

# **Sermon by Rev. Bill Church**

*JUDGES 9.7-16 (Jotham's Fable of the Trees)*

*MATTHEW 20.1-16 (Jesus' Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard)*

Do children still read Aesop's fables?

Even if they don't, some of the themes have entered into our culture, like The Hare and the Tortoise or The Ant and the Grasshopper.

A fable is a story that could not happen in the real world.

Everybody knows that animals do not organise running races between species.

Everybody knows that insects do not talk to each other about preparing for winter.

They could not happen in the real world but may have a real-world message:

From the Hare and the Tortoise, that those who are methodical and persistent will often overtake those who may be talented but do not apply themselves to the task in hand.

From the Ant and the Grasshopper, if you do not look ahead and put something by for a rainy day, you are likely to be in trouble when hard times come.

By contrast, a parable is something which could happen in the real world. Jesus' story parables could happen in the real world – sheep do get lost, workers do argue with employers and between themselves about how much each should be paid.

Jesus' parables could happen in the real world but are so surprising that people sit up and listen and retell them and ask themselves what message

there is for them in the unexpected outcome. The answers may differ from age to age and from place to place and from person to person, but the parables can be a never-failing spring of inspiration and teaching.

Fables are not usually so complex.

The story of the trees spoken by Jotham on Mount Gerizim is the only fable in the whole Bible.

Jotham's fable could not have happened in real life – trees do not have a debate among themselves about which should be their leader, but it has a real-world message now as much as it did in the time of the Judges – if good people are not willing to fill places of responsibility, locally and nationally, in community, church and state, then those places will be filled by the incompetent, the corrupt or the downright dangerous.