

Changed by something radically other (Luke 12:32-40)

Can we allow Jesus' metaphors into our imagination?

by [Hardy Kim](#)

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This passage from Luke consists of a series of teachings that instruct Jesus' community to live in the world without being of the world.

But here, as elsewhere in parables about God's world-to-come, it is hard to know exactly how to translate the teachings into meaningful action in our own lives. Whether because the context of these sayings is too distant from our own, or because parables by their very nature cannot be understood literally, we cannot draw a simple conclusion from the lesson.

[In a 2015 interview with Religion News Service](#), poet Christian Wiman answered questions about the "spiritual power of poetry":

We can only know God metaphorically. The Bible is quite clear about that, and the Bible is filled with metaphors. It makes sense then that you would turn to the place where metaphor is used most intensely and well: poems. Great poems, even when they are not about religious experience, are in a way, about religious experience. They give us some access to the other, to the spiritual life.

W.H. Auden famously said he didn't think there was such a thing as an atheist poet. I have friends who disagree, but he thought the act of writing a poem was a religious act. Because you were allowing something so radically other into your imagination. And it could change you.

The metaphors that Jesus shares in our text today are indeed things that are "radically other." If we allow them into our imaginations, they might change us.

And as Wiman contends, poems have a similar power. The ideas and worlds hinted at in some poetry might be criticized as impractical, or as constructions of an idealized reality that we could never achieve in our current economic and political landscapes. Yet they can still serve as provocative companion texts to scripture and to our own stories, bringing us to deeper understandings of Jesus' encouragement to live according to another way.

Wendell Berry's "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" is a good example of poetry as provocation to live by a different standard:

Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.