

Gems of story

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Steiner's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

I was startled earlier this year when news anchor Peter Mansbridge called someone a Good Samaritan on *The National*, the flagship nightly newscast of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I was surprised that in our secularized, multifaith society, newswriters assumed that listeners would understand an allusion from the Bible.

On second thought, I was less surprised. The reference is to a parable, and the word pictures from the parables take on a life of their own. Ever since my seminary days, I've been attracted to these analogies with a twist, these stories drawn from Palestinian life. I love their strange juxtapositions, the power of their elusiveness, the possibilities they open up.

So for this week's readings, it didn't take long for me to settle on the six small similitudes tucked into Matthew 13, featuring mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl, a dragnet, and a householder pulling out treasures.

In an old seminary paper, I describe a parable as a diamond that is cut, polished, and anchored in a particular setting by a Gospel writer. The parable shimmers as it catches the light first from one angle and then from another, dependent not only on its placement in the text but also on our own location and receptivity as those who encounter it.

The tiny similitudes of Matthew 13 are for me gems of exquisite beauty. They shimmer unexpectedly, illuminating the strange realities of life in the territory where God's reign draws near. Then I move, or the light moves, and the moment fades.

Yet these analogies stay with me. Playfully yet forcefully, they hold out a vision of another way. I find it hard to argue with them. They grab me and won't let me go.