

Parables of the Kingdom

In our last lesson we studied about the three synoptic gospel writers — St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke. We learned that they wrote the “Good News.” Through the gospel writers Jesus brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. He showed us what is in the future for us, and through his teachings and parables we know how to live our lives.

Remember the story about the mustard seed? Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds on the face of the earth, but it grows to be a very large tree. (Mt. 13:31-32)

This story that Jesus told is called a parable. It is a story that shows how two different things are alike. Have you ever compared two things with phrases like these?

as cute as a button
as skinny as a toothpick
as quick as a rabbit
as white as snow

Jesus told his parables or stories to

make it easier for us to know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, even though we cannot see it. Jesus told us parables so we could imagine and believe in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Have you ever watched your mother or grandmother bake bread? If you have, then you know that she adds yeast and flour and other ingredients and makes dough and places it in a warm spot and soon the dough rises. Then she bakes it so you can have nice warm bread.

Let's compare ourselves to that dough.

We are the flour.

The yeast is our love and faith in God and Christ.

The liquid is the Church; it brings everything together.

Flour can sit on a cupboard shelf in your kitchen for months and years and nothing will happen to it, but as soon as you add the yeast (leavening) and water the flour changes. It is no longer called flour; now it is dough. After a while, it begins to rise, and it grows and grows.

Compare this to our life in the Church. When we love God and are good Christians and live according to the way Christ and the apostles directed us to live, then the Kingdom of

Heaven will be closer and closer to us, just as our bread dough gets larger and larger. Jesus told us parables so we would learn how to be prepared for the Kingdom of Heaven.



Vartoohi and Lucine

Once long ago in a far away land nestled between two large mountains there was a small village. This village was so small there was only one main street. All of the houses and shops faced each other on either side of the street. At one end of the street stood the church and at the other end stood the schoolhouse. All of the farms of the villagers were on the edge of the village, and the well where the people drew their drinking water was on a small hill behind the schoolhouse. At dawn, every morning the young girls of the village would gather at the well to draw their water and to chit-chat about the

goings-on of the village. This was the most enjoyable time of day for them because they could be free to laugh and sing before their daily chores began.

Two of these young girls, Lucine and Vartoohi, lived right next door to each other. As a matter of fact, they were cousins, and like some cousins they happened to be good friends. Lucine and Vartoohi were always together, and went to the well together for their families' supply of water every day.

"Hurry up, Vartoohi, you're always late," shouted Lucine. "I want to get to the well early today so we can find out what everyone's going to wear to the wedding. We have so many plans to make."

There was going to be a wedding in the village in a few days and Vartoohi and Lucine's families were invited. Needless to say, they were both very excited about this social event.

Vartoohi's mother came to the door.

"That girl of mine is still in bed — the lazy thing. I can't do anything with her."

Lucine tried again: "Vartoohi, come on, get up, we have to go." Finally, a mumble came from inside the bedroom. "What, oh, alright, I'll get up, but I was having such a nice dream and you ruined it."

By this time Lucine could hear the other girls in the village on their way to the well, and she started to get impatient.

"Vartoohi, I can't wait any longer for





dark deserted village street. It was so early no one was about; not even the dogs were barking.

Half way down the village street lived Vartoohi and Lucine's *medz mairig* (grandmother). That morning *medz mairig* happened to be looking out the window and saw Vartoohi running along.

"Vartoohi, *aghcheegus* (my girl), come here, please. I need your help," called *medz mairig*.

Vartoohi went over to her grandmother's window.

"I'm crushing walnuts for the *pakhlava* for the wedding and these old hands could use some help."

"*Medz mairig*, I would love to stay and help you, but I have to get to the well for some water. Father will be upset if his morning tea is not ready when he wakes up."

you. I have a lot of chores to do today."

"Oh, wait for me," Vartoohi whined.

"I can't. I'm on my way. I'll see you at the well. Hurry." And Lucine was off.

Vartoohi, deep in her thoughts and feeling sorry for herself, got out of bed and began to get dressed when she heard her mother call again: "Vartoohi, hurry up. How are we to begin the day without water? Your father can't wash and he will have no tea. Without his tea, he'll be unbearable. Hurry." Vartoohi knew her father would be in a bad mood without his morning tea, but she was more concerned about missing all the fun the other girls were having.

Vartoohi finally got her clothes on and started running down the semi-



“Well, my dear girl,” said medz mairig, “that’s very strange.”

