

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52, 2014

Did you understand all those parables in our reading?

The disciples did, or at least said they did. Maybe you had to be there for it to be so easy.

For the last few weeks Jesus has been trying to tell the people, the disciples, you the kingdom of heaven is like something you ought to recognize, but I wonder; do you get it?

First it was like the sower who scattered his seed all over the place.

Then it was like the sower who sowed good seed in his field only to have an evil person come along behind him and sow that awful bearded darnel.

Now Jesus says it is like the mustard seed, yeast, a treasure hidden in a field, a valuable pearl a merchant seeks to find, and good fish hidden in the water that the fisherman tries to catch.

The meaning is not so easy to come by though is it?

The disciples didn't always get it. They had to ask about a couple of these. But Jesus keeps telling parables hoping the people, and his disciples will finally get it.

I think sometimes, just by the very nature of the different cultures of the times, then as opposed to now, you have to struggle to get what Jesus means by these parables.

Jesus truth gets hidden from you because you don't know enough about his day and the culture he lived in, the experience of life in his day.

For instance, the mustard seed was not something a farmer would have planted in that day. It was not a harvestable crop.

Usually the mustard seed, which was so small it could be undetectable,

would get mixed in with the seed for the planting and then when it sprouted it would cover the land and choke out whatever else tried to grow there if it were not removed.

It has been compared to Kudzu if you know what that is.

Then the word that is translated yeast here was really a very different thing in Jesus' day called leaven. Leaven was an uncooked piece of a previous batch of bread used to leaven the next batch.

Before it could be used, however, it had to spoil. If not left to spoil long enough it was no good and wouldn't make the bread rise, and left too long and it would ruin the bread and cause food poisoning.

Perhaps Jesus was trying to convey with these two parables that surprising things happen when what is small in size or what is spoiled or rotten has the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

But Jesus doesn't stop there, he goes on with the treasure in the field, the fine pearl and the fish, and what does he accomplish as he does this?

Jesus provides a point of understanding for a broad spectrum of people to enter into their understanding of the truths He is trying to teach about the kingdom of heaven.

He makes His truth about the kingdom of heaven accessible to all the people:

- The farmer and his slaves who do agricultural work,
- the women who daily bake the bread, and the baker in town who supplies a community with **leavened** bread,
- the land surveyor, investor or even the land owner who knows the value of real property
- the business owner, salesman, purchasing agent who is always assessing the value of the goods, and his place in the market
- the fisherman, the sailor, the hired hand, the fish market owner the wife and mother who has to go to purchase the daily food, who all have to know how to sort out the good from the bad.

Jesus wants everyone to know that the kingdom of heaven has come near to them.

But how do you translate these parables into something understandable today in your culture, in the context of your life experience?

Maybe if you wrote your own parables that would help.

Instead of the small mustard seed that sprouts into a plant that takes over and consumes everything,

what about the smallest child who speaks the truth of the kingdom when she walks up to her parent who is wearing that look of despair and worry and the traces of tears that could not be held back on their cheeks, and says,

“I know you are sad daddy but Jesus loves you, and so do I.”

The love and compassion of this small child is enough to drive away your despair let alone the truth of the kingdom this little one speaks.

The smallest one chokes out the despair and worry,
and dries the tears.

Do you get that?

Instead of a little piece of leaven that will transform enough flour to make enough bread for 100 people,

maybe the kingdom of heaven is like the 1.1 cups of muriatic acid I had to add to the 10,000 gallons of water in our pool to keep the water sparkling, clean and safe for all our family and friends to swim in.

just a little bit changes a lot!

Do you get that?

Instead of a hidden treasure in a field how about the kingdom of heaven being like the real estate investor who goes out to look at a house that has been sitting empty, and that apparently no one wants.

The investor finds a winning \$100 million lottery ticket hidden in the space between the stove and the wall, puts it back,

and he goes out and liquidates all he has, sells his car, cashes in his IRA and all his investments and buys the house.

Jesus is telling you the kingdom is that valuable.

Do you get it?

Rather than being like a fine pearl, could the kingdom of heaven be like the bachelorette who has to date all these really fine guys until she finds the one for whom she will give up her whole life?

The life she could have with him is that valuable to her.

Do you get that?

Maybe the kingdom of heaven is like the reality show Storage Wars where these people bid on abandoned storage units, and after the bidding is over and the winner can get into the unit and he goes through all the contents and packs up the good stuff and throws out the junk.

In our gospel lesson Jesus says the angels of heaven will come to do the sorting.

Do you get it?

The kingdom of heaven:

It is often hidden just like the mustard seed mixed in with the good seed, and able to choke all other life out of the garden or field

the little bit of leaven hidden in the flour enough to
make bread for 100 people,
the treasure in the field, the pearl of great value
mixed in with the rest of them,
the fish in the water, some good and some
not.

But it is always worth giving up everything you have to get it.

You have to go look for it sometimes to be able to see it.

You may have to make up your own parable to explain
where you have encountered the kingdom of heaven.

Your life experience is going to be different from anyone else's,
and so to be able to see where Jesus has brought his kingdom to
you will require your attention.

Your eyes, your heart has to be open!

But He comes and brings the kingdom of heaven.

There are some places and some ways in which the kingdom
comes that are common to everyone.

It comes to you here in this holy place as you hear and
receive Jesus' word from the scriptures, preaching, prayer.

The kingdom of heaven comes in your baptism and as
you remember your baptism, and the promised
fulfillment of your salvation as we did this morning;
sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of
Christ forever.

The kingdom of Heaven comes in the sacred meal you receive at Christ's table for the forgiveness of your sins, the Holy Spirit and the affirmation of Christ's promised salvation for you.

The kingdom comes to you in your despair and your tears, in your searching, seeking and longing.

You may find it in the unexpected places, among many things that shine just as bright and look just as attractive,
but are not of the value that Jesus and His kingdom are.

You may have to sort through some pretty bad things and separate the good from all those things, in order to experience the Kingdom of Heaven,
but your treasure has been found, the kingdom has come near because Jesus is with you.

Jesus, His kingdom, are your treasures. They are worth giving up everything for.

Do you understand all these things?

Amen