

King of Glory Lutheran Church – July 29-30, 2017
Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-53 Mustard, Leaven, Treasure, Pearl
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God's Kingdom will grow and move in ways that surprise us, eventually overtaking our deepest seated behaviors and our guiding assumptions. God's ways entice us to larger lives, for we who aren't satisfied with the status quo, who want more of God's power in our lives.

Please pray with me a prayer in the front of the ELW – our hymnal – which reads as follows: *O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship. Augsburg Fortress. Minneapolis, MN. 2006. Morning Prayer, Pg 304)*

Give us faith to go out with good courage! As your servants!
Ready to share your news! Ready to suffer for you! Ready to trust in your love! Ready? Are you ready? Are you sure?

The Kingdom of heaven is like a those people who steal packages off others' porches.

The Kingdom of heaven is like the ad on the ARC truck around town with a picture of a young woman with Down's Syndrome. The caption reads, "I'm different. I want a small wedding."

The Kingdom of heaven is like the beggar on the street corner going home to write a \$1000 check for his favorite charity.

Surprised? Put off? How could God's dominion and reign be like those who steal packages off porches? How could God's kingdom be like one who begs and then gives it all away? Remember parables – are pictures of God and God's kingdom? None of them hold the whole, yet each hold a truth with often a surprise! These today are especially subversive.

OK – a quick review. Most of us grew up with an explanation about the mustard seed parable that went something like this. From what is tiny grows something very large. Well, that's true for many things in the natural sciences. Yet, what we know is the mustard seed is not the smallest of seeds - many say orchid seeds are the smallest. And the mustard seed doesn't grow into a tree. It grows into a nasty, wild, invasive bush that no one wants on their land. So birds may nest there, but farmers would dislike it immensely. Why does Jesus say the Kingdom of God is like an invasive, expansive, wild bush?

Leaven in bread? For we in the 21st century, we buy leaven in little yeast packets at the grocery store. Fleischmann's company parcels it out in 0.75 ounce packets – dry yeast – ready to use! That's not the kind of yeast Jesus was referring to! He was referring to a big hunk of moldy, rotting bread. She hides it. She doesn't mix it. In that day, leaven had a negative symbol of corruption.

What's even more crazy, it that she doesn't put it into just wheat enough for her family, 'three measures' was enough wheat to make bread for a crowd of 100. The woman is contaminating food for many people!

It might not be as sinister as this, but think about the cyber attack that hit London hospital computers in May. That attack affected patients, medics and the whole industry for days!

Why does Jesus say the Kingdom of God is like a woman – not a man – tainting wheat that if ever made into dough for 100 people would be rotten? May not be sinister, but it is disturbing and creepy. God's dominion will go down under and we might not know it or notice it.

And the man who finds a treasure? It may not even be legal what he does. After finding the treasure, he doesn't go find the owner and fess up. "Hey, out in the back 40 on the west side, over along the fence, I found an incredible ...well, why don't you

just come with me and take a look. I think you'll want to know what's over there."

Wouldn't Jesus have told us the 'right' thing to do? No, these parables aren't about behavior, they are describing God's kingdom. The treasure this man found was so valuable, that he had to be 'all in'. At the risk of not even knowing the treasure's worth for certain – he didn't get it appraised first on Antique Roadshow – he sells all he has and buys the field.

Rev. Dr. David Lose says this. "the Gospel of God's coming kingdom is threatening before it is comforting, because it invites no half measures. The Gospel makes a claim on your whole life, not just part. It invades your whole world and reality and can't be contained only to your spiritual, Sunday self. Not only that, but it taints the reality we've grown to accept, challenges the views we've lived by, and again and again calls into question assumptions that have guided much of our lives in the world."

The good news of God's dominion in our lives invites no half measures. It will invade us and change our assumptions and the reality we've grown to accept.

A friend of mine, Brenda Greenwald has a Christmas tradition. She and her brother love to hide tiny plastic green military men in the branches of their mother's Christmas tree. Now her mom likes her tree pretty and perfect. "Don't mess with it, don't change it, just leave it alone." Which of course, inspires Brenda and Brad all the more. So they secretly hide the military men. Not just a few, more like 100. And every so often one falls out and they get the tirade. When Mom goes to take down the tree, out fall little green military figures all over the carpet who invaded her peaceful tree.

God's Kingdom is like a Christmas tree with military men. Historically, that's not inaccurate. Rome had a hold when Jesus became incarnate on that starry night; it was they who required the census causing the family to be in Bethlehem. One day,

Jesus would threaten military might and supplant it with another kind of power: grace and love. He became that nasty weed that wouldn't go away. People became ensnared in his branches and the establishment didn't like it.

Has the Good News of Jesus Christ disrupted your life? Mine? When has it challenged us to look at our assumptions? When has it called for us to be 'all in?'

Several times parents have told me they've had a harder time parenting after being empowered to be 'faith formers' at home. "Why?" I asked. "Well, before we knew about helping form faith in our children, we'd let them go to play at other friends' houses." "Yes, so what changed?" "Now, I want to know what video games they play and what movies they are going to watch. I don't want my kid playing games with only guns and battles even if they are imaginary. It doesn't promote my Christian values anymore. Now I ask the other parents and sometimes we just stay home. It's changed friendships." Hmm. Pesty mustard weed.

A woman went to brunch every Sunday after church with her family. One day as she paid the bill, she was shocked to realize that she paid more for the meal than the check she had just an hour ago put in the offering plate. "Certainly my time with God in worship and my fellowship with other Christians is worth more than my lunch!" she thought. That moment changed her understanding of stewardship. Oh my now, God is creeping into our wallets and budgets! Darn moist leaven.

Maybe you felt a call to accept a new job offer that took you a new city hundreds of miles away from family and friends. It wasn't logical to move. The kids were all settled in school, your spouse was happy. Yet it made the most sense because it was work that left you feeling fulfilled. God needed you – just you – to do that specific job and you had to pick up the family and go. It was God's call for you in that season...the pearl of great price.

Because here's the reality. We can pretend we're in control. We can buy things that make us feel good or put money in the bank for that 'rainy day' crisis. But when that crisis hits, or when the values of our neighbor just turn us to anger, or when our child is experiencing some injustice, we need more. We don't need more anger or more money, we need God in the middle of our life. We need the pastor to come pray before surgery. We need to learn how to pray for our neighbor so we don't say or do something stupid! We need to stick up for our children not because they are our kid, but because it could be any kid and they don't deserve what is unfair.

The Kingdom of God is pervasive and undermines social norms. It finds our weaknesses and speaks to them. God's dominion, the more we open ourselves to it, will grow in our hearts like a weed out of control. And even if it brings discomfort between family members or friends or even within ourselves, Jesus' claim on our lives is real. He and only He, offers what we need.

We heard in the Romans text that when we don't know how to pray, God's Spirit prays with us. The Spirit groans with us, cries with us, rejoices with us and ushers us right into God's presence. If you want God to leaven your Spirit, ask. If you want God to grow all over your heart, pray.

Do you want the pearl of great price? Listen!

"If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,

nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8: 31-35, 37-39)

Jesus is our pearl of great price. Reach for Him. Search for Him. Learn from Him. Allow Him to be all that you need. Allow Him to love you, because He does already. And then God's Kingdom will be revealed to you. Amen.