

NT 302-3: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Summer 2023

Course Information

Day: Monday through Friday
 Time: 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
 Location: Zoom (link in Canvas)

Instructor: Anna Bowden

Email: abowden@lpts.edu
 Office: Schlegel 300
 Student Hours: by appointment

Course Description

What are parables and how do we read them? This course offers a survey of the parables of Jesus. In this course students will explore and evaluate various strategies for reading and interpreting the parables, including attention to their historical context, engagement with modern literary theories, and an introduction to contemporary hermeneutics. This course counts as a general elective, an IP elective, or as an advanced exegesis course.

Course Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course a student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the general content of the parables of Jesus.
2. Analyze and exposit the parables, taking into consideration the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text.
3. Competently use major tools for the exegetical study of the parables, including print and digital resources.
4. Reflect critically on competing paradigms for biblical interpretation, with particular attention to the dismantling of racist, sexist, heteronormative and other oppressive readings of NT texts [Many other institutionalized forms of oppression exist and could be listed here. A more complete list might include ableism, ageism, ethnocentrism, religious intolerance, nativism, and transphobia, among others.]

Relationship to Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

The primary SLOs for this course are:

1. SLO 1 for the MAR degree program: Students will be able to interpret Scripture critically and imaginatively.
2. SLO 1 for the MDiv degree program: Students will gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the ability to use critical skills and educated imagination to interpret it in contemporary social and cultural contexts.
3. QEP/SLO: Describe strategies, grounded in their practice, for working toward racial justice appropriate to their particular vocational setting. Students can demonstrate competence with this SLO in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. Defining and using key terms in way informed by an understanding systemic racism
 - b. Identifying racism in its many manifestations (structural, personal, communal, etc.)
 - c. Critical reflection on the history and current contexts regarding race, racism, and antiracism

- d. Critical reflection on racist and antiracist practices and theologies
- e. Developing and implementing antiracist policies, practices, and theologies

Required Books

- Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*. New York: Harper One, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-06-156103-0
- Herzog II, William R. *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994. ISBN: 0-664-25355-5.
- Library link to ebooks: [Course Details for Interpreting the Parables of Jesus \(worldcat.org\)](http://www.worldcat.org)

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

The success of this class is dependent on your attendance, preparation, and participation. Please come to every class and come prepared. Preparation includes reading the assigned readings before coming to class and bringing either a digital or print copy of the readings with you. Participation looks different for different people, but may include things like active listening, taking notes, asking questions, sharing answers/mistakes with classmates, and engaging in classroom exercises.

Reading assignments are listed below on the Course Schedule. Please bring copies (digital or printed) of assigned readings and a Bible to class with you so you may reference them as a part of class discussion.

Reading Journal (20%) – CO 2 & 4

For this assignment students will write short reflections (300-600 words) on the assigned readings and submit them to Canvas as text entry or document upload before class. You can write about one or all of the assigned readings for the day in your reflection. It is your choice. Think of the reflections as an academic diary. This is an opportunity for you to write whatever is on your mind. Maybe the reading reminded you of something in your life or maybe it brought up a lot of questions you want to explore. Maybe you loved the reading and want to think about other ways it might impact your studies or maybe you disliked the reading and want to complain. Whatever is on your mind is okay – just write! Because the point of the assignment is to get you thinking ahead of time about the readings we will discuss in class, journals are due at the beginning of class at 9:00am.

There are 10 dates/opportunities to submit a journal. Grades will be assigned as followed:

Criteria	Grade
Submits at least 10 journals and submits all journals on time.	4
Submits at least 8-9 journals, mostly on time.	3
Submits at least 6-7 journals	2
Submits at least 5 journals	1

Parable Portfolio (80%) – CO 1-4

For this assignment students will put together a portfolio. A complete portfolio will consist of three assignments on the parables of Jesus and is due three weeks after the end of the class. For Part I of the portfolio, students will explore the question “what is a parable?” by choosing one of three assignments. For Part II, students will practice interpreting parables with two of six assignments. The portfolio is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their proficiency with the course outcomes and to practice the skills necessary for interpreting the parables of Jesus.

