

To: Participants in SC 630. “The Parables of Jesus and the Imaginative Dimension of Scripture”
 From: Dr. Wayne G. Rollins
 Re: Preparing For the First Session

Dear Friends,

In preparation for our week together on “the Parables of Jesus and the Imaginative Dimension of Scripture,” I would like you to read a few introductory pieces as background for the first session. *Please note that none of these assignments are to be handed in. Just bring in your ideas.*

The first is from David B. Gowler’s, *What Are They Saying About the Parables?* (Paulist Press, 2000), the mainstay text for the course on the history of parable scholarship. It’s eminently readable. But if you find some of it too technical, race through the underbrush until you find a clearing with something that strikes you. Try to read the entire book ahead of time. For our first session, focus on chapters 4 and 5 on the Jewish and Hellenistic background of the parables, and on chapter 7 on Simile, Metaphor, Symbol. Come prepared to discuss parable backgrounds, and the various theories on the purpose of parables and the meaning of the phrase, “the kingdom” or “reign of God.”

The second is a “Cadillac” for laymen and scholars on the parables, Arland J. Hultgren’s, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary, The Bible in Its World* (Eerdmans). Just published this last year, it is already hailed as a long-needed resource on Gospel parables. It’s a wonderful book for your library because it comments on every parable with bibliographic suggestions for research papers. Don’t get turned off by the occasional Greek and Hebrew words; they are always followed with English translations. Come prepared with notes and questions on the excellent introduction to the Parables on pp. 1-19. You will find Hultgren useful later in the week in our Workshop sessions on individual parables.

Third, is a somewhat “lighter” text with “out of the box” thinking, Bernard Brandon Scott’s, *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Polebridge Press, 2001). Scott alludes occasionally to the Jesus seminar, but I have chosen this book anyway, because he is one of the most renowned New Testament parable scholars and author of the classic, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Fortress, 1989). You will find his boxed historical notes immensely useful and he will challenge you to think in new ways. Please bring questions, comments, even objections, from his first two chapters, pp. 1-20, “The Parables and Jesus” and “On Parables.” You might try to read the last chapter and epilogue as well, so you won’t have to do that during the week. We will be reading the middle chapters on a daily basis in our Workshops.

Also, we have a BYOB policy in the course: “Bring Your Own Bible” to every session. Bring a copy of Gospel Parallels as well. The biblical text is what it’s all about! It will be a busy and lively week, which I hope will provide all of us with a deepened understanding of Jesus and his parables and the role of imagination, story, and symbol in the life of the soul within the life of the Holy.

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P.S. Credit students: please note the Book Review Assignment in the attached syllabus.