

It's Jesus!

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
Year A: Pentecost 9: Mt 13:31-33, 44-52
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³¹He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." ³³He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." ⁵²And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Gospel: Jesus is the seed, the yeast, the treasure, the pearl, the net full of fish.

Law: How much is it worth to you and me? Are we willing to search and pray? Are we willing to sacrifice? What are we willing to do for the One who gave His life for us?

Beloved of God, hear the words of the Lord. Amen.

One quick definition before we begin. "The Kingdom of heaven is like.." Let's define kingdom. Kingdom in this context doesn't equal King Charles new reign in England. Yes, the people of Jesus' time were living under Roman rule and a kingdom that oppressed them. But that's not what Jesus is talking about.

Likewise, Kingdom is not a geographical area. Kings and queens rule over this nation and this nation. Their rule has geographical areas and boundaries which are clearly specified. That's not what Jesus is talking about, either.

What Jesus is talking about it this. “Kingdom” is what, how and where God acts and moves. Where is God’s domain? Where do we see God? There is God’s kingdom.

Jesus spoke of holy and ordinary things in the same sentence. “The Kingdom of God is like...” He spoke directly and He spoke indirectly. In doing so, Jesus made people think in new ways about what they saw and experienced. He was a creative teacher inviting those who listened to also think in expansive ways.

Are you willing to play along with me? I have several items here. I’m going to hold them up one at a time, and I invite you to shout out the answer to the question. The kingdom of God is like a coffee cup because...

(Holds up coffee cup, screwdriver, iphone)

So what do a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl and fish of every kind have to do with one another?

Let’s get at it this way. You used to tell your children, “If the pastor asks you a question, the correct answer always is...Jesus!”

What do a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl and fish of every kind have to do with one another?

Yes! They are all about Jesus. Theologians and preachers have come to many conclusions about these parables over the years. What was new for me as I prayed over these old, wise texts was that they all described Jesus who brought in and embodied God’s Kingdom.

Jesus came as a tiny baby, like that tiny mustard seed. He was small and seemed insignificant, helplessly suckling at Mary’s breast. And yet thirty years later, when the fullness of His ministry came to be, He was like a huge tree that all people could come and rest in and under.

Hebrew prophets Ezekiel and Daniel used tree images to symbolize God’s power over other strong empires like Egypt and Assyria. The kingdom of God is Jesus’ ultimate power over rulers that subjected people. It was true then and it’s still true today.

Remember last week when we talked about God being at work in the world? We might get discouraged about all the trouble, all the wars, all the hunger and refugees. We are called to remember God is yet more powerful than every ruler on earth today. We might

not be able to see God at work, but God's power is there for certain growing in small and magnificent.

For example, what if the Kingdom of God is like the Women's Soccer World Cup? Nations playing against nations, putting aside differences to play elite athletes, shaking hands afterwards, wishing one another well on the journey to be the best. God's Kingdom is like that.

And that yeast the woman used? She didn't mix it in with the flour. She hid it. Yes, the Greek word is hid! The woman hid enough yeast in with her flour to make bread enough for one hundred people! That's subversive! That's calculating! It's even rebellious!

Ever been to a concert where the opening act is some unknown artist, some small band? The headliner chooses another artist who might not be as well known to showcase their music. In this way, the opening act - the supporting act - gets as much exposure as the artist who everyone came to see! Taylor Swift choosing Gracie Abrams as her opener. It's subversive and calculating!

That's Jesus! The Gospel He embodied and preached about wasn't only for the Jewish people. He was subversive and rebellious in His message. This Good News was for people who had never believed in a Jewish God. The Kingdom of God was for all people! Jesus came to feed the whole world with His kind of justice and mercy.

What about someone who sells everything he has to buy a field where a treasure is? What about this merchant who also sells everything to get enough money to buy one pearl?

Could we be the treasure? Could we be the pearl that Jesus paid for with His life? He gave everything so that we could be His forever. Jesus loved us that much. He died so we can live. God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son.

This was the trajectory from the very beginning. That for all people, the good fish and the bad fish, those who gave Jesus a hero's welcome and those who rejected Him, Jesus would give His very life to bring in God's domain. God's Kingdom was born in Jesus. And it is still revealed in Jesus, yet today.

Which brings it all back around to us. The Gospel, the Good News of this text is everything God has done for us. The Law in this text is...what are we willing to do for God? *How much is Jesus and His kingdom worth to you and me? Are we willing to search for God day after day and pray? Are we willing to sacrifice time, energy, money*

to grow God's Kingdom? What are we willing to do for the One who gave His life for us?

Matthew indicates the choice is clear. The fish who believe in lies, greed, and unjust power will have their end. The fish who believe in God's ways will have their life in Christ.

What are we willing to search for? Can we open our eyes and hearts to ever new understandings of the ways of God? Are we willing to make sacrifices – true sacrifices – so that more and more people can know about Jesus?

Take for example the line in the Lord's Prayer: Give us today our daily bread. It is a very relevant petition when there are those with plates full of food and those with empty plates. Or no plate at all.

Faith cannot just be what we live for one hour a week, when many of God's children suffer the other 167 hours a week. The Kingdom of God is the food we donate, the letters we write so that food stamps don't end. It's spending time listening to a person who has no one to talk to. The Kingdom of God looks like giving up some of our precious time to another person.

Did I ever tell you about the season when my parents insisted we pick up a single Dad and his children to take them to church? We did it for a long time. I got tired of doing it. But what it taught me was sacrifice and service. Those were excellent lessons.

And helping bring in God's kingdom can be really fun! Think about doing it in hidden ways, subversively and covertly, without any recognition! Jesus said, "Go into your room and pray in secret." How fabulous is that?! Praying in secret for annoying neighbors, for friends who are ill, for world leaders to whom we are just specks of dust and will never know we pray. What fun! God's Kingdom is like that too.

It is an incredible honor that God allows us to be co-creators to bring in the ways of God, the love of God, and the justice of God. Oh that we are willing to lose some of ourselves in the process! The Kingdom of God...is like that. Amen!