

There are some things Jesus says I don't like. There are some things Jesus says I'm not sure I understand. There are some things Jesus says I don't think I want to understand.

For example, when Jesus says that I should forgive my brother or sister not seven times, but seventy times seven I am not sure I like that. My gut reaction is that he's asking too much. It's pushing me past a reasonable limit, stretching me past practicality. It's just too much work.

When Jesus says love your enemy I know I don't like that either. I'm not sure what it means – what kind of love am I supposed to have for my enemy? Is it the same love I have for my best friend? How do I know I am being sincere in my love for my enemy? I don't understand this teaching and I'm not sure I want to understand it.

When Jesus says do not be anxious about tomorrow, it doesn't take me a second to dismiss that out of hand. Yeah right, don't be anxious about tomorrow – and next it's don't root for Michigan against Ohio State. Not going to happen. There's just not a second's thought I give to that crazy suggestion.

And I look at all these teachings of Jesus like a jigsaw puzzle and I don't like jigsaw puzzles. I don't have the time or energy or patience to sit there and figure these puzzles out. I just put it all back in the box. I don't understand and I don't want to take the time to understand.

So when Jesus tells this story about the rich man who has a man who manages his accounts and he decides to let him go because he's playing funny with the books – and this crooked manager then turns around and starts cooking the books even more in order to secure a better future for himself

now that he knows he's going to get fired – and then the owner ends the story by congratulating the corrupt accountant and says, "Well you got to hand it to the guy – he got really creative with my money." I can't quite figure it out. I thought Jesus was a fan of honesty and integrity and now he seems to be applauding the guy who's on his way to prison. I don't understand and I'm not sure I want to take the time to understand. But because the lectionary tells me that this is the text of the day and I'm the preacher of the day now I have to keep the puzzle on the table. I have to explore to see what in heaven's name is Jesus saying. I hate it when Jesus' teaching makes me work. Since I work one day a week I suppose I shouldn't complain.

So while working the puzzle one of the things I come to remember – when I give myself the chance to think about it – is that Jesus teaches often with superlatives – to make a point. He exaggerates. When Jesus says, for example, that if your right hand sins better to cut it off – that's a superlative. He's making the point that we should take sin seriously -- he's not telling us to cut off our hand. When he tells us to have faith so as to move a mountain – he's not expecting us to be landscape engineers. He wants us to have unflagging faith. So when Jesus gives a shout out to the dishonest manager – he's not cheering dishonesty – he's applauding creativity. The Greek word is "phronimus" which means wise, crafty, thoughtful, shrewd, creative. At least the guy was wise, crafty, thoughtful, shrewd and creative with the master's money!! Not much else to say about him – and he should probably go to jail, but at least he was creative!!

Jesus tells the story in a different way when he tells about the owner who hands out certain amounts of money to his servants and tells them to take

“GOD CREATES THE WORLD AND LEAVES GOD'S CREATIVE IMPRINT UPON US. GOD CREATES US TO BE CREATIVE.”

care of it. The guy with \$5000 plays the market, doubles down on penny stocks, and doubles his money – and the guy with \$2000 buys some speculative real estate and doubles his money and the guy with \$1000 plays it safe and doesn't risk the master's money and so puts it under his mattress. And the owner says – Oh, I like those risk takers. I like those guys that play it close the edge. I like these guys who don't mind gambling with my money. And because I am a money under the mattress kind of guy – I am at risk losing the point of the story. Because the point of the story is that the master is looking for someone to be creative with what he's given. Takes some risks. Double down.

Which helps me to understand the story Jesus tells a couple chapters earlier in Luke – Laurie preached on this a few weeks ago – about the man who does so well with his crops that he just keeps building bigger and bigger barns in which to store them – and Jesus says “Oh, how uncreative! Think of what you could have done with that 401K, with all that food!”

And now I am seeing puzzle come together. And now all of a sudden it's as plain as the nose on my face. Because it all forms a picture that goes all the way back to the beginning. Because all the way back at the beginning the first words we

hear about God is that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth, the birds and the bees, the plants and the animals, the moon and the stars, the man and the woman – this whole amazing universe that parades in front of us every day. This amazing ecosystem of life that we get to dance in and bask in and take care of. That God isn't happy with one flower he wants billions of them. God is not happy with one star God wants billions of them. God isn't happy with one species of animal – he wants thousands of them. God doesn't want just one tree, he wants a million billion of them. Not one bird but millions of birds. This is who God is. And God creates the world and leaves God's creative imprint upon us. God creates us to be creative. Not just two humans, but two humans that make more humans. Not just one tree, but trees that makes seeds that make trees. Not just two chickens but a rooster and a hen that make eggs that make chickens. Not just one snake ... well, he could have stopped with the one snake. Be fruitful and multiply is what God says to those first human beings. Keep on making this world into the more and more the beautiful thing that I got started! Be creative with what I've given you!

