

Streetwise

unity in diversity

Let's take a moment to re-read part of the Gospel in a modern version and experience something of the shock Jesus' detractors and admirers alike would have experienced when they heard these words for the first time.

Luke 16:1-13

The Message (MSG)

The Story of the Crooked Manager

16 1-2 Jesus said to his disciples, "There was once a rich man who had a manager. He got reports that the manager had been taking advantage of his position by running up huge personal expenses. So he called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? You're fired. And I want a complete audit of your books.'

3-4 "The manager said to himself, 'What am I going to do? I've lost my job as manager. I'm not strong enough for a labouring job, and I'm too proud to beg. . . . Ah, I've got a plan. Here's what I'll do . . . then when I'm turned out into the street, people will take me into their houses.'

5 "Then he went at it. One after another, he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6 "He replied, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.'

"The manager said, 'Here, take your bill, sit down here—quick now—write fifty.'

7 "To the next he said, 'And you, what do you owe?'

"He answered, 'A hundred sacks of wheat.'

"He said, 'Take your bill, write in eighty.'

8-9 "Now here's a surprise: The master praised the crooked manager! And why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard, than law-abiding citizens.

They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is right—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, to concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you’ll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behaviour.”

What’s shocking about this story is that Jesus is holding up for us as a role model someone who is clearly dishonest.

But, of course, we then quickly realize, that it’s not the dishonesty that he is praising, so much as a particular kind of mindset. In metaphorical terms the whole story could qualify as a conceit, that is to say a far fetched comparison, where the similarity is nothing more than a sliver of glass, which draws to those qualities Jesus admires:

alertness,
to pay attention to detail,
and the ability to look at things from multiple angles,

so necessary for the grim business of survival.

For he knows that the complacency and the shelteredness engendered by the ‘good life’, must finally desert us in times of crisis.

Jesus counsels us to cultivate the kind of intelligence that strips a situation bare of its surface view, to reveal only the essentials; the acquisition of a wisdom that seizes upon every adversity to stimulate a creativity that sets us up for survival.

Jesus shocks us, just as he himself was shocked by the Syro-phenician woman in last week’s reflection; challenges us to persistently and enduringly clamber out of our small worlds to see the big picture – why?

Because it’s not always obvious what that big picture is.

The theologian James Alison brings to our attention a great analogy to help us understand how the shock tactic plays itself out – and he goes to a quite unexpected source to make his point: the two-Act Italian opera, and an Italian word that conveys it.

It's the word 'rovesciamento' [ro·vef·fa·'men·to]: which means to turn everything upside down.

You see at the end of the first Act of a two Act Italian opera, there comes a moment when the characters and all their schemes are completely caught by surprise, and shamelessly exposed, as it is suddenly revealed that the nice young man who appears to be a steady but boring suitor to the leading lady, who has her eyes only for an elder richer man, who in turn has his eyes fixed on a governorship, but needs someone else's aunt to actually buy the posting for him – that same steady boring young man is none other than, the Czar of all Russia. At this point of pulling the rug from under everyone's feet, there is an outbreak of musical chaos, as everyone realizes that just about everything has been turned upside down, everything has to be re-negotiated, old understandings, misunderstandings, put aside.

And so, suddenly, what was thought to be important, is now considered unimportant, and those who looked like being influential, in an instant, stand before us, powerless.

In effect it *is* a complete inversion: a [ro·vef·fa·'men·to].

And Jesus said to them, the disciples, and he says to us:

be careful of living in a bubble.

If you want to survive, you need courage to burst the bubble you live in on your own... before someone else, or *something* else comes along to burst it for you.

Don't wait for the *denouement* the unveiling, the revealing of the Second Act of things unfolding around.

Don't be caught by surprise when reality breaks upon you. Anticipate it now – learn early rather than later to separate the apparent from the real.

Jesus' parable breaks in upon us, like a well crafted metaphor which takes us to another place altogether from what we imagined, a place where we rub our eyes and wonder what is real.

Paul Ricoeur, in his book *The Rule of Metaphor*, reveals some surprising characteristics of metaphors that are not immediately obvious, resonating with Jesus' story, in the sense that metaphors by their very nature, also operate in a subversive manner to expose ways of looking at things that, paradoxically, sharpen our sense of reality.

For example, metaphors give a name to something that belongs to something else, and by bringing these two essentially unlike things together, a new meaning, almost magically, is created – like two atoms of Hydrogen, and one of Oxygen, when combined together produce, what big history calls, an *emergence*, something entirely unexpected, something substantially new.

When we examine the dynamics of metaphor, how they work, we discover that something is transposed, and something is displaced: and in its place something doubly alien has arisen: a present but borrowed word, and a substitute for an absent word.

In essence, the metaphor involves making a deliberate mistake, a calculated, playful error specifically designed, by affecting just one word, to disturb a whole network of meanings, to shock us into a new realization of what the big picture of life is really all about.

Ricoeur calls it, quaintly, yet provocatively, the idea of 'categorical transgression'.

It's as if Jesus is saying, through this story (a kind of extended metaphor, an allegory) that if we, as children of light are going to become as wise as the children of this age, we have to commit a kind of 'categorical transgression' to achieve it.

And that's the kind of lateral thinking we need to adopt, if we are to survive.

Lucy Abbott Tucker at a recent Spiritual Direction Conference made the following remarks which I found so apposite:

(1) beginnings are always messy;
transformation is always, always messy...not a simple straight line.. messy and nonlinear

(2) history does not repeat itself, but it *does* rhyme:
we have been in similar places, even though each time it seems new

(3) and so, grace and wisdom may follow...

(4) Curiosity has its own reason for existing (Einstein)

(5) Curiosity keeps us open to new ideas ...we are on a journey once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity

And finally,

(6) We find they are not caves but long dark tunnels that lead to new light

(7) The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.
Joseph Campbell

And finally, this reading from TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*, its *first*, which captures so well the notion of the 'immaculate perception' with which we began, the place where we understand reality, understand all things in an instant: unity in diversity, diversity in unity: the place where all things are understood at the point of *singularity*.

Burnt Norton

I

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.

But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.

Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
Round the corner. Through the first gate,

Into our first world, shall we follow
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.
There they were, dignified, invisible,
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
And the bird called, in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

...

mmmPoint of view:Italian opera reversal of power structures

Who gathers around Jesus and why?

The 'lost' know where to be found: they gather around Jesus he is like a homing device

Preferable to be lost and know it, than to think you're you're safe when you're not...

Notion of irruption: Eucharist

Limitations of the adversarial paradigm

Judgement/discernment: Jane Austen

TSEluit on time burnt Morton etc

Rowan Williams and how great insight come from outside the church of syriphienicisn woman and Jesus jolted Hume into a new awareness

The shock of realization

It takes something to jolt us out of complacency... See parable

Vision of Julian of Norwich

Size & relativity

Interconnectedness of all things

The gasp of a full moon

Immanence transcendence

Reading the Torah : inside/outside

Insider outsider

Language: knew what I was saying without the words: cognition

AND the point of singularity

Where all is seen and understood

Immaculate perception

Awareness self awareness

Time/eternity: Ellie

Sense/ common-sense /sensual/sensate

Nonsense

Literal

Metaphor: carries us beyond: indesignate

Metaphysical

Notion of 'locus' location

Above

below

Beside

Behind

Before

Past present future

Time location

Memory cf., Memento short memory loss

Sense of self

Sense of the other

Bring in the messy/fear/curiosity/desire paradigm