin doesn't have to be an object. It could well represent some essential part of a person that goes missing. Some piece of a heart that gets submerged. Let's make a link to mother's love as well. Children go through phases. Sometimes we wonder "What's happened to my son? Where did my daughter go?" The happy boy becomes miserable for a season. But Mom never forgets the beaming boy she held in her arms, even when all she gets from him is a grunt. She never forgets her daughter's sweet heart, even when she gets the look that says, "Mom, you're the dumbest creature God ever made." She keeps on looking for that lost coin. She knows it has to be in there somewhere. And how she will rejoice with her friends the day the lost coin is found, and the children become themselves again.

Of course this is a picture of our heavenly Father. The very next story is the parable of the Father who watched down the road until his prodigal son returned. Our God never gives up on us. Just as he is working like leaven, slowly, hidden, over time, so he keeps on remembering who we are, who he made us to be. He keeps running after us. When we are as lost as lost can be, he is still there, waiting for us to go ahead and get found.

And of course, this is what he sends all of us to do. Perhaps there's a rupture in a relationship. Friends, siblings, go from close to estranged. Pride inserts itself. Projection throws our fears onto the other. Blame follows. It would be so easy to close our hearts. To give up on each other. But we're sent to one another to keep looking for the lost coin. To keep believing the best in the other person can yet come out.



**3. Persistent Prayer.** A few chapters later, Luke records a story Jesus told about persevering in prayer.<sup>2</sup> A widow kept going to a judge asking for justice in a legal matter. In those days, a wife could not inherit her husband's estate directly. His heirs, though, had an obligation to provide for her financially. This, of course, did not always happen with as much generosity as the husband intended. Perhaps she had children who depended on her. This woman sought a remedy in court. But the judge was a hard man. He did not fear the God who has special affection for widows and orphans. He did not scare easily in front of others. But the poor widow wore him out by coming back and back and back. One commentator said that the words used here apply to boxing matches. Specifically, to the way a boxer will hit the little bones under the eye until the eye swells and the fight stops. She just kept

demanding justice. So, Jesus, said, we should persist in our prayers, especially for what is good and right and true to come to pass.

Once again, how can we not think of the mothers who pray for their children? Mothers of prodigal daughters and sons simply will *not* accept that lostness is their final condition. They go to their heavenly Father again and again. Save my boy. Bring my girl back to life. Give him faith to see you. Move her, Lord, to do right again. This kind of prayer is deeply Scriptural. We read in Isaiah that the LORD himself asks for it. In Isaiah, we read how God speaks to his people in exile,

On your walls, O Jerusalem,  
I have set watchmen;  
all the day and all the night  
they shall never be silent.  
You who put the LORD in remembrance,  
take no rest,  
and give him no rest  
until he establishes Jerusalem  
and makes it a praise in the earth. (Is. 62: 6-7)

Take no rest, and give the LORD no rest until he has done what he has promised. We hold up to God his promises. We pray back to our Father the words of Paul, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1: 6). Do it God! Finish what you started. Bring back the faith. Bring back the faithfulness. Heal. Save. Act!

We think here of Monica, the mother of one of the most influential Christians who ever lived. She prayed for her son Augustine to come to faith in Jesus. It seemed hopeless. Augustine loved his ladies, loved his parties, loved his sophisticated friends and his erudite philosophy. Monica prayed for him. For 17 years she persisted before the throne. For years Augustine resisted, though he grew more and more miserable. The hound of heaven was after him. Finally, he surrendered his life. In his famous *Confessions*, Augustine recalled his mother in prayer:

‘God, you stretched out your hand from on high and drew my soul out of that deep darkness. My mother, your faithful servant, was weeping for me to you, weeping more than mothers weep for the bodily deaths of their sons. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from you, saw the death in which I lay,

and you, Lord, heard her prayer, You heard her, and you did not despise her tears which fell streaming and watered the ground beneath her eyes in every place where she prayed; indeed you heard her.<sup>3</sup>

After all those years, Monica saw her son come to Jesus. She lived only a year after that, but in those days, they had sweet fellowship in the Lord together.

And so, of course, we see the connection to our Lord Jesus. Hebrews 7:25 reminds us that the ascended Jesus lives to intercede for us. John reminds us that Jesus is our advocate before the Father. He pleads our cause. And of course he sends us to the battle of intercession. Good mothers never give up praying for their children. And neither should any of us give up our prayers for this lost and weary world. Jesus himself taught us to pray until his return: your will be done, here in this broken earth just as your will is always done in heaven. Let your reign, your kingdom take over more and more of this rebel world, until all is at peace and your name is revered throughout the globe.

We celebrate today how mother's love is faithful, often hidden, persistent and ever hopeful. Good mothers reflect to all of us these qualities in our Lord. Our God seeking the lost coin of our humanity, got down on hands and knees to come find us. He laid aside his glory and took up the confines of flesh. He offered himself utterly, even to the last drop of blood on the cross. Even now he sends his Spirit to carry out the leavening work of changing us from the inside out to be like him. Then he sends us to participate in his mission. To seek the lost, to pray for justice and leaven everything with our love and faith in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> James Tissot, "The Lost Drachma," 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Bernand, "The Iniquitous Judge," 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III, Chapter 1, trans. Rex Warner