Part I: What is a Parable? (30%) – CO 3

Choose One:

1. Annotated Bibliography
2. Debate Chat GPT
3. Thesis & Outline

Part II: Interpreting Parables (2x25%) – CO 1, 2, 3, 4

Choose Two:

1. Godly Play Lesson
2. 21st century Parable
3. Parable Resource Page (Academic or Liturgical)
4. Photograph a Parable
5. Communication Strategy/Campaign
6. Dissect a Scholarly Article

For detailed instructions and a grading rubric, please see the assignment sheets on Canvas. The full portfolio is due **September 8** by the end of the day. Please upload your three assignments to Canvas as a PDF, Word document, or JPEG. (If you need to use another format, please email me to confirm receipt of your work. I want to make sure I can open/access.)

Grading

In an attempt to make grading more transparent and equitable, this course adopts a 4-point grading scale and utilizes grading rubrics and assignments linked to course outcomes.

Why not use a traditional, 100-pt scale?

The 100-pt scale is a vestige of the early 20th century, in which the goal of education was to sort and compare students (decidedly not the goal of this class!). That alone makes me question the traditional practice. But there’s more! According to the research cited in *Grading for Equity* by Joe Feldman (Corwin 2019), the 100-pt scale is prone to error and excessive variance. Perhaps the most compelling reason to use an alternative scale is that the 100-pt scale is also oriented toward failure: the scale has over sixty points dedicated to failure (0-59), while only twenty points dedicated to proficiency (B or above)! These divisions make it almost impossible for students to overcome a low grade.

Grading Scale

- 4 – Exceeding Outcomes
- 3 – Meeting Outcomes
- 2 – Approaching Outcomes

1 – Not Yet Met Outcomes
IE – Insufficient Evidence

(Note: I may occasionally determine a student is between two categories and score accordingly. In these instances, it is possible to earn a 2.5 or a 3.5).

Each student will receive an invitation to a Google Sheet for tracking their grades. I will not use the gradebook in Canvas because it is not equipped to handle this kind of grading. If you misplace the invitation or link to your grades in Google Sheets, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I'd be happy to send another invitation.

Final Course Grade

The final grade for this course will be calculated as follows:

- Reading Journal (20%)
- Portfolio Part I (30%)
- Portfolio Part II – First Choice (25%)
- Portfolio Part II – Second Choice (25%)

Translation to Letter Grade

3.8-4.0 = A
3.4-3.7 = A-
3.1-3.3 = B+
2.8-3.0 = B
2.4-2.7 = B-
2.1-2.3 = C+
1.8-2.0 = C
1.4-1.7 = C-
1.1-1.3 = D+
0.8-1.0 = D

Course & School Policies

Contacting the Professor

If you have a question, concern, or just want to connect, let's talk. I am available by email or by appointment (virtual or in-person). If you'd like to meet with me, please send me an email so we can set up a time. I check email frequently and generally respond within 24 hours.

Late Policy & Re-dos

I understand that you have lives that are at times outside of your control and I understand that you have other classes and responsibilities with due dates that at times might compete with our class schedule. For this reason, I will always accept late work and allow unlimited re-dos of previous assignments. If you wish to resubmit an assignment, send me an email so we can make the necessary arrangements. There will be final deadlines for re-dos, though. While I care about students and I am happy to be flexible, I still need boundaries to keep my own personal and professional life healthy. I will give plenty of notice ahead of time when a re-do deadline is

approaching.

Written Assignments

All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font, have 1-inch margins, and numbered pages. Your name, the course name/number, the assignment title, and date should be in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.

Expectations for Students

In addition to the obvious - reading chapters before they are discussed in class, completing assignments thoroughly and on time, and contributing to classroom activities - I appreciate straightforward feedback from you regarding how well the class is meeting your needs. Let me know if the material is not clear or when its relevance to the student learning outcomes for the course is not apparent (or when you're bored out of your mind!). It is also expected that you will treat your classmates with respect, avoid gratuitous arguments, and observe rules of confidentiality regarding personal information shared in class.

Expectations for the Instructor

I will follow the course outline as closely as possible and will notify you of modifications in the outline if they happen. I will attempt to create and maintain a class atmosphere in which you feel free to both listen to others and express your views and ask questions to increase your learning. Please make an appointment to talk with me if there is anything you want to discuss or about which you are unclear. I want to be supportive of your learning and growth throughout the semester.

