



## Ma Ke Alo o: *Presence*: Community as Parable

### **Parable**

If we are to be imitators of Jesus, committed to one another and committed to the community around us, then understanding the main thing that Jesus talked and taught most about is pretty important. And that thing is the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> And the way that Jesus spoke most about the Kingdom of God is through parables. So, what's a parable?

In short, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus, knowing who His listeners are, used examples that they were familiar with - at that time, agrarian culture was the most prevalent, so, Jesus spoke in parables, in earthly stories with farming themes, to talk about what the Kingdom of God was like.

"The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." (Matt 13:44 NIV)

"Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?" (Luke 15:8)

"[The Kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)

Earthly things – a treasure hidden in a field, a woman who searches for one lost coin, or a mustard seed – that tells a heavenly meaning – the Kingdom of God worth it to give everything you have for it; in the Kingdom of God, God searches and pursues us because His heart is for us; or the beautiful and generous and justice in the Kingdom of God can seem so small at first, but over time, it grows to become an environment of flourishing for everyone around it.

Jesus used parables to share with the world what He is like, what His heart is like, and what His wise, good, just, and beautiful reign is like.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to MKAO Discipleship Core Essential on *Kingdom Partnership* for more details

## **Community as Parable**

"The missional community is enabled to – and, in fact, it should – understand itself as a *parable* in the full New Testament sense of that concept. It shows the watching world what the kingdom of God is like. It conveys in understandable pictures and explanations the 'wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light' (1 Peter 2:9)"<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of what the Kingdom of God is like, Jesus uses *community as parable*. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35 NIV). If a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, then Jesus' continued story about who He is and what His Kingdom is like, and that His heart is for people and His Kingdom is good and flourishing for all, then the community of people who are imitating Him and are committed to one another and to the community around them is how he's telling his story. Our community is the earthly story that showcases to the culture and world around us that God tells us who we are to a world that questions our identity; gives us our purpose when we ask what in the world am I here for; gives us justice in the midst of brokenness; wholeness in the middle of feeling like there's something wrong with me; belonging in the midst of figuring out how to fit in; truth when there are so many differing realities; and beauty when we question what's good in the world.

To Jesus, a community that imitates Him by loving one another and having unity is the clearest picture of an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Guder continues,

*[Missional community] represents parabolically and provisionally what this good news is all about ... portraying it imperfectly, inadequately, both illuminating it and at times casting it in the shadows. Its witness can describe the inbreaking kingdom of God in Christ ... [and like the parables], it can disclose essential aspects of the kingdom of God that is coming and is now very near. It can render this overwhelming good news in such ways that the Holy Spirit can awaken faith and extend that calling that results in the growth of the missional community.*<sup>3</sup>

## **MKAO as Parable**

How is our own community a parable of community? How do we showcase to the culture and world around us who God is, what He's like, what His heart, goodness, justice, peace, and beauty is like? In what ways are we a poor reflection of what the Kingdom of God is like?

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<sup>2</sup> *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* Darrell L. Guder Pg 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* Darrell L. Guder Pg 140.

How are we a <b>STRONG</b> parable?	How are we a <b>WEAK</b> parable?
Safe environment to share and be vulnerable in without judgement (bc Jesus cares about our struggles, values vulnerability and doesn't judge)	Noisy cymbal without love when there's grumbling, murmuring or jealousy (vs God's love)
Expansion of the Kingdom of God and multiplication from the overflow of people's hearts (bc Jesus' Kingdom grows from multiplied communities)	Low in-between times of pursuit (vs God is constantly pursuing us)
Intentionality in discipleship which is tied to multiplication (bc growth only happens through discipleship)	Lots of connecting and sharing environments but low "challenging/seeking" environments (vs God does all 3)
Love of Jesus experienced through rallying around one another's needs (bc John 13:34)	Low persistence with the One (vs God's heart is always for the One)
Variety of different people want to spend time with us (bc God's family welcomes everyone)	Low corporate scripture study (vs a love of God's word)
God's love is practical and tangible (bc love is lived out in the Kingdom of God)	Low sharing/teaching from more people and in the in-between times (vs learning about God's heart is a constant practice)
Reflection of freedom in Christ (bc that's exactly what Jesus' life, death and resurrection did for us)	Low urgency of the Kingdom of God that sanctifies and transforms (vs God says to seek His Kingdom first)
Small but big impact (bc Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed)	Low corporate prayer (vs conversation and relationship with God is constant)
Committed community to one another and to community around us (bc God's people are a missional community)	Low perspective of seeing each new gathered time as a new opportunity (vs seeing what the Holy Spirit is at work in)
Love for the marginalized in society (bc God's love includes the "widows, orphans and strangers")	Unclear of "what is it?" And unclear paths (vs God is clear about the way of Jesus)
Presence brings peace and joy (bc Galatians 5:22-23)	
Faithfulness despite obstacles (bc God's people imitate God's faithfulness)	
Diversity of strengths and passions are valued (bc unity not conformity is important to God)	
Value each persons' sanctification and growth (bc God cares most about a person's heart)	
Not bound by 1 location (bc there's no bounds to God's heart for people)	
Structure and shared leadership allows others to participate and not just spectate (bc there's partnership in the gospel)	