“What’s strange, medz mairig?”

“Aghcheegus, how will you make tea without water?”

“But, I just told you, I’m going to get the water.”

“And how will you carry this water home?”

“In the ... Oh, no I forgot the bucket!”

Vartoohi realized in a flash that she was in such a hurry to get to the well that she forgot her bucket. She raced home and found the bucket and again started running toward the well. By this time, some people were up and about and there were even a few carts on the village street.

“Hey, girls, hello, Lucine, I finally arrived, how are all of you today? Whew, I’m out of breath, I ran all the way. Where are you going? Hey wait, I just got here.”

“Well, good afternoon, Vartoohi, the day’s almost over and you’re just getting here,” said one girl smugly.

“Hi, Vartoohi,” said Lucine, “I’m sorry you missed all the fun. I just couldn’t wait for you. In fact, I better get back home or else my ...”

“But what about the wedding?” said Vartoohi. “What about all of your plans?”

“Oh, we already talked about that, all of our plans are made, but I’ll tell you all about it later. Good-by for now. I have to run.”

Before she knew what was happening, Vartoohi was alone at the well. From the top of the hill she could see all the girls walking home with their filled buckets.



THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH MAIDENS

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out and meet him.” Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise replied, “Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.” And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he replied, “Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Matthew 25:1-13

Session 2—Parables of the Kingdom

Key Concepts

1. A parable is a story told by Jesus to illustrate a point.
2. Jesus told many parables about the kingdom of heaven.
3. One must live by the teachings of Christ and love God totally to enter the kingdom of heaven.
4. One must always be prepared for the kingdom of heaven.

Objectives

Students will

1. Prepare role play parable of wise and foolish maidens.
2. Explain the necessity for preparedness.
3. Relate a specific teaching of Christ to their own lives.

Background for Teacher

The theme of the entire year is most clearly presented in this session. Through parables Christ instructed his followers that seeking the kingdom of heaven—his father's kingdom—should be their main goal in life.

Be acquainted with the parables in Matthew 13, which are about the kingdom of heaven.

- Verses 10-17—Parable of the Sower.
- Verses 31-32—Parable of the Mustard Seed.
- Verse 33—Parable of the Leavening.
- Verse 44—Parable of the Treasure.
- Verses 45-46—Parable of the Merchant Searching for Pearls.
- Verses 47-50—Parable of the Net in the Sea.

Note: In the Armenian Church there is a widely-accepted custom for Holy Tuesday. For the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Maidens, we have our young girls, in shabigs, carry lit tapers around the church in procession. They then file into the center aisle in the nave. Then the parable is read. When we get to the line: "Our lamps are going out" (verse 8), half of the girls put their candles out, and the reading continues.

Materials Needed

- Dry yeast (one packet for each child)
- Candles (one for each child and you)
- One candleholder (optional)
- Coffee can with slips of paper—half labeled "wise" and half labeled "foolish" (there should be one for each student in your class)

Procedure

1. Opening Prayer. Take attendance. Read the biographies (homework assignment from previous week). Ask each student why he feels that the person he wrote about is a good Christian. Post assignments in classroom. (10 min.)

2. Have students read the introduction in their texts. Next, have class take turns reading the story, "Vartoochi and Lucine." Discuss the text as follows:

"The story we just read is only a story. It is similar to real life, though, and is told to teach us a lesson about life. Now let's read one of the parables that Jesus told. It is about how to be prepared for the kingdom of heaven. While you're reading Jesus' parable from the Gospel of St. Matthew, keep in mind the story of 'Vartoochi and Lucine.' Could these two girls be characters in this parable? Which one will be prepared for the kingdom? Which one are you like: Vartoochi or Lucine?"

"During Jesus' lifetime it was a custom for the relative of the bridegroom to accompany him to the home of the bride before the wedding ceremony. In this parable the maidens have to wait for the bridegroom, but the sun goes down and they have to light their lamps to see the way; read to find out what happens."

Have students read the parable of the Wise and Foolish Maidens in their texts. Some things to point out:

- Symbolism: Oil and lamps; light; preparedness for the wedding compared to preparedness for the kingdom; bridegroom = Lord; marriage feast = the kingdom of heaven (reward).

- Last verse: "Watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour." (We don't know when we will be asked to enter the kingdom. When the church asks us for something we should not refuse.) (25 min.)

