

## The Christian parable of “The Lorax”

Among all of Dr. Seuss’s storied, *The Lorax* is probably the best example of how the good Doctor could give us two kinds of good at the same time – the obvious good and the hidden good.

*“...the good that people can do can be obvious; but even when it is not, it cannot remain hidden.”* (1 Timothy 5:25)

People commenting on *The Lorax* have generally focused on its obvious good – its lessons about good environmental practices – and they have walked away from the story apparently feeling that it has little more importance to tell us. The story is seen primarily as a morality tale, a cautionary preachment about pollution and conservation and corporate greed.

But *The Lorax* goes deeper. There is something beyond these obvious moral lessons, something that remains hidden. Far more questions than the story bothers to answer:

- What was the Lorax? Why was it there?
- Why was it lifted and taken somewhere?
- Who was this “somebody: who “lifted the Lorax away”?
- Where does the Lorax’s peculiar name come from?
- The Once-ler, what’s that all about?
- And those trees! Why is Truffula so special?

At the end of the story when the Once-ler tosses the tiny Truffula seed – “the last one of all” – to the story’s unnamed narrator, he calls out to the boy, “Catch!”

- It would seem that most of the meaning of this story – like the seed – still seems up in the air for us to catch.

Hidden elements in the story are closely related to Scripture.

Ted Geisel had plenty of opportunity to know his Bible “very well” and wanting to somehow put this knowledge to good use – even if its power must sometimes be carefully hidden inside artistic books.

*The Lorax* would seem to be about faith:

- Christian faith
- Faith in Christ
- Faith’s short supply in the world
- All the world’s need for this faith

*“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you”* (Matthew 17:21).

Jesus was not speaking to the disciples or to us individually, but he was speaking to the whole world.

- The world finds it difficult to believe – even impossible – to believe in Christ.

- Instead the world finds itself believing in the “things” of the world.
  - What are some “things” in the world that we might believe in?
    - Material things such as toys, games, electronics

Once upon a time, we’ve been told, the world was like a beautiful garden filled with:

*Those trees! Those trees!*  
*Those Truffula trees!*  
*All my life I’d been searching*  
*For trees such as these.*

All of us for all of our lives search for beautiful, graceful trees such as these, and originally, once upon a time, they were ours. This how it all started, as the Once-ler recounts:

*It all started way back...*  
*Such a long, long, time back.*

But then, after this perfectly beautiful “In the beginning,” something went terribly wrong, horribly, hideously wrong. For soon people realized that the Truffula trees could be used to supply people with all those things that they think they need – “Thneeds,” in other words. This meant that the Truffula trees would no longer be appreciated for their original purpose.

The story of the two types of trees in the garden of Eden is not in the Bible to teach how the situation got to be what it now is, but simply to teach us what the situation is.

There is now another *once*, another starting point, and this starting point from which all of us now originate is horrible.

Look at Genesis 1:29; 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The New Testament knows “very well” this starting point of original sin, “the old Once-ler.”

Look at Romans 6:17, 19; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:21-22

And just as the central human problem in the Bible and in *The Lorax* seems to revolve around this old Once-ler, the answer to this problem seems to hinge on the meaning that both of them can put into “the one word” – as it’s printed in *The Lorax* – namely, “UNLESS.”

It is interesting to see how many important elements in Dr. Seuss’s parable of *The Lorax* are represented in Jesus’ parable of “the vine and the branches.” Pay close attention to how Jesus uses “unless” in this passage.

Read John 15:1-2; 4-6

Unless the vine and branches remain together, the branches, like the cut-down Truffula trees in the story, are doomed to only producing “smogulous smoke.” Also, the true vine is in the branches, just as the Lorax comes “out of the stump of the (Truffula) tree.”

So, who then is this “Lorax” on whom so much seems to depend and around whom the entire story centers?

Ask the kids:

Who was the Lorax?

Why is the Lorax often referred to, as in the story’s first words, as “the *Lifted* Lorax”?

Why was it there?

Lorax is a word that you probably have not heard. It could be an acronym for Jesus:

Acts 2:36 – “the Lord and Christ”

Can become

“the Lor a X”

(X is often used as a letter or symbol for Jesus)

Also, in Acts, this same Lord and Christ is twice referred to as the “lifted” Lord and Christ (Acts 1:9; 2:33).

When Dr. Seuss first introduces us to the Lorax, who is pulling himself “out of the stump of the tree I’d chopped down,” this scene is illustrated by an unusually large picture in which the Lorax is surrounded by a colorful border consisting of pointed beams of light, all of which are radiating from – but at the same time pointing at – the Lorax.

Read Isaiah 11:1 to notice the prophet speaking of a coming messiah.

After the Lorax is lifted “through a hole in the smog,” we don’t see him anymore, just as we don’t see Christ anymore in the New Testament after “he ascended into heaven,” to use the Apostle’s Creed’s words.

At that very end of the story we are told that if we can just use the last of the Truffula Seeds to “grow a forest” then:

Then the Lorax

And all of his friends

May come back.

Or as Jesus could say about his own “second coming,” “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Ask:

How do you grow your faith?

Does your faith ever get challenged?

How do you get through times that cause your faith to lag or be weak?