

## “Many surprises”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill  
Sunday July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The kingdom of God, or in Matthew’s gospel, because good Jew’s do not speak the name of God, the kingdom of heaven is like... where do we see it, what is it like.

Jesus announced that the kingdom of God is in our midst – God’s rule, God’s reign, God’s power is at work in the world.

We see it as Jesus heals, as Jesus calls disciples, and as he teaches.

The Bible talks about Jesus’ reign and the kingdom of God being in our midst, but it also speaks of the reign of Jesus coming to fulfillment, in the future.

The kingdom of God is breaking in, it is being revealed, and it will come in its fullness some promised day.

So to what do we compare the kingdom, what is it like, how do we take hold of now, how do we live into God’s kingdom?

The Kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like a mustard seed, and like yeast.

How does that sound to your ears?

A little boring maybe?

A little surprising if you think about it, maybe more surprising if you were part of Jesus’ Jewish followers.

A mustard seed is hardly a great tree.

The crowd around Jesus was probably expecting something more spectacular like the tree depicted in Daniel of Babylon: a tree standing majestically at the center of the earth with a top that reached to heaven, a tree that was visible to the end of the earth, abundant enough that “the birds of the air nested in its branches, and from it all living beings were fed.”

Great kingdoms are supposed to look like the massive cedars of Lebanon or towering sequoias; instead, Jesus offers the humble image of a mustard bush.

The mustard seed does start as a tiny seed, and grows to a great size, but this greatness does not take the form we expect.

David Garland, in his commentary on Matthew, has remarked, “Jesus’ parable hints that the kingdom is breaking into the world in a disarming and, for many, disenchanting form.

We do not sing, “A mighty mustard bush is our God.”

The parable implies that the kingdom will not come as a mighty cedar astride the lofty mountain height reaching to the topmost part of the sky but as a lowly mustard bush.”

(Garland *Reading Matthew* p. 149-150)

Yeast is not just a symbol for baking – but yeast in Jewish thinking, is usually a symbol for things that corrupt.

Yeast is what you get rid of in preparing for the Passover.

It would like saying one bad apple spoils the whole barrel.

There is also a sense in the Greek that the woman wasn’t so much mixing the yeast in the flour, as she was hiding it.

Another surprise is the amount of flour – 3 measures is about 50 pounds of flour – enough for bread for 100 people.

Putting this together, the parable of the yeast pictures the kingdom as a hidden force, working silently to “corrupt” the world – to corrupt the corruption – to change it from the bland flour of the world to be transformed into the joyous bread of life.

Hidden and silent, unexpected, the kingdom of heaven is something we have to wait for, and even when we don’t see it, or it isn’t what we expected, it is present.

Jesus uses parables to open our eyes to the kingdom of God, that is in our midst.

The next two parables in this section are the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl.

In the first one, the parable of the treasure, it is found by accident.

A person finds it in a field – maybe she tripped over it, maybe he was plowing the field and thought he’d hit a rock.

The parable doesn’t say.

A great treasure was left by someone- and it was there for the finding.

The person sold all he had to purchase the field so that the treasure would be his.

The merchant, on the other hand, searched and searched for the treasure.

He recognized it immediately, and new it was the treasure of his life.

He also sold everything and purchased it.

So, the kingdom of heaven is of utmost value.  
It is worth everything we have.

And we see the truth of Jesus' words.  
Some people seem to stumble over the kingdom and find it even when they weren't looking for it.

I would put myself in that category.  
I was at camp- I was not searching for God or God's kingdom.  
But suddenly God came close and my eyes were opened, and my heart was warmed and I was changed.  
And I knew it was worth everything.

Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Workers Movement, found God, and God's kingdom because she needed to praise God, she needed to give thanks for the wonder and beauty of the world around her.

Seeing a child born can be a holy moment when eyes are opened, and God's kingdom is revealed.

Some of us are fortunate enough to stumble over the treasure, in the midst of walking through a field, or in the work of every day plowing and picking rocks and suddenly the treasure is revealed.  
Happily we invest everything for this treasure.

For others it is a more methodical search.  
Nabeel Qureshi was a devout Muslim.  
He has written wonderful book called "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus"  
He made a careful search of his Muslim faith, and a careful search into Christian faith.

He found the evidence for Christianity very strong, and the evidence for Islam, not so credible.  
Finally, he came to God, and asked God to reveal himself.  
He found the pearl of great price.

And he sold everything, gave up everything for the sake of this incredible treasure.

There are folks who wrestle with God, who search diligently, like C.S. Lewis who was a staunch atheist, and philosopher, but came to discover the truth of God in Christ, and was himself discovered by God, and touched by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We, each one of us, have a different story.

And the parables of Jesus, if we let them, invade our thinking, teach us in unexpected ways, reveal the truth to us, and grow us as Jesus' disciples.

The last parable in this section is the net and the fish.

The kingdom of God, is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind, when they drew it ashore, the fish were separated.

And Jesus explains, like in the parable of the weeds, judgment is in the hands of God, and God's messengers.

But in the kingdom the net is thrown wide, and everyone is drawn in, and it isn't us who do the separating.

May God give us ears to hear and hearts to understand, that we would experience God's kingdom breaking into our midst.

Thanks be to God.