

“The Kingdom of Heaven”
Matthew 13:31-52
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #63
8th Sunday After Pentecost
19th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
7.26.20

Matthew 13:31-52 CEB

31 He told another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his field. **32** It’s the smallest of all seeds. But when it’s grown, it’s the largest of all vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches.”

33 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and hid in a bushel of wheat flour until the yeast had worked its way through all the dough.”

34 Jesus said all these things to the crowds in parables, and he spoke to them only in parables. **35** This was to fulfill what the prophet spoke:

I'll speak in parables;

I'll declare what has been hidden since the beginning of the world.

36 Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

37 Jesus replied, "The one who plants the good seed is the Human One.**38** The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. **39** The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of

the present age. The harvesters are the angels. **40** Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. **41** The Human One will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin. **42** He will throw them into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. **43** Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Those who have ears should hear."

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that somebody hid in a field, which someone else found and covered up. Full of joy, the finder sold everything and bought that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. **46** When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.

47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that people threw into the lake and gathered all kinds of fish. **48** When it was full, they pulled it to the shore, where they sat down and put the good fish together into containers. But the bad fish they threw away. **49**

That’s the way it will be at the end of the present age. The angels will go out and separate the evil people from the righteous people, **50** and will throw the evil ones into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

51 “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

They said to him, “Yes.”

52 Then he said to them, “Therefore, every legal expert who has been trained as a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like the

head of a household who brings old and new things out of their treasure chest.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I'll have to admit, when I was reading through the scripture earlier this week, I think I imposed my own interpretation of the text when it came to Jesus asking the group if they understood these parables. They said “yes”, which I interpreted as that same resounding “yes”

whenever my math teacher in high school beautifully explained a formula to determine the area of a circle. But, I was wrong. The audience and the disciples most likely understood these parables more than I thought. They are a product of the 1st century: Agrarian based economies and subjects of Rome.

Honestly, I understand these parables the same way I “understood” those formulas in Geometry. A blank stare with nothing on my mind except lunch. I imagine for many today, you can probably grasp some of these parables more easily than others. But, this Kingdom of Heaven is shrouded in mystery! What is Jesus talking about? We hear the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew so often and maybe we think we can finally figure out just what the Kingdom of Heaven is if we just pay attention to another parable by our Savior.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast. The Kingdom of Heaven is like someone who planted good seeds. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a hidden treasure. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for pearls. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net.

Maybe that's the point. The Kingdom of Heaven is mysterious.

The Kingdom of Heaven appears in many, wonderful, bizarre ways.

The Kingdom of Heaven is strange. The Kingdom of Heaven

stands in direct opposition to the many kingdoms that have risen

and fallen throughout history, including the Roman Empire. The

Roman Empire controlled the known world in the 1st century. The

Emperor was lord, those at the top were rewarded for their

obedience, those at the bottom suffered, and many nations were conquered. Yet, compared to the Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Heaven is not what humans think as normal.

The Kingdom of Heaven is described to the 1st century audience in different ways by Jesus and they seem to get it, or at least, they seem to understand it a bit better than we do in the 21st century world. For the ancient people accustomed to these images of mustard seeds, yeast, hidden treasures, and others, they can grasp the language. The Kingdom of Heaven as told by Jesus in Matthew describes God's action and our response.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed or yeast. In these two parables, Jesus says that the Kingdom is faith in God. God's movement in our world. It's God's action. What seems so small, like mustard seed, or what seems to be insignificant like yeast, perseveres because God provides the growth. The mustard seed grows into something bigger than anyone thought possible and the yeast ends up as delicious bread. Both take time. Faith that in God's own time, all things work together for good. This Kingdom of Heaven is not only a future reality, but is a present reality and we are that mustard seed or we are that yeast and God is working in and through us right now in this moment in time, even when we think what we do doesn't matter.

God's action in the world not only provides the growth in our present day reality, God's action in the world also purifies. In verses 36-43 and 47-50, as Jesus explained the parable of the weeds to the disciples and as he spoke to them about the parable of the net, God separates. The Kingdom of Heaven doesn't rest on our separating the good from the bad, the righteous from the unrighteous, the wheat from the weeds, or the good fish from the bad fish. That's up to God. Sure, there are plenty of people who claim to be a part of the Church who pay lip service, but do not follow Christ's teachings. As members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are called to proclaim Jesus as LORD and to obey his teachings. God will do the separating.

While the Kingdom of Heaven portrays God's action in the world, the Kingdom of Heaven also depicts our response, as we read in verses 44-46. This Kingdom is like a hidden treasure or a merchant in search of fine pearls. Someone buried the treasure in a field and someone else found it. That treasure gave them so much joy that the finder of the treasure sold everything they had and bought the field. Or the Kingdom is like a merchant who found the most valuable of pearls that they sold everything they had to buy it because it gave them so much joy. This Kingdom of Heaven gives us joy that transcends human thought. The Kingdom of Heaven is hidden like that treasure or that one fine pearl. But, once it's discovered, indescribable joy overwhelms us. The joy of discovering that God has been, is, and will be at work in our world.

The joy of knowing that the Kingdom of Heaven is not like the Empire of Rome or our modern day empires.

The Kingdom of Heaven is strange. In 1st century terms, it stands in opposition to the Roman Empire where the strongest were first and the weakest were consumed. In our day, the Kingdom of Heaven seems highly illogical, yet it continues to persist. The Kingdom of Heaven is right here and now and the Kingdom of Heaven will be. It does not rise and fall like any empire, it continues to grow inside us and around us. God does the growing, God does the separating, and we joyfully respond and proclaim the Good News of our strange God who continues to grow a strange Kingdom. The same strange God who dwelt among us, died for us,

rose for us, and continues to work through and in us as members of this strange, mysterious, and wonderful Kingdom.

Beloved in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.