Modern Day Parable Writing Competition

What is a parable?

The word parable comes from the Greek *parabolē*, meaning “comparison, illustration, analogy”\(^1\), and refers to stories that illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Often told by Jesus, they are simple stories that captivate the listener, while at the same time serving to instruct, correct, and rebuke. Concise and accessible, parables are spoken into the context of the hearer and frequently employ the imagery of the everyday. At the same time, however, they also speak of a deeper reality that the parable-teller desires for the hearer to perceive, to move them out of complacency, and to provoke self-reflection and obedience to God.

In a sense, then, parables can be thought of as a lens that “allows us to see the truth and to correct distorted vision”\(^2\). To do this, a good parable “creates distance, provokes, and appeals”\(^3\). Distance disarms the hearer to engage with the story without becoming defensive, which prevents them from hearing God’s message for them. Provocation allows the hearer to realise new possibilities, by seeing alternatives to the circumstances of the present reality. Appeal helps draw hearers into those realities, permitting them to respond positively to God’s summons to obedience.\(^4\)

Why do we need a modern day parable?

Jesus effectively used parables to address the many issues of his time, and to present the ways of the kingdom of God to his audience. Using the power of stories, Jesus engaged the issues in his society and challenged his hearers’ conformity to both personal and corporate patterns of sin. To reclaim the power and validity of *story* in postmodernity, we would like to see modern day parables that are able to engage and become a prophetic voice in our society.

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\(^3\) Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 21

\(^4\) More unique characteristics of a parable can be read at [https://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/characteristics-of-jesus-parables/](https://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/characteristics-of-jesus-parables/)
Examples of modern day parables

1. With story flow and content that follows the biblical/New Testament parables

Parable of Wise & Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27)

“the kingdom of God is like...” Two contractors set out to build houses in a beautiful neighborhood, where the asking values were high and the would-be owners had deep pockets. Both of them had received significant training by apprenticeship, and both had the instructions on how the houses should be built specific to the location. One of them set out carefully to establish the ways the house should be laid out, spending time and energy to make sure that the foundation was just so and that the materials had been gathered correctly. The other told his workers to set the foundation knowing no one would see their workmanship when it was covered by flooring, insulation, and the beauty of the house, and hurried off to grab the cheapest materials he could find to reduce overhead and increase his profit. When the day came for the owners to survey their new houses, one was mightily pleased and paid a bonus to his contractor, who had taken the time to make sure that everything was just right; the other took his contractor to court for faults found in the crawl space foundation, for faulty fixtures, and for a general lack of workmanship that showed throughout the house. (205 words)

Source: https://mustardseedthoughts.com/2013/02/19/modern-day-parables-21713/

2. With a totally a new story flow but has the distinct features of a parable

Parable of Faith in the Face of Peril

Two travellers came to a rickety bridge over a deep, rocky ravine. The first man thought about the goodness of God and convinced himself that the bridge would hold up till they had crossed over safely. He called this assurance Faith.

The second man looked at the bridge and thought to himself, It might hold up and it might not. But whether my life ends today or at some other time, whether here or somewhere else, I am always in God’s hands.

The two men started across. The bridge did give way and neither man survived. The first man’s faith was unfulfilled; the second man’s was not. (115 words)


Other possible contemporary issues that can be addressed in a modern day parable, are church unity/disunity, Christian hypocrisy, consumerism, faith and work, individualism, technology, xenophobia and racial prejudice, income inequality, creation care, familial neglect, comfort and apathy, etc.