3. *Role Play.* Give each student an unlit candle and have him/her pick from the coffee can full of slips of paper—half of which are labeled "wise" and half labeled "foolish." After all have chosen, ask everyone to look at their slip. Only the "wise" may light their candles from your candle. Have those with lit candles stand on one side of the room and those with unlit candles on the other side. Instruct students to say a silent prayer for themselves. Then read aloud the following prayer:

"O, Christ our God, whom we worship every hour we are alive, who suffered for us and has love for us and has mercy on us. Show us how to be like you, how to love the good, and how to be fair to the sinful. Show us how to follow your commandments. Make our bodies and minds pure so we can understand your glory. Help us to have faith so we may know the kingdom of heaven. This we ask because we believe you are holy. Amen." (20 min.)

4. *Homework Assignment:* Baking bread. (This assignment should be reproduced and passed out to each student with a packet of dry yeast. Stress family participation.)

Baking Bread Together—Pideh

1. All members of the family should recite the Lord's Prayer together.
2. Read the following prayer aloud: "Lord, may thy loving favor rest upon us, and prosper all the work we undertake. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, world without end. Amen."
3. Assemble the following ingredients:
 - 4 cups all-purpose flour
 - 2 teaspoons salt
 - 2 teaspoons sugar
 - ½ cup hot water
 - 1 package dry yeast (given by teacher)
 - 4 tablespoons butter
 - 1 cup milk
4. Follow these directions:
 - Measure the flour and the salt into a bowl.
 - Add sugar and yeast to hot water in a cup, stir until dissolved.
 - After 5 to 10 minutes, it should be bubbly.
 - Melt butter in warm milk, together in a small saucepan.
 - Blend the dry ingredients and add the milk and yeast mixtures.
5. All the children in the family should take turns kneading the dough for a total of five minutes. While the dough is being kneaded the oldest member of the family should read the following Bible verses: Matthew 13:1-3, 10-17, 31-34.
6. Put the dough into an oiled bowl. Cut a cross into the dough with your fingers or a knife. Cover with waxed paper and warm towels. Let rise in a warm place for 2 to 3 hours.
7. Knead for one minute. Shape into a round loaf.
8. Let rise again covered until double.
9. Brush with water. Bake at 375° about 25 minutes, until golden brown.

Session 3—The Word Is God

Key Concepts

1. Jesus always existed and always will exist.
2. Jesus came to earth to show us the light of God.
3. Jesus came to communicate God's love.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read and explain the meaning of John 1:1-5.

2. Demonstrate communication with God.

Background for Teacher

This session is based on John 1:1-5. These verses are abstract and difficult to understand, but if you take the class step by step, by the end of the session, they should have some understanding of what John is saying.

We do not begin with the actual Bible verse but with a definition and explanation of "word" and "logos." The point of the cartoon is to illustrate that people are not whole or complete without their senses of hearing or sight. We compare this to Jesus' birth which brought with it an understanding of God's love and the kingdom of heaven.

Materials Needed

- Baked bread from last week's assignment
- Bibles

Procedure

1. Opening prayer: John 3:16.

Discuss the homework assignment. Have students relate how they felt as the bread was being made. Ask: What was the best part of the assignment—the family working together, mixing the dough, watching it rise, eating the bread, the readings, etc.? (If possible, bring in some bread to share with the class.) (10 min.)

2. Read the student text, "What Is a Word," rearranging the letters on the first page. Continue with the cartoon strip and discuss the explanation given in the text. (Key to rearranged words: Hat, bird, cup, house, church.) (25 min.)

3. The "Word Substitution" exercise on page 20 should be done orally. Following completion of the exercise, have students read aloud the verse with the substituted words. Discuss their understanding of its meaning. (5 min.)

4. Have students do the "Match Game" exercise individually. Assist the students if they need help. Go over the answers at the end of the session. They are: 1-F, 2-J, 3-C, 4-I, 5-D, 6-A, 7-G, 8-B, 9-H, 10-E, 11-K. (15 min.)

5. *Homework Assignment:* See page 22 for this assignment in the student text. Explain the assignment as follows:

Insert your first name in the blank before "_____ology" and on the following line after "the latest word on _____." Then write a short biography of yourself, including your early childhood, family life, school life, church life, etc. Include a photo or picture of yourself doing your favorite activity. Lastly, answer the question at the bottom of the page, "How I communicate with God." (Include your thoughts, actions, feelings, words, etc.) (5 min.)

6. Close with a prayer.