Zoom Guidelines

Whether we meet in person, on Zoom, or in another digital format, we are expected to:

- show up on time;
- be prepared for our collective work;
- try to limit distractions in our individual locations.

As members of a community, please consider the effects of your actions on your peers, just as you would in a physical classroom:

- keep your video on;
- mute yourself when not speaking;
- focus your attention on the speaker.

Please let me know if you are having difficulties interacting in class via Zoom, and/or if there are reasons you cannot follow the above guidelines.

Use of Inclusive Language

In accordance with seminary policy, in class discussions and in written and oral communication please use language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy, but when referring to God please use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. More discussion about inclusive language can be accessed from

the Academic Support Center and from the section of the LPTS web site on “Inclusive and Expansive Language” (available [here](#)).

Special Accommodations

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center during the first two weeks of a semester (or before the semester begins) and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Resources for Instruction, Learning, and Technology at LPTS

- To access the Library and its resources, visit: <https://lpts.libguides.com/Research/eBooks>
- To request a library laptop loan, contact the Online Help Desk – library@lpts.edu
- For general help with campus network access, Outlook (email), contact support@lpts.edu
- For assistance with Canvas, contact Carolyn Cardwell, ccardwell@lpts.edu
- For Academic Support for any of your studies, contact the ASC: Beth Herrinton-Hodge at bherrintonhodge@lpts.edu or Sherry Arconti at sarconti@lpts.edu

Attendance Policy

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Two or more absences (1/5 of the course) may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructor is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another’s language (including A.I. chatbots) or ideas from online resources is included in this policy and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism and may result in failure of the course. Two occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues related to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see the Policy for Academic Honesty in the Student Handbook.

Most courses at LPTS will require that you write papers. Some will be “journal type” writing, offering theological reflecting, and some will be research papers in which you incorporate the research and ideas of others to help support your points. Some of you will actually publish some of your papers in various theological journals. In all cases, your papers should be of professional academic quality.

In your research papers, you must document any information that is not “universally known” or that you did not know before your investigation of the subject. In academic papers and professional journals, you can make some assumptions about your readers since you know that you have some level of shared expertise. However, any use of information without proper documentation is considered plagiarism.

Sometimes students inadvertently use the works of others without correctly citing the source of the information. Remember, when you use someone's ideas you must give credit to that source. If you are using the author's exact words use quotation marks around the passage and then, using the appropriate documentation style, give the full citation information. These mistakes are usually unintentional but are nonetheless plagiarism.

Another problem occasionally arises when summarizing material. Even when you put the author's ideas in your own words, it is necessary to give the citation information. Sometimes, writers summarize and correctly document their sources, but the summaries are too similar to the original. Phrases and groups of words from the original text might not be rewritten in the writer's "language" but retain too much of the original author's style. This is often tricky but is still considered plagiarism.

A special form of plagiarism is self-plagiarism or "double-dipping": reusing an assignment written for another course (whether at LPTS or elsewhere) or incorporating a substantial portion of work submitted for another course in an assignment submission. Assignments are course-specific and related to the distinctive pedagogical aims of a class. When a student attempts to recycle previous work, whether they intend to deceive or not, they frustrate the aims of teaching and learning in their course as well as the expectation that their submissions represent their fresh, original, and current understanding. In certain exceptional cases (for example, the MAR course Research Methods and Practices) "double-dipping" may be allowed when it serves the aims of two courses, ordinarily taken in the same term, but only with the understanding and express permission of the instructors of both courses. In most other cases, self-plagiarism (or "double-dipping") is academically dishonest practice and should be understood as a variety of plagiarism as defined in this policy. If you are uncertain about what "substantial" re-use of previous work means or whether an exception to this policy applies to your work for a course, you should speak to your instructor for clarification.

Plagiarism is not only unethical but also illegal. Ignorance is not an excuse.