And now it's starting to make sense! It's kind of like God gives each of us our very own seed supply and God says let's see what you do with it.

Luke 16:1-8

Seed Supply

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell
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We're all born with our own sack of seed – right? We're all born with a wide variety of seed – a wide variety of brains and talent and personality and opportunity and education. We all have this seed bag we're carrying around. All different kind of seeds. And the adventure of life, the calling of life, the purpose of life – is what you do with your seed. Do you keep it or do you sow it? Do you start gardens or do you build bigger barns?

Makes me think of John Chapman. Do you know who John Chapman was? Yes you do. John Chapman was what was called back in the 18th and 19th centuries – a nurseryman. A man who grew and tended trees. And he decided one nursery wasn't enough. There needed to be lots of nurseries. Lots of trees. So he started walking around the Midwest, west of the Alleghenies, planting nurseries. Trees and trees and trees. Apple trees in particular. John Chapman loved his apple trees and his apple seeds. So much that they started calling him Johnny Appleseed. Who went from town to town planting apple seeds that would grow into apple trees. Because that's what you do with apple seeds – you sow them, you grow them so you get apples to eat and plant again.

I suppose it's why Jesus kept talking about seeds. The sower and the seed. The mustard seed that becomes the biggest bush. The seed that has to fall to the ground and die before it brings new life. Seed. Seed. Seed. And he throws this sack on our shoulders and says – time to plant, time to sow. Time to tear down those barns and put that hay to work.

Makes me think of a garden I learned of a while back. The Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden. And it is where you think it might be. It is the northern most public garden in the world. In the northern reaches of Norway. On parallel with Northern

Alaska. A picture of part of it is on your bulletin. And it's got thousands and thousands of flowers. All kinds of flowers from all over the world and for a short season it flowers and blooms and dances and smells and pollinates and puts on a show for anybody who wants to come by. And I want to know who got that brilliant idea. Who got the idea to throw seed there? To take the risk to throw seed where seed doesn't grow? To invest in a garden where gardens don't grow. Like putting money on a penny stock. Oh, but the pay off? Double your money maybe.

Makes me think of Shane Claiborne – a young college student in Philadelphia who started reading the Bible and started letting these hard and easy to ignore statements of Jesus sink into him. And he wondered what life would look like if you took Jesus at his word and you actually tried to do what Jesus said you should do. And they started this movement called Red Letter Christians – that take seriously the red letters of the Bible – which are the words that Jesus spoke – and tried to apply them. So they found one of the hardest places to live in Philadelphia – a pretty difficult neighborhood -- and they grew a garden. They grew a literal garden that they could use to sustain themselves and feed the neighborhood – and the garden grew into a ministry and the ministry grew into a changed neighborhood. And it was as crazy as planting a garden at the Arctic Circle. But things grow in the Arctic Circle, did you know? You just have to be creative. You just got to find a way to use your seed. Because what a shame it would be to end up at the pearly gates with a bag full of seed. A bag full of forgiveness you never extended. A bag full of love you

kept from your enemy. A bag full of justice and kindness. A bag full of money you never shared.

Wouldn't it be great if they came up with a board game (I like board games better than I like puzzles) and the winner is the one who used up all her seed? The winner is the one who planted the most gardens? Because I suppose it's the message Jesus keeps teaching over and over again – that the great secret to living, the great purpose to the game – is to figure out what to do with your seed bag? Store it or sow it? What are you going to do as you walk this troubled world? Shake your head and hold onto your seed? Or start planting? In arctic circles, stressed neighborhoods, disadvantaged people, rocky soil, people in your life who need some grace and unconditional love. The answer to the world – lies right inside that bag we're carrying.

Which makes me think of the man who was walking down a city sidewalk and noticed a woman tending to a garden where once a vacant and abandoned lot once stood. And the man called out to the woman, "That's some garden you and God have created!" To which the woman replied, "Yeah, well you should have seen it when God had it by himself!"

All those brains we have, all that talent, all those 401K's, all those friends, all the time that's ours, all the opportunity – all that seed. And the good Lord just waiting to see what gardens will grow.

