

Book Review by Emma Knights

Gooder, Paula. *The Parables (Biblical Explorations)* Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2020

'There is something about the parables that, for me at least, captures the essence of Jesus. They are playful and thought-provoking. They cannot easily be tied down'. (2020: xiii). This quote can be found right at the start of the introduction in this latest book by Paula Gooder. The parables that we discover in scripture make us stop and think. No one parable is like another and they insist on being read on their own terms. This new book makes you do just that. It is an interesting read. It is a book that can be dipped in and out of, with each section containing a selection of parables. It looks at the parables but splits them into sections, with parables which are mentioned in more than one gospel linked together. The four main parts of the book are: 1. The land and all that lives on it. 2. Houses and their occupants. 3. Money – having it and lacking it and then 4. is titled Odds and Ends. Parables that don't fit easily elsewhere.

Gooder begins with some suggestions of reading for further study and gives helpful charts showing the bible references for each parable. Reference is also made to helpful passages within the Old Testament which aid our understanding of parables. Gooder suggests that there are 55 parables and spends quite a bit of the introduction looking at what makes a parable. For each parable, she gives translations of some of the original Greek words that were used, explaining what the word meant then, and occasionally relates it to a situation or word we would use today. This is most helpful, although too often you can get swept away into accepting her definition rather than understanding it for yourself.

One of the parables that Gooder unpacks is that of the Prodigal Son. Reference is made to this being one of the most well-loved parables. She gives an interesting background and understanding of some of the key issues that are contained within this parable. The parable is described as being of a lost son and a forgiving father, where the forgiving father is seen as God who waits for us to return to him. However, with Gooders' interpretation of this, she comes to a very different conclusion. Gooder is of the opinion that the father isn't God, although she admits that this may be an

unpopular view. She contends that for the son to ask for his inheritance in Jewish law was akin to wishing his father was dead. She also states that “the father has thrown the welcome home party with the elder son’s property and did not even invite him to it. Such actions seem ill-judged and thoughtless, and not the kind of behaviour one would want to associate with God” (2020:123). Gooder also discusses the importance of examining and reading the text with what she calls fresh eyes, but also of looking at the views of those from different cultures and backgrounds to ourselves. They may see in the text something that we miss due to our own cultural bias (2020:123-124). The issue of cultural bias is an important one and I would agree with Gooder that this needs to be reflected in our study of the text.

Gooder concludes the book by saying ‘The parables summon us on a journey of discovery. It is not always a comfortable journey; in fact quite often it is a distinctly uncomfortable one, but like no other. Once you set out on it you will never see anything in the same way again’ (2020:235).