When a professor judges a student's work to have been plagiarized, or to be subject to academic dishonesty, the following steps will be taken:

1. The instructor and the student shall have a consultation in which the assignment in question and the issue of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be discussed.
2. If, in the instructor's judgment, it is unequivocal that a student has plagiarized or used dishonest academic methods in preparing an exercise, the grade for that particular piece shall be judged an "F" or a numerical grade of zero. Any opportunity to redo the exercise is left to the discretion of the instructor.
3. The instructor shall promptly notify the Dean about the incident of plagiarism or academic dishonesty.
4. Such notification will be confidential written communication among the instructor, the Dean, and the student.
5. Two incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty by the same student shall be grounds for dismissal from the Seminary.

6. A student wishing to appeal the judgment of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may use the established procedures for appealing grades.

Citation Policy

Citations in your papers should follow Seminary standards, which are based on these guides:

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2020.

Turabian, Kate L., Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. 9th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

The Chicago Manual of Style. 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center. See also the library's citation help center: <https://lpts.libguides.com/digitalresources/citingsources>.

Course Schedule

NT: 302-3 Interpreting the Parables of Jesus

Monday - Friday, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Week One

Monday (8/7)

Topic #1: What is a Parable?

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 1
- Crossan, *The Power of Parable* (HarperOne, 2012), Chs. 3 & 5 [Canvas]

Suggested Reading:

- Zimmerman, *Puzzling the Parables*, Ch. 4 [Canvas]
- Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, Introduction [Canvas]
- Kim, “Justice Matters” [Canvas]

Topic #2: World of the Parables

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 4
- Levine, Introduction

Suggested Reading:

- Carter, *Jesus and the Empire of God* (Cascade, 2021), Chs 1 & 5 [Canvas]

Tuesday (8/8)

Topic: Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son (Luke 15:4-32)

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 1
- Beavis, “Making Up Stories,” in *The Lost Coin* (Sheffield, 2002), 98-122 [Canvas] TW: child sexual abuse

Wednesday (8/9)

Topic #1: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 2
- Thurman, “The Good Samaritan,” *Sermons on the Parables* (Orbis, 2018), Ch. 5 [Canvas]

Topic #2: The Kingdom of Heaven is like Yeast (Matthew 13:33)

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 3

Thursday (8/10)

Topic #1: Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 4

Topic #2: The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32; Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19)

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 5

Friday (8/11)

Topic #1: Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 5
- Levine, Ch. 7

Topic #2: Wicket Tenants (Mark 12:1-12)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 6

Suggested Reading:

- Bowden, "Extracting the Lives" [Canvas]

Week Two

Monday (8/14)

Topic #1: Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Intro to Part 2 and Ch. 7
- Levine, Ch. 9

Topic #2: Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 8

Suggested Reading:

- Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Herzog, Ch. 9

Tuesday (8/15)

Topic #1: Pharisee and Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Intro to Part 3 and Ch. 10
- Levine, Ch. 6

Suggested Reading:

- Levine, “Questioning the Sources of Anti-Jewish Interpretations” [Canvas]

Topic #2: Friend in Need (Luke 11:5-8)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 11

Wednesday (8/16)

Topic #1: Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 12
- Jerkins, “Righteous Sinners and Free Slaves” [Canvas]

Topic #2: Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-9)

Required Reading:

- Herzog, Ch. 13

Thursday (8/17)

Topic #1: Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

Required Reading:

- Reaves and Tombs, “#MeToo Jesus: Naming Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Assault” [Canvas] TW: sexual assault

Topic #2: Invitation to Banquet (Luke 14:7-14)

Required Reading:

- Metzger, Disability and the Marginalisation of God in in the Parable of the Snubbed Host” [Canvas]

Friday (8/18)

Topic #1: Persistent Widow and Crooked Judge

Required Reading:

- Levine, Ch. 8
- Fluker, “The Liberating Narrative of #SayHerName: A Womanist Social Justice Movement in Black Women’s Stories” [Canvas]
- Meneses, “Queering the Parables” [Canvas]

Topic #2: Closing Reflections

Parable Portfolio due September 8 by end of day.

** Note: Because this is a short course at the end of the summer term, there is little-to-no wiggle room for late work and not a lot of time for re-dos. Do us both a favor and get your work in on time. If you cannot get your portfolio in on time, please be in touch so we can make any necessary arrangements.**